

THE MOUNTAIN BELONGS TO THE REMNANT

Overcomers Advance the Kingdom of God

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to my family who has inspired and encouraged me to write, to the prophetic voices who have confirmed God's desire for me to put on paper the truths He has shown and taught me, to the assemblies who in my early life taught me to love scripture and to the assemblies in my later life who taught me to love the Spirit of Truth. I also dedicate it to the One who loves me more than I could possibly explain and in spite of my many failures has never given up on me. Lord, I love You.

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INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of God is not about WHAT we can do for God, but about WHOM we are because He lives in us! We do not strive to become an overcomer, we ARE overcomers! Maturity in operating according to the principles of the Kingdom is what makes us effective as overcomers! It is time for the body of Christ to grow up!

Everywhere I go I see a people weary of working hard and seeing so little results. I see a people on the verge of giving up, discouraged and begging God to send Jesus back for them. They do not see any way out of the mess this world is in and the chaos of their everyday lives. But my message to them is cheer up, we have entered the seventh day and it is the Lord's day, a day of rest. When we learn how to let God be God in and through us, the advancement of the Kingdom happens easily every day as we go about our normal business of living.

I also see a remnant of people hungry for more of God, a people tired of religion. Going to a church building once or twice a week is not enough. People all over the world are finding that the building is not where they meet God, but the God who is their source of life is with them every moment of every day. They are the Church, and they are taking the Kingdom of God with them wherever they go.

The word "*church*" means "*called out*" ones. It does not mean a building. Throughout this book when I talk about the truly called out ones, the word Church is capitalized. When I refer to a building containing people that meet together, I refer to it as an assembly or gathering place or with a lower case letter. God never intended our emphasis to be on the Church or an assembly, but on His Kingdom. We are the Church and we are to move out of our comfort zones and take the Kingdom with us, ever advancing it.

This book challenges us to be all that God has called us to be and not depend on our leaders to do the works of the Kingdom for us. One might read this book and think that the author is against all gathering places and leaders, but that is the furthest thing from the truth. I am called as a leader by God to His people, but I believe strongly there is too much religion in the current church, and God is calling His people to "*come out of Babylon*" or religion, and prepare herself to be the bride the Lord desires.

When God invited the Israelites to enter into their promised land, He wasn't promising them a land full of riches and provision. These are bi-products of a land filled with Him. Were they hungry enough to enter into their promised land? Are we hungry enough today to enter a land where He is everything, where our total dependence is upon Him? Are we ready to leave all the worldly principles of living behind, follow Him into the desert and let Him prepare us to enter a land flowing with His word and His provision? It is my desire that this book stirs that desire in you, and I pray you will climb the mountain into His presence and glory and never look back at where you were.

Jesus is not coming back for a frazzled bride, worn out and without beauty. He is coming for a bride who has made herself ready for the love of her life. She has matured in Kingdom principles and is ready to take her place beside her Lord ruling and reigning throughout eternity. The earth is waiting for the sons (and daughters) of God to be revealed. They have been in a place of hiding, being prepared for this day. It is time to come forth.

Everywhere I go I see the Church coming alive. Not a building, not a particular brand of Christianity, but the true Church, the body of the Living Christ. I see it not only preaching the gospel but doing the works (even greater works) than her Lord; works not born from hard labor, but works born from rest in the Lord. This is not happening in mass crowds, but individually as each believer walks out their Kingdom responsibilities every day of their lives, at work, at home, at play.

Everywhere this remnant goes, they are beginning to understand what true judgment is, the ability to judge what is right and just in the sight of God. But, it doesn't stop there. Once injustice is identified and the understanding of what God would do in the situation is known (righteousness), something must be done! We know that it is not God's will the injustice continues so as God's representatives on earth we use Kingdom principles and the tools He has given us to apply righteousness and justice to every situation we see. This is the true expansion of the Kingdom. It doesn't happen in huge assembly meetings, but anywhere we go, every day of our lives.

I talk about a remnant – not because that is God's plan. It certainly isn't. He desires for all His children to walk in Kingdom principles and do exploits in his name, but not everyone is willing to pay the price to walk in that anointing and power. My desire is for this book to

bring hope where hope has been lost, excitement where life has become mundane. Contrary to popular belief, we are going out in a blaze of glory, not hiding in some dark cave for the world to end and our God to rescue us. If you do not believe me, read God's Word and ask Him to reveal the truth.

We need to counteract the negative voices coming out of religion and learn how to decree and declare God's word in the earth and not let go of His promises until we see them fulfilled. We can turn our communities, our schools and our nation around even with just a remnant. But, I don't just want a remnant. I want a mighty army that covers miles and miles of terrain, all marching in unity because they all clearly hear the voice of our commander-in-chief, Jesus, and nothing will detain them from fulfilling His every command.

Some will read my words and say that I hate the church, that I am giving license to people to be rebellious toward leadership. I assure you, it is out of my great love for God's people, His Church that I say the things I say. There must be a change in vision from building churches and assemblies, to building the Kingdom and God has given us multiple vehicles and methods to do just that. Christianity is not a Sunday-go-to-meeting to get my needs met religion. It is a relation with a God that goes with us every second of the day where He empowers us to do exploits and to advance the Kingdom of our dear Lord in the earth.

Many might read this book and say I am causing people to be in rebellion. Yes, that is my goal! Rebellion is a word used often by man to bring people into submission to their will. Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft. But, the key is, it is rebellion against God and His ways that is sin, not rebellion against religious and anti-God principles that have infiltrated our assemblies. Jesus spoke with love and gentleness to the multitudes, but he has many harsh words for the religious leaders who steered his people in the wrong direction.

As a prophetic voice I have no choice but to speak what He tells me to speak. So as you read the words on the pages of this book, I pray you will hear them from the heart of one who loves God and His people with a passion. I pray you will also hear the words from the heartbeat of God as well. He loves you, and He wants you to know how much! There is a world of adventure awaiting you in His Kingdom. I pray there is a hunger developed in you through this book to pursue God with a passion you have never experienced before. Read on!

CHAPTER 1 - CREATED TO BE OVERCOMERS

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. I John 5:1-5 (NIV)

If we are born into the family of God, we are overcomers. Not could be; not will be; not might be; we are overcomers! Yes, we are overcomers now, if we believe that Jesus is the Son of God. John is emphasizing this in these verses written to the Church. If we are born of God, we overcome the world. We are a victorious people. Psalms 149:4 (NIV) says **“he crowns the humble with victory”**. Psalms 118:15 (NLT) declares **“Songs of joy and victory are sung in the camp of the godly”**. Victory can and should be ours. Victory is the result of being an overcomer. It means we win.

We are overcomers, but sometimes we are not very skilled at overcoming. We have not developed our spiritual muscles. Being effective as an overcomer takes training and knowledge. Then we need lots of experience in applying that training and knowledge. The dictionary says to overcome is *“to gain superiority or mastery in any trial of strength”*.

I can grow to be an adult and yet still act like a child. A person can mature in body while their mind and emotions remain childish and therefore never truly achieve the status of “acting like an adult”. The same is true of an overcomer. I can be born an overcomer, but yet never know how to act like an overcomer. I can be born as an overcomer and never use the tools God planted inside of me to overcome. Becoming an effective overcomer is a process we must go through, just as a child must go through a process to become an adult.

Overcomers Have Three Keys

To be effective as an overcomer we must learn how to apply the three keys found in these verses in I John: **LOVE, OBEDIENCE, and FAITH**. If we use these keys, we will find with every trial we face we gain strength and become more competent as an overcomer.

King David of Old Testament fame often acknowledged God as his strength. As a young man, David learned about the strength of God working through him to accomplish great things. David faced a lot of trials where his level of strength was tested and the result was his ability as an overcomer greatly increased. One such trial of strength was when David fought a lion and another when he fought a bear. Later when David observed the giant named Goliath challenging the mighty army of God, there was no doubt in his mind that Goliath was no match for the strength of David's God.

The account of David facing this giant can be found in I Samuel 17. It is a good example of the trials we face today becoming stepping stones into the

future. David learned from experience how to be an overcomer. He defeated the giant with the strength of God working in and through him just as he had earlier defeated the lion and the bear. He gained mastery over the enemy by using the strength of God within him to overcome.

We face trials every day and we can learn to be effective overcomers in the middle of these trials. Our enemy can and will fall just as easily as Goliath did. David had learned to trust God's strength to work in any trial he encountered. We must come to the place where we realize that as spiritual beings we have our Father's DNA in us. His strength can work in the trials we face, just like it worked in David's trials. The more we understand this, the more effective we become as an overcomer.

While all those around him had an attitude of defeat, David declared that God was on his side. David knew in his heart that there was no room for defeat. David had trials of strength and we will, too. If the trials that come our way are trials of strength and God is our strength, is there any reason for us to fail? Scripture tells us In James 1:2 we should be joyful when trials come our way. How can we possibly be joyful in the middle of a problem, a test, a traumatic experience? We can have great joy in the midst of a trial knowing it is just another opportunity for our God to show He is stronger than anything we face and He is on our side.

In the book of Nehemiah the story is told of the Israelites who had been captured and taken into captivity by the Babylonians. Some of the captives (a remnant) were freed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild it, a city in ruins for many years. The people were few and the work to be undertaken was enormous. When their physical eyes gazed upon the ruins, they were highly discouraged. How could they ever accomplish such a huge task?

All the people gathered together in unity and called for the reading of God's Word. The reading of God's promises greatly encouraged the remnant. As the word of the living God came alive in their hearts, Nehemiah declared to them that the joy of the Lord would become their strength. It would be joy and strength enabling them to accomplish this great task. We need to constantly be reminded of God's particular promises to us. As we read and meditate on His Word, the joy of the Lord overtakes us and gives us the strength today to accomplish anything the Lord has placed in our hearts.

Another definition of overcoming is *"to overpower and bring under control"*. Satan is definitely our enemy and he tries to overpower and control us. However, most of the time it is our own flesh that wants to control us and get us in trouble. A war rages between our spirit and our flesh. The Bible tells us that the spirit man is to bring the flesh, or carnal man, under control.

In each of our lives, there are areas we need to allow our spirit to bring under control. If the Bible declares we are overcomers, and it does, then we should be able to overcome, or bring under control, those areas in our lives that are now controlling us. We need to use the power of the Holy Spirit within us to overpower the flesh with its weaknesses, habits, faults, limitations, and sins that hold us back from being spiritual giants.

Conviction and Repentance

We live in a crucial hour of history and it is imperative God's people become all He desires us to become. There is much work ahead, and much

opportunity. We need to be in the best spiritual shape possible. Jesus said He did not come into the world to condemn the world. However, the Spirit of God will prick our conscience in areas where we need change. When our consciences are pricked it is impossible for us to enjoy what we are doing.

Many of God's people have a wrong concept of what sin is. We tend to think God has a Richter scale for measuring sin. Murder, stealing, adultery are all high on the scale, while lying, gossiping, getting angry are small on the Richter scale. This is not how God looks at sin. There is no scale. Sin is sin and it is evil in God's eyes.

What is sin? It is falling short of God's will and His way. If God speaks to you and tells you to go talk to your neighbor, but you are afraid and you make excuses and never go, you have sinned. Sin is anything that keeps you from God's best for you.

When God pricks our hearts about something, it is not to condemn us. He loves us with an everlasting love that never grows lukewarm or cold. He wants us to change our ways for our own good. Our reaction to His prodding in our lives should always be repentance.

We do not hear a lot about the need to repent these days. Repentance was the message that John the Baptist preached. Why? John said we must repent because the Kingdom of heaven was near. The message of the first disciples, as they were sent forth by Jesus into the cities and neighborhoods, was repentance.

If you have been born again by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of heaven is within you. Your spirit lives in the Kingdom of God. Your goal is to bring your mind and body in subjection to the Kingdom of God within you. No matter where you go the Kingdom is in you and you in it. Any time our soul or our mind wants to take control of our life, the spirit brings a nudging to indicate something in our lives is not lining up with the Kingdom of God.

Paul in his writings likened it to a war between the old man and the new man, the spiritual man and the carnal man. If our spirit is in control then when people of the world get near us they should sense the Kingdom of heaven in us, and begin to feel a pulling towards repentance.

What is repentance? Repentance recognizes a difference between God's opinion and our own opinion. When we begin to see the way we are heading is not the direction God would have us go, we want to change our direction to follow Him. Repentance is turning our back on the sin that so easily causes us to stumble and fall, when we should be running the race the way He desires for us to run it. It is turning from the direction we are heading on our own, and heading down the path the Lord has for us. It is allowing our spirit that dwells in the Kingdom of God to control our soul and our mind.

Repentance is the difference between being a spiritual being and a carnal being. It is when you recognize you are operating out of the kingdom of darkness, from the realm of the soul or the flesh, and then doing an about-face and starting to operate instead from the Kingdom of God or spirit realm within you. Repentance is turning from self-centeredness to God-centeredness.

Repentance is not a one-time religious ritual that we do when we accept Jesus as the Lord of our life. It is not saying "I am sorry" and crying a few tears, only to go and do the same thing again tomorrow. It is a change in our mindset. It is truly turning around and going a different direction.

Repentance is when we truly understand what Paul says in the first chapter of his letter to the Colossians. Verse thirteen (NIV) says we have been “**rescued from the dominion of darkness**” and placed into “**the kingdom of the Son**”. Therefore, we choose to walk in the power of the light of God, because the Kingdom of God is within us.

Repent we must. Not once, not twice, but as often as God reveals to us that change must be made in our lives. According to Hebrews 6:1 repentance is foundational. In other words, you cannot build a vessel of honor until the proper foundation has been laid and repentance is a part of that foundation.

We must repent from dead works as individuals and as assemblies. Many works done today in the name of Jesus are nothing more than dead works, but we clutch them like sacred cows. We must let them go. Only works born of the Spirit of God will have life and produce fruit. Works from the realm of the soul or emotions may produce something good for a season, but they are not Kingdom building material. They are wood, hay, and stubble.

The Sin of Losing Your First Love

On the island of Patmos, John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, wrote a letter to the “*called-out ones*” in seven different cities as Jesus dictated the letter contents to him. In four of these seven letters listed in Revelation chapter 2 and 3, the people are told to repent. Jesus is not talking to the heathen, but to sons and daughters of God. If repentance was important to the people of that day, then it is certainly important to His people in this age.

Jesus, through John, warned the saints at Ephesus if repentance did not take place, the light of their assembly would be extinguished. That is an extremely serious statement. They must have really done something horrible to bring such a warning to the believers in that city. Did they teach false doctrine? Did their leaders fall into unforgiveable sin? No, it wasn't that at all. What was so serious that would cause their light to fail? They had left their first love! They had let their love and excitement for God diminish and it was a very serious offense in God's eyes.

The city of Ephesus had an assembly of believers who did many good works. They labored tirelessly in their community. Perhaps they collected goods and distributed them to the poor. Maybe they had an evangelistic outreach program and went door to door talking about Jesus. Widows and orphans were probably taken care of properly.

The Ephesian assembly was commended for hating evil. They hated wickedness. They did not accept every doctrine that came through their doors even if the person delivering the message had Apostle or Prophet before (or after) their name. These people recognized truth and rejected lies.

They had patience and did not give up under adversity. They seemed to have all the ingredients a person would desire in an assembly of believers. But, Jesus had other thoughts and this place which seemed so perfect was in danger of either becoming extinct or having absolutely no value in the Kingdom. Their great works were nothing more than wood, hay and stubble. They had sinned by losing their first love for their Lord. They had replaced relationship with works not realizing that works not born out of love are worthless.

This is a picture of a great many of our assemblies today. Many places

in recent years have closed their doors forever. The buildings stand as empty monuments to a time gone by. Could it be that for many of these lights that no longer shine, it was because they had lost their first love?

The Sin of Being Lukewarm

The Greek word for sin means “*missing the mark*”. What is the mark that we are missing? Paul said in his letter to the Philippians, chapter one there is a high calling of God which is a prize. That was the mark he wanted to obtain. That was his goal in life. There is only one calling, only one prize, to be obtained by the believer and that is to be like Jesus! The Greek word for mark means to be able to look far ahead and see the goal that is in the future.

Any activity that keeps us from being like Jesus is sin. Anything that keeps us satisfied with where we are is sin. This explains why Isaiah talks about “*sinners in Zion*”. Sinners in Zion, which represent the Church, are people that are saved, but have no vision of their purpose, and no desire to move from where they are to where God wants to take them. They are neither hot nor cold. They are filled with apathy, complacency, and lethargy. Our church gatherings are filled with people like this.

The assembly in Laodicea mentioned in Revelations, chapter 3 was the lukewarm assembly. The people were commended for doing many good works. They had accumulated great wealth, which they very likely attributed to God’s blessing upon them. They were highly favored by man, but to these saints there also came the warning from Jesus to repent. If they did not repent of being lukewarm, then Jesus said he would spit or vomit them out of His mouth. That is truly a serious situation!

Today there are many ministries that resemble Laodicea. Their leaders are dressed in exquisite attire and drive expensive vehicles. They look good on the outside and it appears that God’s blessing is resting upon them. Things are not always as they seem. Jesus told the assembly of Laodicea in John’s day even though they appeared well dressed, they were really naked. They were not dressed in spiritual attire. They were not dressed in the important clothing of love, strength, self-control, faith, kindness, humility and forgiveness. How many today are walking around richly dressed, but are really poor and naked on the inside?

Jesus also told this assembly that they were blind. They did not really see Him as He desired for them to see Him. His words to them were to repent. If they obeyed, He would come and anoint their eyes to see His glorious truth. There is a divine call being sent across the earth to repent and turn from the direction we are going, with a warning that being lukewarm is a sin and it displeases our Lord. Will we heed the call?

The Sin of Deadness

The saints in Sardis had a reputation for being alive, but Jesus said in Revelations 3 they were dead. This assembly like many of the others had accomplished plenty of good works. They were known in their community for the things they did. Perhaps they had a great worship team that played and sang together perfectly. Perhaps they had a great youth program. Maybe those who looked at this assembly saw the leadership as having it all

together, like a well-oiled machine. Everything operated smoothly and nothing seemed out of order.

But Jesus looked through all the outward appearances of perfection, and found that inwardly perfection was lacking. Many times what we see with our physical eyes can be very deceiving. Jesus said the people of this assembly appeared to be alive, but they were really dead. He told them to wake up and repent.

Even though Jesus gave a strong warning to the assembly, He commended a few individuals who dared to be different and who were alive in spite of all the deadness around them. Jesus promised them the blessings of God. He would not forget them. Jesus challenges this assembly to repent and to overcome this condition of deadness.

The Sin of Religion

The fourth assembly in Revelations told to repent was at Pergamos. Once again, Jesus commended them for their works. In this assembly He praises them for many of their works because they were done out of His heart. This assembly existed in a very wicked city. Even under threat of death they did not deny their Lord.

They did, however, allow false doctrine to be preached and propagated in the assembly. They mingled the pure word of God with the defiled doctrines and religious practices of man. Jesus was not pleased with this. He wanted pure, holy vessels to carry His word and to show the world His ways. That is still what He wants from us. We cannot compromise the gospel.

The Nicolaitans are mentioned as gaining a stronghold in this assembly. This group elevated leadership above those who were not classified as leaders. They believed in separating themselves as leaders from the rest of the people because they considered themselves better than the common person. The Nicolaitans were the first to call the people who were not in leadership, laity. Leadership made the rules and the laity obeyed. This separation and elevation of leadership was evil in the eyes of Jesus and they were told to repent.

Unfortunately, a lot of these same doctrines and the mixing of God's rule with man's rule still exist in most assemblies and organizations today. This is called religion. Christianity is not a religion. Christianity is based on individuals having a relationship with their Maker. We need to pray for clarity of vision because God is cleaning out His vessels in this day and giving them a hatred for the defiled. In Ezekiel chapter 22 and verse 26, God said that His priests did not know the difference between what was holy and what was not holy. They did not know the difference between what was clean and what was unclean.

Religion does that to us. It dulls our senses so we do not understand holiness and righteousness today. The gospel is severely compromised and few people stand for the truth of the Word. Many leaders water the truth down so it is more palatable to today's assembly goers. We must repent of the way we have conducted business in the house of the Lord based on man-made rules and traditions. It is time to turn over the building of the House to the Master Builder and obey His every command. It is time to separate the common from the uncommon in the house of the Lord, the defiled from the

holy. We must begin to walk in righteousness and truth.

Church versus Kingdom

For years too much emphasis has been put on what we as Christians call "*the church*". Instead of building the Kingdom, we are busy trying to build our own individual "*church*". There is only one Church, and it is the body of believers that the Lord Jesus Christ is building. He said He would build His Church. This one Church can have people meeting in different places, different cities, different countries, but it is still one Church. The Church is His Body and it is not disjointed.

Many assemblies teach their people to grow "the church" by bringing people into the church building to get saved, healed, filled with the Holy Spirit, taught, preached to, corrected or delivered from every demon that we can imagine. Many believe that this is the goal of our Christian life and our measure of success is how many people we can persuade to step through the doors.

None of these things are wrong, but they don't have to be done inside a building by a licensed or ordained minister of the gospel. These deeds were meant to happen anywhere the Kingdom of God goes. The Kingdom is within you, so wherever you are, you are a minister of the gospel and can do these works.

Our purpose as Christians is not to build a church assembly and fill it with people. Our goal should be to become like our Lord, and do His works in the earth. Our goal should be to expand the Kingdom of God, so there are many more people just like Jesus doing His works in the earth. Jesus said that because He was going back to the Father, and because He was sending the Holy Spirit to be with us, we would do even greater works than He did while He was here on earth. The church assembly is only one of many vehicles that we can use to help accomplish our goals, but it is not the means to the end. We need to change our focus from our little group to the Kingdom of God.

When we have too much focus on our own fellowship, we tend to develop the attitude of having it all while others are lacking. We get the attitude that God is for us and all that we do, just because His name is on our building. We become separated from other children of God who can be a great benefit to us in our walk in the Kingdom. God told the saints at Pergamus in Revelation they must repent or He would come and fight against them. What a sad commentary for Jesus to have to come and fight against us!

We tend to think that everything is ok if we do not have any highly visible sins manifesting in our assembly. We do not understand when we are not following Him, when we are not listening to His voice, when we are assuming we are doing His works, when we have not developed a relationship with Him so strong we know what is in His heart we are sinning or missing the mark. We must repent!

These letters in the book of Revelations could have been written to assemblies in our time. There are many places that seem alive on the outside, but are really dead on the inside. It is time to repent. It is time to repair our foundations. It is time for our leaders to preach repentance again. It is time to wake up and fall in love with our God like we did at the first. It is time to crucify

the flesh and let God work salvation in us for His glory.

The Enemy

We need to crucify our flesh, but it is not the only thing we need to overpower and bring under subjection. There is an enemy of mankind, and his name is satan. The Bible says that this enemy, or adversary, is like a lion who stalks people to devour them. (1 Peter 5:8).

Satan is not a real lion. He roars to frighten us into submission and to make us think he has trapped us. But, satan can't have us unless we let him. When he roars he hasn't defeated us, but if we are ignorant of his ways, he will snare us every time. When we hear him roar, we often retreat, because he has frightened us and we don't understand how to defeat him.

The devil has deceived us into believing he has caught us. Instead of surrendering to the enemy, we should turn and face him and resist him until he flees. God's promise to us, found in James 4:7, is if we will resist him, he will flee. He has to flee, if we act on God's word and believe. The Kingdom of God is within us. The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of Light, and the enemy hates the light.

Satan has no power, other than deception. He is the master of treachery and the father of lies. He tells us there is no way we will win, we might as well quit. He tells us we're not smart enough, we're not good enough, we're not pretty enough, we're not strong enough. He tries to convince us we are just a sinner by nature and thus it is impossible for us to ever be like Jesus.

When we dream, the enemy begins to tell us our vision of doing something great for God is selfish and self-exalting. He argues it can't be God's will to do something great since He wants us to be humble. He tells us we are losers. And we believe him! Much of our religious thinking is full of deception.

We do not have a clear understanding of God's definition of humility. We truly need to pray for a revelation of what it means to be humble. If the devil is standing face to face with you, telling you lies he is in the wrong place. He belongs under your feet. God has equipped you to be a winner, not a loser. We should overcome, not be defeated.

If we continue to focus on the failures of our past, the devil will continue to throw them back in our face. We must understand our sins have been forgiven and forgotten. They are washed away by the blood of Jesus, never to be held against us. God looks at the heart. David did some terrible things. He had a man killed because he wanted the man's wife. Yet God said that David was a man after God's own heart. How could that be?

David was quick to repent and change his direction because the deepest desire of his heart was to follow God. When God looks at you, He sees you as His child and He loves you. Any correction or discipline is done out of a heart of love. Scripture tells us in Hebrews, chapter 12 he whom the Lord loves, He corrects or disciplines, but it is always done out of a heart of love.

Because of His great love for you, He has given you the Kingdom. You are a part of the Kingdom of God. Everywhere you go, God is there with you. There is nothing too hard for God therefore there is nothing too hard for you.

You have His power and authority living and working in you.

I grew up in a Christian home. I knew I had an enemy. But I was never taught how to fight him. I was never taught I had any authority or power over the devil. I just hoped he wouldn't find out where I lived!

Many people believe if we don't talk about satan or antagonize him maybe he will leave us alone. That's not true! The devil hates us. When he looks at us, he sees the blood of Jesus. This blood reminds him Jesus defeated him on the cross of Calvary two thousand years ago. You are his enemy because Jesus is his enemy.

We can get so preoccupied with what the devil is trying to do that we live our lives in fear. We're afraid to step out and do something great for God for fear we will make the devil mad. If we walk in this type of fear, we either lack knowledge of who our God is, or we just do not believe God is who He says He is, or what He says He will do, He will do.

The enemy tells us God will do those things for others, but not for us, because we are not good enough to deserve Him. Oh, yes we believe He will save us, and take us to heaven someday, but the deception of the enemy convinces us we are not good enough to have God on our side today fighting for us.

God gave His most prized possession, His Son, so we might be partakers of all that He has for us now. Jesus willingly endured the cross and shed His blood for us that we might have victory in every area of life. The blood of our Savior is one of our greatest weapons against the enemy. The devil hates the blood of Jesus. That blood is what made us overcomers in the kingdom when we accepted Jesus into our lives. The blood of the Lamb of God assured victory for us through the cross. That blood operates in our lives today.

We have His DNA. It is not about what we do or do not do. It is about who we are. We are royalty, sons and daughters of the King. It does not matter what you are going through right now, God is bigger than the problem. You are His precious child and He has all the resources you need at His disposal.

Satan has deceived us into believing victory is not something we can obtain in this life. If the devil decides to steal our house or our car or our health, it must be God's will so why fight back. This philosophy convinces many people no victory can be obtained here on earth. Victory only comes at death, when they are free from the devil's clutches. Overcoming to these people means nothing more than dying and going to heaven where the devil can't go. They do not believe that being an overcomer is meant for this life, but it is! How sad to never walk in victory throughout this life on earth.

The devil has kept God's people in bondage for centuries with these lies. We are meant to be overcomers in this life on earth. If God is for us, and He is, who can stand against us? John, the Beloved, declared if you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, then you are an overcomer. That is not a maybe, or a will be, but a declaration that you are, right now, an overcomer!

If you are like me, there are times you don't feel like much of an overcomer. There are times when everything that can go wrong, does go wrong and nothing you try to do seems to help. God never said that we would not have problems, but He did promise deliverance. It is during the trials of our lives we learn the most. They are where we are trained for battle. Psalms

34:17 (NASB) says, **"The righteous cry, and the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles."**

The Process of Becoming an Effective Overcomer

When you were born into this world, you were born with all the capabilities of a human being. You were born with a mouth to eat and talk and you were born with legs to walk. Could you eat steaks, or give a speech, or run a race on the day you were born? Of course not! You probably had to be coaxed into nursing and even though you were born with legs, you definitely went through a process before you were ready to walk or run.

You also went through a process in learning to talk. Your mom and dad loved your cute baby talk, but it would not be sufficient for your adult life. Through a process of growth, a person learns to enunciate their words. Their vocabulary increases and through the struggles and joys of life they learn what to say and what not to say in the daily situations they face. Over time they learn to control their tongue.

Being an effective overcomer is also a process of growth. On the day that you received Jesus as Lord and Savior and He became a part of your life, you were born again as an overcomer. You were born into the Kingdom of God with everything you would need to overcome. But you must go through a process of growth to become an effective overcomer.

The word "*Christian*" means Christ-like. Is that an accurate description of you on the day you were born again? I doubt it. But, you were born again with all that you would need to become like Christ because Jesus came to live in you by His Spirit. Becoming Christ-like is a process of growth. Becoming an effective overcomer is a process of growth towards maturity.

Seeing ourselves as God sees us is an important first step. Until we can really see our self as an overcomer, we will never take the necessary actions to become an effective overcomer. Until we realize that God gave us two legs to stand on, we will never take a first step, and if we never take a first step, we will never run.

The verses in I John found at the beginning of this chapter are very familiar to most of us. We quote them. We sing songs about using faith and victory to overcome the world. Yet, somehow we go through life not realizing that we receive our victory through our faith. Faith is how we overcome. This scripture shows us the importance of faith, but love and obedience are equally important.

Love is an important key to being an overcomer. In fact it is the master key that unlocks everything in the Kingdom of God. It is the glue that holds it all together. When we understand how much God loves us, we can begin to return that love. John, the beloved disciple, spent a lot of time writing about love. In I John 4:19 he tells us we are able to love God only because He first loved us. He goes on to explain further in verse 20 if we truly love God we cannot hate our brother.

When we read the next chapter in this small book (the verses listed at the beginning of this chapter) we can get excited about victory and faith and really miss what else John is saying by the Spirit of God. He talks about overcoming in the same breath that he talks about loving God, loving Jesus, loving our brothers and sisters in the Lord, having faith and being obedient.

Galatians 5:6 tells us that our faith is activated by love. Without love working in our lives, our faith will be stunted.

Along with love, faith and obedience are also very important keys in the Kingdom of God. They all work together. If any one of these three areas is lacking in our lives, then our life as an overcomer is not as effective as God desires it to be. In fact, without these keys operating effectively in our lives, we are spiritual cripples and we will be hindered in running the race of victory until this condition is corrected.

Love God

We are commanded to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and body. We show our love for the Father by being obedient to His voice. Obedience is extremely important, if we want to be effective in God's kingdom. If we love God the Father, we will also love His Son, Jesus. The more we fall in love with Jesus, the easier it is to obey. Because we love Him, we take great delight in doing those things that please Him.

When we love God the Father and His Son Jesus, the things required of us are not oppressive or demanding. They are not difficult. We delight to do what our Father asks, knowing that we are pleasing Him. We reach for the mark of the high calling of God in our life, because we know it is God's best for us and it pleases Him.

When we know God and we understand His heart, we realize that His thoughts toward us are good and not evil and we know we can trust Him with our life. The more we love and trust Him, the stronger our faith grows. Faith is not just words. It is a way of life made possible because we have come to the place where we know and trust our God. As we read God's word, we have a better understanding of Him and His ways, and that strengthens our faith.

So, God has put faith, love, and obedience into a three-strand cord for us to use effectively to grow and mature as an overcomer. If we allow this cord to do its work in our lives it will pull us out of despair and discouragement and make us effective overcomers. Then as Isaiah said in chapter 40, verse 31, we will be able to run and not become weary and we will be able to walk without fainting. We will run the race that is set before us as our eyes behold the goal of being an effective overcomer made in the image of our God.

Love Each Other

Again, as we look at these verses in I John, chapter 5, we see that the Lord says through John not only are we to love God the Father and His Son, but we are to love His other children as well. Who are His other children? Yes, you and me, the ones who have inherited the Kingdom of God! If we are to be effective overcomers, we must learn how to love one another as Jesus has loved us. Today God is calling His body into unity. This unity will not be established by doctrine, but rather by love for one another in spite of our differences in doctrine, nationality, social status and all the other things which tend to separate us.

True unity is not merely tolerating each other, but really loving and caring for each other. Paul said in his letter to the Ephesians that the gifts we call "five-fold ministry" gifts were given to the Church by Jesus for one

purpose, for you to fulfill your calling. That is correct! Apostles, prophets, teachers, pastors and evangelists are given to Christians as a gift to help them fulfill their calling.

What is your calling? There is only one true primary calling for all God's people and that is for us to become mature, spiritual beings. We are to spend our lives become like Jesus and doing the things He did when He walked this earth. As we become like Jesus, we love like Jesus, we see like Jesus, we desire to set people free like Jesus did.

These gifts listed in Ephesians chapter 4 are given to the Church (not a building) until something happens. What is it that happens as a result of these gifts operating in the Body of Christ? According to verse thirteen (NIV), these gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher are given until we ALL **"reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature"**. That word translated mature means *"complete, finished, or mature"*.

If Paul said this, then it must be possible. I challenge you to read chapter 4 of Ephesians until you understand this with your spirit. This is the finish! The finish is a person. It is Jesus. It is not taking over the earth and forcing everyone to believe like we do. It is about us becoming mature and walking the earth doing what is right in God's sight just as Jesus did. It is about the Kingdom of God being demonstrated in the earth by mature saints until masses of people have a strong hunger and desire to know Jesus and allow Him to do the same thing in their lives. That is Kingdom expansion at its very best!

As we allow the Holy Spirit to perfect our love, we will find that we actually enjoy each other's company. As a result we become more teachable and pliable. Out of this, our doctrines very well may change and we will find we really aren't as far apart as we thought. Unity is really one of the greatest spiritual weapons that we can use in our battle against the enemy today, but it only comes as we yield to the Holy Spirit. Unity will not come to the Church through human efforts and demands, but by the working of the Holy Spirit as we get out of the way. We must relinquish control.

The Holy Spirit came to reveal Jesus, the true Head of the Church. He is not the head of the Baptist church, or the Lutheran church, or the Charismatic church, or the Assembly of God church, or the Catholic church, or whatever other name you want to put on the door. You may call yourself a prophetic church, or an apostolic church, it doesn't matter. You may be a part of a denomination, a network or be completely independent. It doesn't matter.

If you are not for Him, you are against Him. There is no middle ground. Jesus is only building one Church and that is His Body. He will not have a disjointed Body. People may worship in different buildings or no building at all, but they are still His Body, the true Church.

Unity does not require us to compromise the gospel. The Bible has plenty to say about having fellowship with unbelievers. Paul warns us in II Corinthians that we should not be yoked together with unbelievers for righteousness and wickedness, light and darkness, cannot fellowship together.

John in his first letter says that the fellowship that he had was with God the Father and with Jesus. He told the people that they could fellowship with him, if they too had fellowship with God the Father, and God the Son. There

are key issues that we must agree upon before we can fellowship together. The cross must be central. We cannot save ourselves. The word of God must have authority in our lives. We cannot say that we fellowship with God and yet walk in darkness. If we fellowship with God, we will know what is right and what is wrong according to His Word and His heart. Our desire will be to walk as a spiritual man or woman, not given to our carnal or physical desires.

Religious Spirits

There is a religious spirit that masquerades as the spirit of light. This spirit has great influence and tries to get God's people to operate from the realm of their soul instead of from the spirit. This religious spirit looks very much like it is serving God, but it isn't. We are told in II Timothy to correct those under the influence of this spirit with gentleness so they might realize the error of their ways and repent. There can be no unity between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Babylon, which is synonymous with religion and self-exaltation.

Because God still loves these people and wants them to truly know Him, we must love and pray for each other, so those under the influence of this deceptive spirit can be set free. There are so many times in our lives when events or problems or actions of people must be spiritually discerned. We all have the capability of being deceived. Pride goes before a fall, and we should all humble ourselves before God and ask Him to show us where the enemy has deceived us, so we might be free.

It is often this religious spirit that demands that we follow certain rules and regulations that the Lord has not required of us. The religious spirit operates out of the knowledge of good and evil rather than the tree of life. So many times we speak death to each other, rather than life because we don't like what someone is doing. We want them to be more spiritual, or more accurately, we want them to be more religious and live by our rules.

The goal of those of us called to lead in the body of Christ should be to prepare a people as the pure and spotless bride for the Master. Those called to leadership should be so in love with Jesus we speak revelation of who He is and what He wants to do in and through each of us. We do nothing else to saddle these children of the King with burdens they cannot bear. Heaven help us if we abuse these precious ones.

It is the revelation of Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life that sets people free, not our rules, demands, and regulations. The religious spirit attempts to make a person try to gain favor with God through the things they do or do not do. But, those of the Kingdom know that God's favor is given because we believe and are therefore His children, not because of anything we do. As we fall more in love with the Master, He changes us. We have experienced His love and forgiveness, so let us direct people to Jesus so He can perfect and complete them.

Changes made in our lives because of rules that someone has forced us to accept as a way of life, are mostly superficial and external and seldom last. The kind of change that changes us forever happens from the inside out. It begins with the heart when we start to truly realize who our God is, and begin to understand He lives inside of us.

When others see our love for them without all the rules and

requirements, they will begin to know and understand the Father's love for them. As they begin to experience His love, they will grow to know and understand His heart better and then you will see lasting change in their lives.

Overcomers Face Battles

Overcoming carries the connotation of "*battle*". Victory is assured but there can be no victory without a battle. The sound of battle is being heard in the land. There is a trumpet call being sounded in the body of Christ. It is sounding reveille for it is time to wake up and prepare to take our place in what God is doing in these last days. We need to take off the grave clothes. We need to take back the things the devil has stolen from us. We need to stop the enemy from killing our young people with drugs and suicide, lost in a sea of hopelessness. We need to stop him from killing our unborn babies.

The world has a saying, "*Win a few, lose a few*". Sad to say, many of God's people have accepted this lie of the enemy. This attitude is contrary to God's Word. God does not want us to have an attitude of defeat. His word declares that we are overcomers. We are to be victorious in every battle we face. We were never meant to win a few battles and let the devil win the rest. If you do lose a battle, admit your failure, get back on your feet and follow the Lord back into battle, because God never intended for you to lose. God's plan is success for us. In all our battles, we are to be overcomers.

It is important to remember at all times our battle is not against human beings, but against the devil and his cohorts. Ephesians 6:12 tells us that our struggle is not with flesh and blood, but with the rulers, authorities and powers of darkness that dwell in the spiritual realm.

We must not forget this, for if we wrestle against flesh and blood, we will lose. We have not been given authority to fight in that realm. It is time for the body of Christ to quit fighting each other. Our fight is with the devil and with our own mind and we must win.

We must begin to use these keys of love, faith, and obedience to overcome. We must love as Jesus loves. Let us love those who hate us. Let the world see a difference in us. It can only happen as we spend more time with our Father, hearing His heart for mankind, knowing His great love for us. We need to know who Jesus is in us. He is an Overcomer. We must begin to realize that we are overcomers because He lives in us!

CHAPTER 2 - OVERCOMERS ARE WARRIORS

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Ephesians 6:12 (NIV)

Is spiritual warfare for real? Do angels and demons really exist? They make great movie themes, but how does that apply to our daily lives, or does it? Many people do not believe it applies. Then why do we struggle? If Jesus defeated satan at the cross, why do we have to wrestle with the kingdom of darkness? This is not a book on spiritual warfare, but we need to lay a foundation in order to proceed. There are some very good books already written on spiritual warfare. Unfortunately, there are some bad ones, too.

There have been many excesses in the area of spiritual warfare in the Body of Christ in the past. Like everything else in the Word of God, we need to find truth. Being off the road in one ditch is just as bad as being off the road in the ditch on the other side. Many people spend more time talking about the devil and what he is doing than they talk about God. This is wrong. The enemy of mankind does not deserve the attention he gets, but neither should we be ignorant of his devices. We should be wise and knowledgeable concerning spiritual things.

Angels and Demons in the Spirit Realm

There is a spirit world that we cannot see with our natural eyes. It is more real than this physical world in which we live. We tend to forget that we are spirit beings, living in physical earth suits. So in reality if our spirit has been reborn, we live in both worlds. Paul tells us in his book to the Ephesians that we “are seated with Jesus in heavenly *places*”. That means right now, not someday in the future. Because that is where He is, we are there also.

We are in fellowship and union with our Lord right now. Paul says this happened because of God’s grace, mercy and His great love towards us. Do you understand that being saved means sitting down together with Jesus on His throne? That is what Ephesians 2:4-7 indicates. Read it and rejoice! Hallelujah! This is critical for us to understand if we are going to be effective warriors and overcomers.

But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:4-7 (NLT)

God commissions His angels to work in behalf of the saints in order that we might fulfill the purposes of God in our lives. But we must be aware,

as well there are real demons out there trying to stop us from living the life God desires for us. Demons are angels that rebelled against God and were kicked out of heaven with Lucifer, who is satan. For every demon working against God's people there are two angels working for us. Angels respond to the prayers of the saints, and angels are able to overcome the demons as the saints pray to their God.

A good example of this is found in Acts, chapter 12. James had just been killed and Peter had been thrown in prison. The saints were gathered in a home praying for the release of Peter. In response to their prayers, God sent an angel to release Peter from his chains, and to lead him out of prison. A battle had been won in the spiritual, unseen world through prayer.

So many things happen in the spirit realm before they are ever manifested in the physical realm. The prayer caused a battle to be won in the spirit world and the result was Peter being released from prison in the physical world. A battle raged in the spirit world. The devil wanted Peter killed. But Peter overcame and walked out of that prison by the supernatural power of God.

The very word "*overcoming*" carries a connotation of battle, of war, of conflict. There can be no victory without conflict. The main emphasis of Jesus' ministry was doing battle against the kingdom of darkness in order to set people free.

The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favor has come. Luke 4:18-19 (NLT)

Are the poor, the blind, the oppressed, the prisoners of sin and disease still living among us? Is it God's desire to see these people remain in this condition? No, of course it isn't His will. Why would our Lord change His mind? Don't you think He still wants to set people free? Then, of course, there are still battles we need to fight on behalf of these ones that they might be set free.

This is not to imply that battles take long periods of time, it only implies that when we see these things we can judge them as being just or unjust according to the will of God. We know and understand that there is an enemy that desires to keep people from experiencing the pleasures of God. Jesus provided the example of how to fight the enemy. He fought the enemy with just a word from His Father's heart. He spoke and demons fled. He spoke and situations changed. So, it should be with us.

The Church is an Army

In scripture, there are many metaphors for the Church. Paul paints a picture of the Church as a human body with many parts, each being different, yet necessary for the whole body to function with Jesus as the Head. In other places the Church is referred to as the Bride of Christ. Many other illustrations are used to describe God's people, but the most frequently used illustration in all of scripture is that of God's people as an army. Why is there a need for an army?

Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD. Matthew 10:34-36 (NASB)

Jesus declared that He did not come to bring peace, but a sword. When we think of the birth of Jesus, we remember the angels coming to the shepherds to announce this blessed event. We remember how these angels declared "*Peace on earth, good will toward men*", and we imagine a place with no war, no conflict, and everyone living together in love, harmony, and peace. Many people even believe that receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior will bring peace in all the situations that they face in life. It doesn't.

The declaration made by the angels meant that man could be restored to a peace relationship with the Father because of the birth of God's Son. Jesus came to restore to mankind the kind of relationship with God that was lost in the Garden of Eden because of Adam's sin. It also speaks of the peace we can have in our hearts even in the midst of some very stressful and potentially extreme situations.

This great peace from the Father has nothing to do with mankind's relationship with each other. As long as Satan is loose and walking around, he will seek to destroy relationships. When Jesus comes into a person's life, it creates a sword in that relationship with the person's family and friends, if they are not open to receiving Jesus, too. Even when family members are saved, if they live under the rules of religion and one person desires more of God, there is going to be friction in those relationships. But, we can be at peace in those situations, knowing that our God is working all things for our good.

Peace comes in knowing that our Father loves us and knows our every move before we do. It comes with knowing there is nothing that can come our way that we cannot conquer with love, faith and obedience. Jesus sets us free from rituals and traditions where man is trying to establish peace apart from an understanding of what true peace means. The freedom of love and relationship with the Master keeps us on the right path and gives us the peace we so eagerly desire.

The Mind is the Battleground

It is important to teach newborn babies in Christ right away that they have an enemy who is out to destroy them. Many of the friends they had before becoming a Christian will not want anything to do with them. Even family members may reject them. But, more importantly, newborn babies need to know that Jesus did not leave them defenseless. God has made available to us all the weapons we need to defeat the enemy.

One method the enemy uses against us is to try to control our thoughts. If he can control our thoughts, he can then control our lives. That is why it is so important for us to have our minds renewed by the Word of God daily. In Ephesians 4 Paul tells us how important it is that we no longer walk in the futility of our mind which used to tell us what to do according to what felt good to us. But, once we receive Christ in our hearts, we should allow the

Spirit of God to renew our minds according to the mind of Christ. This will allow us to live our lives in righteousness and holiness. Romans chapter 12 indicates that if we will allow our minds to be renewed we can then know what the perfect will of God is for our lives.

One day I had been reading the book of Job, and I asked God how the enemy could take everything away from Job. Why did God allow it? After all, in the first chapter it says that Job feared God and hated evil. Why would God remove the wall of protection around Job? God gave satan permission to test Job. How did satan test Job?

I was drawn to the words in Job 3:25 where scripture reveals the fact that the thing that Job greatly feared had come upon him. Suddenly I saw a vision of a man completely protected on every side with shields. I saw arrows being shot at the man from every direction and falling to the ground having no effect at all. Then suddenly I saw what looked like little imps come and surround the head and began to shoot down at the skull which was uncovered, and the man fell.

The only way the enemy can get to us is through our mind. Job loved God so much that he himself stayed away from evil, but he was afraid that his children were not being so holy. He was offering sacrifices for them, to try to protect them. Why? Job was afraid that his children would perish because of their sin. And that is what happened. God did not do this to Job! If you look at verse 22 of the first chapter, it says that Job did not sin by blaming God. If Job had blamed God for this, he would have been wrong, he would have sinned. Job lost his faith in God's ability to protect his children and Job's fear took control of his mind and caused the enemy to win the battle.

This is a common scheme of the enemy. I have experienced it firsthand. When you are secure in your relationship with God and you know that you are living under His protection, there is complete peace. But when you have children who are not serving God with a whole heart the enemy will try to convince you that they are not protected and are fair game for him to attack.

If you listen to his lies, you will enter into fear instead of having faith and trusting in God's power to keep your children from harm. God's people must learn what covenant means for our God is a covenant making God. If we are going to be fearless overcomers and go forth to reclaim our society and our nations from the enemy we are going to need to understand covenant. We are going to have to protect our minds from the enemy.

In Ephesians chapter 6 we are told to take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit (which is the word of God) and fight. Job did not do this. Job was fighting a trial of strength. How strong was His faith in God? How well did he know his God? The enemy attacked Job's mind. The mind is the battleground where battles are won or lost. Will we believe God or will we believe the enemy? Scripture says that the things that Job feared happened. Anytime there is fear in our lives, it means that in that area we do not have complete faith in our God's ability or willingness to protect us or care for us.

If the enemy can get us to doubt God, and to give into our fear, we lose the battle. God will allow the enemy to attack our mind, knowing that He has given us everything we need to protect our mind and to fight the good fight of faith. He does not leave us defenseless. It all depends on how well we know our God, and trust Him. Jesus gave us everything by His death and

resurrection. The only thing the devil can do is try to convince us that God is a liar. If he can convince us of that, then we lose the battle.

God wants us to win. That is why He has provided us with everything we need to win. Winning battles increases our strength. Romans 16:20 says that the God who is peace is going to step on satan using your feet. Your feet are a part of His body. He is doing the crushing of satan through you! Where is His body? It is here on earth. The devil should not be standing face-to-face with you but should be under your feet, because the God of peace fights for you.

The Day of Battle

Psalms 140:7 says that it is the Lord who protects our minds when the battle is raging. We must put on the helmet of salvation, which declares to us what Jesus did when He died on the cross. It declares that we are now free from the clutches of the enemy and that our spirit can rule over our mind and emotions. Most of our battles begin in the mind. If we submit to the thoughts that enter our mind, our flesh will soon act on those thoughts, whether good or bad.

These battles do not just take place when we are first saved, but we must contend with our thoughts throughout our life here on earth. We must renew our minds daily. Paul told Timothy to fight for the prophecies that had been spoken over him. Timothy was told to fight the good fight of faith. Daily he needed to remind himself of what God had said about him and to him, so he would have strength to continue to live the life God had called him to live. The devil would have liked to convince Timothy that he was not called to preach.

Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. I Timothy 1:18, 19 (NIV)

We, too, must learn to fight the good fight of faith on a daily basis. The enemy will send thoughts to you that are contrary to what God has said to you. Timothy had to fight using faith and a good conscience. Paul told Timothy about others who had not fought the good fight of faith and had ended up shipwrecked. How many people do we know that started out on fire for God, but are now shipwrecked? Their lives are a mess and many of them are bitter and angry with God. We will end up the same way if we do not realize that although Jesus secured our victory, it is up to us to enforce it. God will not impose His will on us. We must choose who and what will rule over us.

Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying. Hebrews 2:14, 15 (NLT)

Jesus freed us from slavery to many things. He made us free men and women to pursue the promises of God and be controlled by our spirit, rather than our mind. But we must choose whether we will walk in that victory and freedom. This fact is illustrated through the story of the Children of Israel and the Promised Land. The Promised Land belonged to the Israelites, because God had given it to them. But they had to enter the land, defeat the enemy and possess the land before they could reap the benefits.

The same principles apply to our responsibilities in spiritual warfare. Jesus secured our victory and He gave it to us, but we must defeat the enemy in our lives in order to possess it. Sometimes we, too, see giants in the land and want to run from them instead of facing them. Sometimes we don't see any way out of our situation. We must remember the victory is ours, it has been promised.

You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross. Col. 2:13-15 (NLT)

When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, satan was already in the earth. He came to visit Eve in the garden. Satan had authority in the earth. God planted a garden on the earth and He created man to rule and gave him authority. He gave mankind (both Adam and Eve) the command to rule. They had authority in the garden and were told to take that authority and go take over the rest of the earth.

Satan has authority to operate in the earth as well. He has a kingdom. That kingdom is darkness, but it cannot exist where there is light. When Adam sinned, he gave satan the right to certain things that had been entrusted to Adam by God. Adam was meant to rule and reign in the earth, but Adam lost his authority because of sin. Jesus through the cross gained back the authority for mankind that was lost by Adam. This is why in I Corinthians 15:45 Jesus is referred to as the "last Adam".

Satan rules over all the demonic forces in the kingdom of darkness and Jesus said that satan is the ruler of this world (John 16:11), or over this world's systems that reject the Lordship of Jesus. He has the right to rule over those who are not in God's kingdom. He is not the ruler of the earth. The earth belongs to God. There is a kingdom of darkness in the earth however, which satan rules. But, praise God, there is also a kingdom of light ruled by God through His people!

Satan is referred to as the father of the unbeliever. Remember when Jesus told the Pharisees that they were of their father, the devil? When we are born again, we are no longer in satan's kingdom, but have been translated into the Kingdom of God according to Colossians 1:13. Now we have a right to rule and reign with Jesus in the kingdom of light right now, here on this earth. Jesus taught us to pray for His Kingdom to come to the earth so that His will and His love for the people He created would be known here in the earth, just like it is in heaven.

His kingdom is here on earth, but being directed from Heaven's

command center. When we accepted the sacrifice made on the cross for our sins, we were born into the Kingdom of Light. Not only that, but we were made one in Jesus, and so we also sit on the throne in heaven ruling and reigning with Him.

Authority Restored

Jesus, by his death and resurrection, restored Adam's rule and authority to the children of God. Jesus made a show of satan and his army when he died on the cross and rose again. In Old Testament times when a nation went to war against another nation, the nation that won the war would take the king of the nation that lost the war, bind him and parade him through the streets of the city. That is what our Lord did. He paraded the enemy through the streets of Zion. They had a hallelujah celebration!

God wanted someone He could fellowship with, but He knew from the beginning that man would fall into sin. So, He had a plan for man's redemption even before the Garden of Eden. God created a man by taking the clay of the earth and forming him into human shape. Then God breathed life into him and Adam became both a physical and a spirit being. God then put Adam to sleep, opened up his side, and created Eve, the bride of Adam.

Many people have been taught that God took Eve out of the side of Adam to show women are to be subordinate to men. Religion has taught a lot of things that we believe to be true, but a search of scripture with the Holy Spirit as your guide will reveal that the spirit is neither male nor female. In Christ, there is no gender, race, or status difference. We are all made in His likeness. Both Adam and Eve were commanded to rule in the earth.

When you read scripture and ask the author, which is the Holy Spirit, to show you what He meant when He wrote it, you will find an awesome revelation of this event. When God put Adam to sleep and then created Eve it was really a beautiful, prophetic picture of what was going to happen looking down the corridors of time to the cross. God would put Jesus, the second Adam to sleep on the cross, and out of His wounded side would flow blood and water. Out of His side was birthed the bride of Christ, the new Eve, the Church, both human and spirit, made to exist in both the physical realm and the spiritual realm. Together the God-man, Jesus, and His bride would begin to have authority in the earth again. This was a huge part of the message that Jesus was portraying to the enemy and to the world when He said, "*IT IS FINISHED*".

The original intent of the Garden of Eden was now once again possible. The prophecy in Genesis 3:15 had been fulfilled. The offspring of the woman had crushed the serpent's head. Remember satan talked to the woman through the serpent. God foretold of satan's defeat in the very beginning. This would happen at the cross. I Corinthians, chapter two reveals this was a mystery hidden in God since the very beginning. Had the enemy known the real reason why God was going to allow Jesus to die on a cross, they would have never crucified Him.

Not only did our Savior make a show of the enemy by dying on the cross and then rising from the dead, but He also disarmed him. Jesus took satan's weapons away from him. All the devil can do now is attempt to deceive us. He can try to make us live under the rules of his kingdom, but he

does that through deception. Unfortunately, his deception is masked in the religious spirit that operates so freely in many gathering places of God's people. In these places people are taught they are mere men and have no power or authority to do anything. Many do not understand the power that lives in us, because our Lord by His Spirit takes up residence inside of us when we are born again.

Paul said in I Corinthians 3:3 when we have strife or we envy someone, we are operating out of our carnal or sinful nature and acting like mere men. When we allow the Spirit of the Lord to direct our spirit in all that we do, we are not operating as carnal but spiritual men and women and are therefore, no longer mere men. That is amazing! How many times have we said "*well, I am just human*"? Really, is that true? If you truly believe that to be true, then you are operating out of the carnal nature, not the new nature given to you at your spiritual birth.

Satan would love us to believe that we are helpless, that we have no real authority. Many believe that nothing good is going to happen until Jesus comes back to earth again and gets everything under control. Paul warned the Colossians in chapter 2, verse 8 not to be seduced by worldly philosophy and fancy words that come from human thinking and religious spirits. But, rather we should be fascinated with our relationship with Jesus, who is the fullness of God and has authority over all who are in authority anywhere.

We are of the kingdom of light. We don't have to follow the rules of the kingdom of darkness. At the same time Jesus took satan's weapons, Jesus gave us weapons. These weapons are spiritual weapons for it is a spiritual battle that we fight. We can use these weapons against the enemy to keep ourselves from being put under his demands. We can also use them to bring people out of the kingdom of darkness, and bring them into the Kingdom of our God. These weapons are strong enough to tear down the strongholds of the enemy. The kingdom of darkness cannot stand against our weapons if we use them correctly. Hallelujah!

Satan - the Master of Deception

Because we are ignorant of what the Word of God says, satan is still able to deceive us into believing that he has power and strength. But there is a day coming when all people will look at him in amazement. They will wonder how such a creature as this could have caused such havoc in people's lives and in the nations of the world.

Isaiah 14 talks about satan at the beginning. He was an archangel in heaven named Lucifer. Pride arose in his heart and he sought to dethrone God. But God cast him out of heaven to the earth where he has been working overtime to separate God's creation from its Creator.

Those who see you will gaze at you, They will ponder over you, saying, 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, Who shook kingdoms, Who made the world like a wilderness and overthrew its cities, who did not allow his prisoners to go home?' Isaiah 14:16, 17 (NASB)

Satan overthrows cities and makes kingdoms tremble through

deception and lies. He has no other weapons. All he can do now is lie to you. He'll tell you that God doesn't care about you. He'll tell you that God is the one who has lied to you, that God has deceived you. He will tell you what a great sinner you are, and God couldn't possibly want to use you to do great things in His kingdom.

Our words have power. When an event happens in our lives and the thought comes to us that no matter what we do, we never seem to get ahead, if we voice that fear we give wings to it. Instead of confessing the Word of God which says that God will meet all our needs through heaven's supply which is not lacking, we confess lack. Satan has deceived us into believing God is not telling us the truth and so then satan and his minions can continue stealing from us. Fear is the opposite of faith and is a sin which opens the door for the enemy.

If you believe satan then he can steal, he can kill, and he can destroy. In John 10:10 (NLT) Jesus says **"The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life."** The devil will try to convince you that it is God who is stealing from you. He will try to make you think that it is God that wants to destroy you. The devil will do all these abominable things and then blame them on God. But, Jesus says He came to give abundant, rich and satisfying life. He did not come to destroy life. How foolish we have been to listen to the enemy. It's the same trick he used on Eve in the Garden of Eden and mankind is still listening to him today.

I John 3:8 states that the reason Jesus came to the earth was to destroy the works of the enemy. He came to free you from the chains the enemy has used to keep you in bondage. The devil will try to hinder you and keep you from walking in all God has promised to you and desires to give to you. This is why the Bible declares *"many are called, but few are chosen"*. Many are called to overcome, to walk into their Promised Land and possess it. Few actually enter in and possess the land God wants to give to them.

There is a remnant who will actually become the effective overcomer that God desires of all His children. God does not play favorites. He died to give us all the opportunity to be His child and partake of His blessings. There is a price to pay to follow Jesus. My heart's desire is that His children everywhere will hunger to know Him, and love Him. Then they will trust Him. It is so worth it!

Read the book of Acts and see how the enemy tried to hinder Paul. Paul saw many things by the Spirit, some of which he was not even allowed to speak. He had been taken to the third heaven and shown things to come. According to II Corinthians, chapter 12 because of these experiences, satan had given Paul *"a thorn in the flesh"*.

Paul prayed three times that God would take it away. But, God told Paul that He had given him His grace to fight the battle. God wasn't going to fight the battle for Paul. God's grace had been given to Paul as a weapon against the enemy. Grace is God's enabling power to be and to do everything God has called you to be and to do. God told Paul to put that grace to work and he wouldn't have to worry about what the devil was trying to do.

For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way. I Thess. 2:18 (NIV)

Satan hindered Paul and he will try to hinder you. The devil's trickery and deception is so subtle, we often fall for it without realizing it. Unless we really know our God, discerning the enemy can be difficult at times because according to Paul in II Corinthians 11:14 Satan often comes masquerading as an angel of light. Satan has never had an original thought. He is a counterfeiter. God has so many amazing things for us, but the enemy will try to counterfeit them. Because we haven't learned to distinguish the real from the fake, we end up rejecting the real gifts from God.

Once I was crying and begging God to do something about a particular situation in my life. I was discouraged and depressed. I couldn't understand why God didn't seem to be intervening on my behalf. I was begging him to kick Satan out of this situation. I was suddenly aware of a very large fly crawling on the wall.

In my spirit I so clearly heard God say, *"Satan is like that fly to Me. If I were to flick him off the wall with My fingers, he would disintegrate into nothingness. But I have given you everything you need to deal with him. There is nothing more I am going to do until his time is up".*

I then realized that I had tools given to me by God that I had not been using to fight the enemy. I began to realize the devil had no power over me unless I gave it to him. I started to speak life into that situation and God worked a miracle and completely turned it around.

Discerning of Spirits

One of the gifts of the Spirit found listed in chapter 12 of I Corinthians is the discerning of spirits. This gift has limited manifestation through God's people because many do not understand how it operates. Many who claim to have this gift are really people with suspicious minds who are trying to operate the gift from the natural side instead of the spiritual side. They see demons in every activity and in a lot of people who are just operating out of their carnal nature.

Anyone who operates in the true gift of the discerning of spirits will have more to say about what the angels are doing than what the demons are doing. They will have more to say about what God is doing in our midst than what the enemy is doing. After all, two-thirds of the angelic force is on our side.

As we grow and mature in the things of God, our prayers become less self-centered and more Kingdom-centered. God begins to show us certain situations and draw our attention to the spirit behind what is happening. Is it God or not? What is God's solution to what is happening? Remember, five-fold ministry gifts are there to prepare ALL God's people to operate in the gifts given to us by the Spirit of God. Everyone needs to be able to discern spirits in order to judge correctly. We can no longer depend on going to a leader to do the work for us. We can no longer be spectators.

When we understand God's will and Kingdom principles we can judge any situation we encounter as just or unjust. Only then can we know how to pray effectively and understand the Kingdom decrees that need to be declared to change the situation.

We war against spirits of rebellion that keep people from following God's ways. We war against all kinds of anti-God ideologies. This is how to

apply righteousness to any situation. We look for injustices that need to be corrected in our lives and the lives of others. We ask God for wisdom and knowledge to understand what He desires to do in order to correct the injustice. When we understand His will then we can declare it into existence by our words or we can be obedient to do what He says to do. Through this process we have a direct connection with the command center of heaven, and through faith, love and obedience expand His Kingdom effectively in the earth.

This ability is not for just a few so-called “intercessors”, but for all God’s people. We are all called to intercede, which is really standing in the gap between God and man, when a person doesn’t know how to approach God for themselves. Discerning spirits is really the distinct ability to discern what is God’s ways versus man’s ways for solving a particular problem, whether it is our problem or we are standing in the gap for someone who doesn’t have a direct line to the throne room, or the one who doesn’t understand they have a right and a privilege to enter heaven’s throne room.

In Joel chapter 2, God talks about the day of the Lord being upon us. He says that the trumpet must be blown to warn the people in Zion. Zion represents God’s people. He goes on in this chapter to tell the priests that they should weep between the porch and the altar and cry out for mercy so that God would not destroy the land.

In God’s Kingdom we are all priests and kings. We should know how to weep between the porch and the altar. That is the place where innocent blood has been shed. Our country has slaughtered thousands of innocent babies, and spilled their blood in the land. They do not understand the measure of this sin.

We must stand between God’s justice being poured out and the people who do not understand their wickedness and cry for mercy. We must cry for their eyes to be opened to their evil ways and their heart to be softened that they might repent and turn from the sin that enslaves them. We must understand the spirit behind the blindness and do battle for the multitudes that are blind and lost, so they might see the truth. Scripture tells us that the enemy blinds the eyes of men so they cannot see the truth of the gospel. Who will fight to set them free from this blindness? Who will love enough to stand in the gap?

The ability to discern spirits allows us to recognize what is of God and what is not, and then gives us the wisdom to deal with that spirit. Too much time is spent trying to identify spirits and their names, both demons and angels. Everyone wants to see an angel. We develop processes and formulas for calling out certain types of demons. Everyone wants the latest and greatest technique for making demons flee in front of us. What a waste!

All we have to know is what is of God and what is not. Our focus should not be on angels or demons. Our focus should be on recognizing when the enemy is keeping someone from receiving what God has for them, understanding the instructions from God on how to deal with it, and then bringing justice and rightness to it. If we see in our hearts how much God loves that person and longs for them to be free, then we will allow that love to flow through us and set them free.

We need spiritual discernment for recognizing the strategies of the enemy. Satan loves to place people who are under the influence of a religious spirit in places of authority. Many wrong people are put into leadership

positions in the different assemblies because the gift of discernment is not operating in that place. People are often put into positions because of their natural abilities, or because they look good, they say the right things, they can draw a crowd with their charisma. Many get into positions by self-promotion, but God says He will promote one and bring down another.

Paul in his writings warns that there would be wolves in sheep clothing that would come into the assembly. If the gift of discernment is not operating when placing people into leadership positions, a wrong appointment can take an entire assembly in the wrong direction. Once a person is appointed or elected to an area of responsibility, it is difficult to change the situation without hurts and bitterness developing. We must be wise builders, building only what the Master directs us to build and only with the bricks He has specifically prepared for their proper place in the wall.

When the gift of discernment is not in operation, the things God is doing are many times attributed to satan, and the things satan is doing, are often attributed to God. This places us in dangerous territory. I have an example of this from my own life. I had a job that I loved very much. I had received promotion after promotion. God had given me this position through several miraculous events.

But, there came a day when things began to go wrong. I really had not done anything to deserve the things that happened. Looking at this situation in the natural, one would assume that the devil was out to steal what God had given me. However, several months before this situation occurred I had received a prophetic word from a prophetess with a well-known ministry. That prophetic word from God said that I would leave my place of employment and that God would provide another. At the time that word was given to me, I did not see how that could be. But, I knew my God.

As things happened and time went on, I realized that God was stripping away the lining of the nest and making things a little uncomfortable so that I would move on to the next step in His plan for my life. Knowing this kept me from struggling with anger and resentment toward those who had come against me. I knew through discernment that God was preparing me for the fulfillment of the prophecy to me.

If I had not operated in discernment and understood what God was doing, I probably would have stayed in the job and accepted the ramifications. If that were the case then I might have believed the devil had succeeded in stealing from me, and my faith in God's ability to protect me would have been shaken. I might have even been angry with God.

As I went through this process, there were people who could not understand why I was not angry about this situation. I was able to minister to people that I worked with about how God was working this all for my good. God was preparing me to move on to a different place.

Do you understand what I am saying? We must be able to discern the things of the spirit realm or we are going to miss what God is doing and become frustrated and angry. So many people come to a situation like this where they don't understand what is happening. They can't discern the spirit behind it, and they allow the frustration and anger to turn them away from God,

This is a part of spiritual warfare. Many times we end up warring against God because we have lack of discernment. God is on our side, but He

is going to do things His way. He will let us know what He is doing, if we will take the time to talk to Him, to listen to Him, to understand His heart.

If we will fellowship with Him and love Him, He will talk things over with us, and allow us to have input into the process. He did with Abraham, and Abraham was called a friend of God. Overcomers take the time and make the effort to become a friend of God. Friends know and understand your heart. We need to come to the place where we know the heart of God, or we will never fully trust Him.

Jesus as the Mighty Warrior

How awesome is our God! How dare we even compare the devil with our God! Many people (even believers) believe in a good force (God) and an evil force (the devil) and they don't really know who is going to win in the end. Some people even believe that God created us, saved us and then left us to fend for ourselves.

How disrespectful and wrong. May God open our eyes to see Him as He really is! There is a time coming when there will be no doubt that our God is an awesome God. He will display His magnificent power and authority. But first He must have a people ready and prepared, holy vessels, through which He can do exploits. He will show Himself through His holy people, a people set apart for Him, a remnant of overcomers.

Jesus has given us His name. We can use that name, which has all the power and authority of heaven behind it. There is nothing more powerful. But, in order for us to use that name, we must first be totally submitted to the Owner of that name and His will. It is not only a privilege to use the name of Jesus, but it is also a great responsibility. We are His ambassadors on earth. We represent Jesus and His will on earth.

We have been commissioned by Jesus, the King, and sent forth in the earth as His representatives. And one of these days, this One with the great name will once again make His appearance here on this earth. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The book of Revelation tells us that Jesus will then appear as a warrior.

Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. Its rider was named Faithful and True, for he judges fairly and wages a righteous war. His eyes were like flames of fire, and on his head were many crowns. A name was written on him that no one understood except himself. He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his title was the Word of God. The armies of heaven, dressed in the finest of pure white linen, followed him on white horses. From his mouth came a sharp sword to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will release the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty, like juice flowing from a winepress. On his robe at his thigh was written this title: King of all kings and Lord of all lords. Revelation 19:11-16 (NLT)

Several other scripture passages reveal our God as a warrior. Isaiah 42:13 reveals God going forth as a mighty Man of War. David declared that the Lord was mighty in battle. In Exodus 15:1-3 He is portrayed as a Man of War.

We read the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and we see Jesus as a gentle Shepherd caring for the lost lamb. We see Him with the children, blessing them, and caring for them. We see Him with a tender heart, weeping over the city of Jerusalem. He does take care of us. He leads us beside still waters. He causes us to lie down in green pastures.

I am definitely not trying to minimize the fact that Jesus is our Shepherd. But we somehow overlook the times when He rebuked the religious leaders of His day and chased the moneychangers from the temple. Psalm 23 is one of the most loved scripture passages of all time. It paints a beautiful picture of the Good Shepherd, but this is only one aspect of His character.

We also picture Him as the Savior, dying on the cross, the suffering one. We see Him as Isaiah saw Him, the Lamb that was slaughtered. He was the ultimate sacrifice for our sins and He is all that Isaiah portrays Him to be. But we have become so accustomed to seeing Jesus as the good Shepherd or as the suffering Savior that we are in danger of not recognizing Him in this hour. He is coming as a mighty Man of War. In that day a group of people will come against this warrior and they will make war with the King of Kings.

Together they will go to war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will defeat them because he is Lord of all lords and King of all kings. And his called and chosen and faithful ones will be with him. Revelation 17:14 (NLT)

His faithful ones will be with Him in battle. Where do these faithful ones learn how to do battle? We learn it here on earth in the here-and-now. We must be found faithful to the end. These are events that have not taken place yet. Jesus is our warrior King and we follow Him into battle against the hordes of hell! If you look at the world today, it is obvious that all hell has broken loose. Where are the warriors?

We are the warriors and the overcomers but for the most part we are not warring. God has given us everything we need to operate in the authority to overcome in the earth. Sometimes we just don't realize what we have already in our possession or how to use it. Let's suppose that a friend of yours gave you a gift. When you opened it, you weren't quite sure what it was, so you let it sit on the shelf and collect dust. We do that with the gifts that God has given us. We don't know what they are or how they work because we don't take time to read the instruction manual (the Bible) or ask God for directions.

Perhaps a friend gave you a gift, and on the way home you decided to stop at a store and do some shopping. You left the gift sitting in the back seat and you neglected to lock the car. When you returned, the gift was not in the back seat. God has given us health, and peace and a whole lot of other great things richly to enjoy. But, we become careless and negligent and the enemy comes along and steals the gift. Then heaven help us, we have the nerve to turn around and accuse God of taking it away from us. God is on our side, yet we fight against Him. Oh, we must seek His face until we have a true understanding of who our God is and that He lives in us and us in Him!

God's Army Comes Forth

A trumpet call has been sounded in the spirit realm and the army of God is coming together. There is a sound of battle in the land today. Are your spiritual ears tuned to the sound? Can you hear it? The battle cry has gone forth and we are in preparation for war. Jesus is going to show Himself once again as a mighty Warrior. The enemy has been allowed to run havoc in the earth, but there is arising in the earth a huge army that is beginning to understand that they not only have the right to do something about it, they have the responsibility.

John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah to reveal who the Messiah was to the people of that day. They were looking for a king to free them from Rome's oppression. They did not recognize Jesus. He came as the suffering Lamb. They expected a King. John, however, recognized Jesus as the Messiah, and he cried out to the crowds, "Behold the Lamb of God".

Many did not recognize Jesus because they were expecting the Messiah to be something different. They were expecting a king. Heed this word! We must be prepared for the coming of the Messiah in this hour. If we do not understand, we will be in danger of missing Him and what He is doing in this hour. Too many people are looking for the Son of God to come and deliver them from the earth, so they hide and wait.

There is a prophetic voice in the earth today that is coming in the spirit of Elijah. Their purpose is the same as that of John the Baptist. They are preparing the way for the coming of the Messiah. They are making ready a people who will recognize Him. They are calling for repentance and holiness so that the bride will make herself ready for the coming Bridegroom. They are crying out against rebellion and pride and false religious attitudes that hold people in captivity. They are declaring everywhere they go, "*Come forth. Take off your grave clothes and be set free!*"

The enemy grows more aggressive as he knows his time is short. We must move beyond self-centered prayers and decrees and begin to war in behalf of our communities and entire societies. Now is not a time to back away, or cringe in the shadows. Now is the time to advance the Kingdom of God, instead of our own kingdom. Glory awaits us.

In John, chapter 3, many of John's disciples were leaving to follow Jesus. This was causing some contention between followers of John and followers of Jesus. Some came to John to get his opinion about this situation. John replied that he, himself, was not the Christ, but, rather, as the Bridegroom's attendant, he had been sent ahead to prepare for the coming of the Bridegroom.

The attendant prepares and then waits in expectancy for the sound of the Bridegroom. John declared that he had heard that voice and that voice belonged to Jesus. Jesus is the Bridegroom and the bride belongs to Him. Therefore, it was right and fitting that the people should follow Jesus.

It is time for the Christian leaders in the earth today, to free the people to be God's people, not theirs. It is time to listen to the call of God saying, "*Set My people free*". Jesus is the Bridegroom. Our job as leaders is to prepare a bride. We are to be an attendant to the bride, not a master. The bride belongs to Jesus. We are to be servants of the bride.

Oh, if we as leaders called by God would understand the great love of Jesus for His bride, we would take our responsibility more seriously. We would not be trying to beat the bride into submission. We would not be

stealing from her. We would not be trying to make her follow rules and regulations and traditions of men. We would be spending our time showing the people the great love of our God for the bride. God wants to present His Son with the most glorious beauty ever seen before.

One day I had a vision of a bride getting ready to meet her soon-to-be husband at the altar. Her desire to be beautiful for him was obvious. Her makeup had to be flawless. The dress she was wearing had to be perfect. When she was ready she began to walk down the aisle. I could hear all the spectators gasping and commenting on the beauty of the bride. But, she didn't hear them. She didn't see them. She didn't care. Her only thought was "*What is my husband thinking?*" "*Is he pleased with what he sees?*" Her eyes and thoughts were on him only. Her gaze never left his face.

Suddenly I was aware that this was a picture of the coming wedding of the Lamb and His bride and I was seeing what God wants and expects. He expects a people who have made themselves beautiful for the Lamb. The Groom is expecting a people who have eyes for Him only, who are not drawn away by the fleeting glamour of the world. They don't care what others think, or what others expect of them, but they care deeply about what the Lamb thinks of them.

This bride wears combat boots on her feet. She is fighting to keep the enemy from ruining her, from defiling her, from keeping her from her Lover. She wants Him and longs for Him just as a deer pants for water. She thirsts for Him and all He has to offer. The enemy has nothing that she wants. She defeats him at every obstacle that keeps her from the One she adores. She loves righteousness and hates wickedness.

The prophet Joel talked about a mighty army arising in the earth to follow God. They will hear His voice and be glad. They will be a people that love righteousness and hate wickedness. This army rises up to follow its commander-in-chief wherever He goes. Jesus is coming to lead His army. Will we recognize Him? Are we prepared to follow Him into battle? Are we making ourselves ready for Him?

CHAPTER 3 - OVERCOMERS KNOW HOW TO DRESS

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. I Thess. 5:8 (NIV)

The Bible has much to say about how we dress our spiritual body. The verse listed above says we are to clothe ourselves with faith and love, two of the keys to overcoming found in I John, chapter 5 and discussed in the first chapter of this book. As overcomers and warriors we must be dressed in our proper armor in order to fight the daily battles we face. A more expanded description of the armor we are to wear is found in Ephesians, chapter 5. Most of us, as Christians, have received good training on the armor of God. We have learned what it represents and how important it is to put on the armor every day.

Unfortunately, like so much good teaching that has come to the body of Christ in recent years we practice it until it becomes a mere formality, a ritual. It becomes just another religious tradition. Jesus warned we should not pray using vain repetitions. As soon as this happens, the truth loses its power and we wonder why it doesn't work anymore. It becomes just another religious activity we feel we must do to be Christian.

We are in a war. What has worked in the past will not work for the battles ahead. God has allowed our foolishness in order to teach us and mature us, but we dare not be foolish any more. We must mature in our understanding and application of spiritual truth. We cannot afford to go into battle without the proper tools and wearing the proper attire.

Many people do not even realize that we are in a war, but whether we know it or not, we are. To be an overcomer means there is something to overcome, something to war against. We are soldiers for life whether we like it or not. War is serious business and as soldiers, as overcomers, we must know how to dress properly for battle. Armor is important.

Dressed for Battle

Let's suppose for a moment you enlisted in the army and completed boot camp successfully. You have been thoroughly trained and have met all the requirements necessary and now you are ready to go to war. You board a plane and you are sent overseas to a foreign land, ready to see your first battle. In the morning as reveille is sounded, you jump out of bed, eagerly facing your first day of battle. You go running out to meet the rest of the troops, but suddenly you realize something is wrong. Others are looking at you. You feel out of place and abruptly you are aware that you are not dressed like the other soldiers. They are all dressed in their nice, neat uniforms, looking very sharp, but you are dressed in a tee shirt and Bermuda shorts, vacation attire. You are wearing a cowboy hat instead of a helmet and instead of an M-16, you are carrying a toy water pistol.

This may sound ridiculously absurd, but this is the way many Christians approach spiritual warfare. Many don't even believe there is a war raging around them. Others who are aware of the war seem to think it is all fun and games. We brag about how much damage we do to the kingdom of darkness and we celebrate like we are attending a big party. But, there is little to no

evidence that victory over the enemy has been accomplished.

Oh, but we are so faithful! We arise in the morning and go through the motions putting on our armor. We stand in front of a mirror and we go through the motions of getting dressed. We look good and we sound good, but often, when challenged, we have little strength to lift the sword or the shield. We are so brave when we are all garmented in what we think is our armor. We strut around and say *"Look at me"*. But, then the devil comes and he roars, and we scream and we turn and run with our tail between our legs.

We have gone through the ritual of putting the armor on, but we have neglected to read the Word of God. We have neglected to spend time in fellowship with the One who loves us so. We have not discovered what is in the heart of our God. We have not yet understood that it is not about what we do or say. It is about who we are. It takes more than mouthing words and going through the motions to be an effective warrior.

One winter day I was sitting at the dining room table, looking out the window at the pine trees heavy with snow. The wind was blowing and it looked like the trees were lifting their hands and waving them in praise to God. My heart was overwhelmed, and I cried out, *"Look, God, those trees are praising you."* His response to me was, *"Those trees are just like so many of My people."*

When God talks to us, He has a tone of voice just like we do when we talk? He has emotions. I sensed that these words came out of a heart that was sad and I did not understand. God often speaks this way and leaves me hanging! I think He does that sort of thing so we will hunger to know more. My prayer was *"Lord, show me what you mean"*. I knew God would explain it to me in His time.

Later that afternoon while out for a drive in the country, the Lord revealed to me what He meant. The snow which had fallen that day was extremely heavy and wet and it had hurt the trees. I saw many pine trees lying on the ground with their roots exposed. Pine trees normally have very shallow roots.

In places where pine trees grow there needs to be periods of draught in order to force their roots deeper into the ground. Otherwise, when winds come or heavy snow clings to them, they topple. That is when the Lord spoke to me again. He said, *"These trees are like many of My people. They praise me when things are going good, but when the winds of adversity come, their roots are not deep enough in Me to sustain them and they topple."*

We need to have our roots go deep in God's soil. We need to be thoroughly grounded in the things of God, so that when the enemy does come against us, we know how to stand. We need to understand that spiritual warfare is serious business.

There are certain things that we must do to prepare for battle. We do need to make sure we have on the armor. But we also need to make sure we have been built up in Christ, who is our strength. We must make sure we use the real armor, which is Jesus, not just the knowledge of who He is. We need to know Him and understand His heart. That is what will protect us. We need to know who Christ is in us, for we are nothing without Him. We must put on faith and love as our breastplate.

Clothed with Strength

In Old Testament times, Nehemiah was a Jew living in Persia after the Israelites had been taken into captivity by the Babylonians. Nehemiah heard about the condition of the walls surrounding Jerusalem and his heart ached to go and help repair them. The king gave him permission to do what was placed on his heart by God.

When Nehemiah and his workers returned to Jerusalem to rebuild, the enemy tried to stop them. When the workers grew weary in the battle, Nehemiah called for the reading of the Word of God. He encouraged and reminded the people that their strength came from finding joy in their God (Nehemiah 8:10). Isaiah 52:1 tells us that we are to clothe ourselves with strength. Strength comes from joy and joy comes only from relationship with our Savior and knowing Him for who He really is.

You see, all the armor represents is Jesus! When we put on the armor we are being reminded of who Jesus is and what He has done for us. Galatians 3:27 (NIV) says that **"for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ"**. As we meditate on this, joy comes to our heart and we have the strength it takes to wear the armor, and to lift the sword and the shield.

The Bible has a lot to say about how we dress spiritually. There are some items from the old nature that we must take off, before we can put on the clothing of the new nature. If we put on the new over the old, all we are doing is whitewashing the fence. The whitewash will eventually wear off to reveal what is really on the inside. We must be cleansed from the inside out.

But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Col 3:8-14 (NASB)

Just as we get out of bed in the morning, take off our nightclothes, and put on clothes for the day, so we must also do this in our Christian walk. We are no longer children of the night, living in darkness and sin. Therefore, we should take off our old sinful nature and all the things that it reflects like anger, slander, lies, filthy language, bitterness, inability to forgive, and resentment. Then we should clothe ourselves with clothing for the day: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Then put on love. Love is what completes this spiritual garment.

When we begin to see these virtues displayed in our lives we will begin to see a spirit of unity developing in the Body of Christ. It is God's people dressed in their proper attire, not doctrine, which will bring unity. It is our willingness to love and forgive and be kind to those whose doctrine is different

than ours that will make us one.

When a person joins the army, the navy, the marines, the air force, or the coast guard, they are issued specific uniforms. This is their identity and when they are in a battle, everyone knows who is on their side by the uniform. Sometimes in the Church today, it is very hard to tell who is on our side. Religion sometimes appears well as true Christianity.

Take the war our nation has been fighting in Afghanistan. It is hard to distinguish Taliban and Al Qaeda members from the Afghans who really are on our side. This is a good illustration of how the enemy can at times come masquerading as the ally to fool us into thinking they are not the enemy. We desperately need discernment in the Body of Christ. It is time for the Church to arise, fully dressed in the Lord's uniform and prepare for the battle against the enemy.

Wounded Soldiers

Sometimes soldiers get wounded in a battle. When a soldier is wounded he is removed from the battleground quickly and placed in a hospital where he is cared for by doctors and nurses until he has sufficiently recovered to return to battle. He does not lie in that bed with his armor on, nor does he have the strength to return to battle while he is yet recovering.

In the Church we have many people who have been wounded in battle. We often try to send these soldiers back into the war before they have sufficiently recovered. A wounded soldier cannot wear his armor. Many times we send our soldiers back to war with open wounds and no covering. In this condition they are vulnerable to more serious injury and hurt. The wound could even become infected if not properly treated.

Our natural body has a built-in mechanism to start the healing process when we are wounded or hurt. New cells are created to replace the old dead cells. Open wounds begin to scab over to keep the wound clean and protected. In the spiritual realm, the Holy Spirit is there to immediately begin the healing process in our hearts when we have been wounded. But often we won't let Him apply the healing salve. We won't let him replace the dead cells with new living cells.

The wounds have come from many different sources. The body of Christ has been inflicted with numerous wounds, many from among its own ranks (friendly fire) over the years. I know personally of an assembly that split about forty years ago. Old-timers in these two groups still will not communicate with each other. They don't even remember what started the fight or the details of the pursuing events, but they know it was someone else's fault and they are still upset.

This fight has been carried down to the next two generations who were not involved in the original incident. They do not understand the principle Jesus taught us when others have something against us. Even if we have done nothing wrong, we need to do everything in our power to mend the situation. Many unnecessary wounds have been delivered to the Body of Christ because we have not followed this command of our Lord.

These wounds have been allowed to fester for many years. There have been very few spiritual doctors and nurses willing to work with the Holy Spirit to heal these wounds and get these soldiers back out on the battlefield. Our

gathering places should be hospitals trained and prepared to care for the wounded. Like hospitals, these places should be set up outside the war zone. Instead, many have become the war zone. It doesn't take long to determine the temperature in a particular assembly. If the people are not red-hot, on fire for Jesus, the place has become a war zone. If we can't fight against each other and force the opposition to leave, we'll freeze them out!

Oh, how we need to realize that our fight is not against people, but against the spirits of darkness. These hellish spirits love to stir up strife. They love to stick the knife to the ribs and turn it until it hurts. We have allowed the enemy to wound us and then we put the blame on our brothers and sisters.

If we have wounds that the enemy has inflicted upon us, we need to let the Holy Spirit come and cleanse our wound and apply the healing salve. If we will allow Him to do this, the healing process will begin, and a spiritual scab will form to protect the wound from further damage. Quite frankly, we often are our own worst enemy. We continue to scratch open the wound. We continue to dig up the past and meditate on the hurts so our wounds never heal properly.

There are a lot of people in our gathering places that have been wounded, and have never recovered. These unhealed wounds lead to bitterness, lack of forgiveness, and rebellion. People with these problems demand a lot of care and attention from our leaders who often just treat the symptoms, not the problems. This needs to change. We need to allow our wounds to heal and be willing to repent of our bitterness and lack of forgiveness.

**“For thus says the LORD, ‘Your wound is incurable and your injury is serious. ‘There is no one to plead your cause; No healing for your sore, no recovery for you. ‘All your lovers have forgotten you, they do not seek you; for I have wounded you with the wound of an enemy, with the punishment of a cruel one, because your iniquity is great and your sins are numerous. ‘Why do you cry out over your injury? Your pain is incurable. Because your iniquity is great and your sins are numerous, I have done these things to you. ‘Therefore all who devour you will be devoured; and all your adversaries, every one of them, will go into captivity; and those who plunder you will be for plunder, and all who prey upon you I will give for prey. ‘For I will restore you to health and I will heal you of your wounds,’ declares the LORD, ‘because they have called you an outcast, saying: “It is Zion; no one cares for her.”’
Jeremiah 30:12-17 (NASB)**

This is a picture of Zion. This is a picture of the Church in our day. Seemingly incurable wounds have been brought on by sin. Sin is rampant in the Church today and it looks like Zion will never be the glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle that Paul describes in Ephesians 5:27. There seems to be little hope.

The Bible is deemed outdated and irrelevant. Homosexuals are being ordained as pastors. Weddings are being performed between members of the same sex. Alternate lifestyles are being accepted as normal in many assemblies. Adultery and divorce are as common in the Church as they are in the world. Christians preach against abortion until they are faced with their

own teenage daughter's pregnancy.

It appears as if the Church has a terminal disease from which she will never recover. It looks more like Babylon than it does Zion. Confusion is everywhere. Self-worship is everywhere. Man is god. There is no need for a savior, a god. The Babylonian spirit is alive and well. Religious spirits dominate and control the leadership in a multitude of assemblies, yes, even in some prophetic and apostolic circles and we are blind to it.

Even when there are no extreme sins such as murder, adultery, or stealing, there are sins of religion and tradition that make the Word of God of no effect. There are people everywhere who are just going through the motions as though it were enough to please God. They are satisfied with their sickly condition filled with apathy and complacency. They are satisfied to live a life of mediocrity, passing time until death finally brings release. But, God has so much more for His Church that He cannot stand to see her like this. He wants to restore her. He has great desires for her.

When God begins a restoration process, He first brings an understanding of the truth to us. Then He begins to mold our thoughts and our character to fit that truth. Only when the vessel has been molded and prepared by the Lord, is it fit to contain the glory of the Lord. Who will hear and feel the beat of God's heart for mankind and begin to cry out with His heartbeat "Oh, sweet bride, be restored!"

God's Way is Restoration

God is in the restoration business! He says that even though our sins have caused our wound, and even though the wound appears to be incurable, He will come and He will restore us to health. He will heal our wounds. Without Him, our disease is terminal. We are unable to make it better. But, praise God, He says He will heal, and He alone is able to do it. He will make us into the bride He has desired.

"I will lead the blind by a way they do not know, In paths they do not know I will guide them. I will make darkness into light before them And rugged places into plains. These are the things I will do, And I will not leave them undone." They will be turned back *and* be utterly put to shame, Who trust in idols, Who say to molten images, "You are our gods." Hear, you deaf! And look, you blind, that you may see. Who is blind but My servant, Or so deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is so blind as he that is at peace *with Me*, Or so blind as the servant of the LORD? You have seen many things, but you do not observe *them*; *Your* ears are open, but none hears. Isaiah 42:16-20 (NASB)

The devil blinds the eyes of the sinner, so he cannot see the gospel of Christ. But, it is rebellion that causes blindness and deafness in God's people. As you read the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, you will see that whenever blind eyes and deaf ears are mentioned concerning Israel, rebellion is listed as the cause. God says His people are the ones that are blind and deaf.

The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, you are living among a rebellious people. They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious people.” Ezekiel 12:1, 2 (NIV)

God made His word glorious and honorable, but because many of His people are blind and deaf they do not understand it. His Church is plundered and snared. However, God says there is a day coming when He is going to take the blind where they have never been before and He is going to give them light to see. He will not forsake His people forever. He will remove the blinders and cause understanding to come to those who have been blinded by the sin of rebellion. They will repent and turn from their wicked ways. He will take them and turn them around and set them on their feet, heading in a different direction.

You have been born of the Spirit. You are seated on the throne with Jesus. You know His heart. You understand His will. You hear His call for restoration. He wants His people, who can hear Him and see Him, to call for restoration. He desires a priesthood that will *“weep between the porch and the altar”*. The porch speaks of the place where the people are, and the altar is where God is.

God is looking for a people who will take the priesthood seriously and stand in behalf of the people who cannot see. *“Who will listen to what I am saying? Who will pay attention to these things and recognize it when it comes?”* The words of the Lord through Isaiah still call out to us today. Who will hear what He is saying to us today? Who has a heart for restoration?

God is looking for a people, a remnant of overcomers, who will cry to Him for His Church to be delivered from bondage. He wants them to be free from the religious spirit that keeps them tied to rules of religion and tradition instituted by man and not God. He is looking for someone to cry for restoration of sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf.

The carnal man finds it hard to see or hear by the spirit. They depend on their physical senses to make decisions for them. Most of the time, those decisions are at odds with the Kingdom of God. God is looking for those living by Kingdom principles to use their authority to advance the Kingdom and set His people free.

Who will understand God's heart and purposes for this hour? God has a heart for restoration. The process of rebuilding Zion cannot take place until there is a restoration of the stones that have been damaged. There is a special blessing reserved for peacemakers and restorers in this day. Will you heed the call?

Living Stones

In Nehemiah chapter 4, we read about a man named Sanballat. He was one of the men who governed in Samaria at the time the Jews returned to Jerusalem to rebuild. Sanballat was not happy the Jews were there and he began to ridicule them for their efforts at rebuilding the wall. Sanballat did everything he could to hinder the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, but the Jews prayed and continued their work.

Sanballat was very angry when he learned that we were rebuilding the wall. He flew into a rage and mocked the Jews, saying in front of his friends and the Samaritan army officers, “What does this bunch of poor, feeble Jews think they’re doing? Do they think they can build the wall in a single day by just offering a few sacrifices? Do they actually think they can make something of stones from a rubbish heap—and charred ones at that?” Nehemiah 4:1-2 (NLT)

Nehemiah encouraged the people to continue with the work in spite of the enemy’s attempt to stop them. When the walls had reached half of their height, Sanballat realized that his words had not been effective in stopping the Jews. They had continually **“worked with enthusiasm” (vs. 6 NLT)** in spite of all the mockery and insults that were thrown at them. So, he decided more desperate measures were needed.

But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites heard that the work was going ahead and that the gaps in the wall of Jerusalem were being repaired, they were furious. They all made plans to come and fight against Jerusalem and throw us into confusion. But we prayed to our God and guarded the city day and night to protect ourselves. Then the people of Judah began to complain, “The workers are getting tired, and there is so much rubble to be moved. We will never be able to build the wall by ourselves.” Nehemiah 4:7-10 (NLT)

The people were tired and discouraged by the amount of rubble that still needed processed. It seemed like a never-ending job to repair all those burnt stones before they could be positioned in their proper place in the wall. Overwhelmed by the amount of work they had left to do and listening to the enemy stirring up trouble against them every day, they became discouraged. But, they did not give up! They prayed and they stationed guards to watch the enemy.

I Peter 2:5 tells us we are like living stones being built into a spiritual house. That is what God is doing. He is making us into a house for His habitation. Many of the stones God is using are burnt stones who have suffered hurt and ridicule from the world as well as the Church. The Church has declared many of them unfit to serve God and has thrown them on the heaps of rubble outside the city gates.

Today God is calling for a people who understand His heart and desire for these discarded stones. He is looking for a remnant of overcomers who will partner with Him to restore these rejected stones so they become living stones once again. Yes, once again they will add value to the Church. God will take them off the rubble heap, put the pieces back together again and polish them until they shine. Then He will place them back into the wall as shining, living stones of great value.

As these forgotten and neglected stones are positioned back into the wall they will find that they have a powerful anointing upon their lives. Their hearts will overflow with love and gratitude for what their Lord has done for them. Those who have known the love of God and the forgiveness He provides desire to share that love and forgiveness with other.

You may be one of these spiritual stones in the pile of rubble who has

been discouraged and discarded by God's people for years. You may no longer be attending a place of worship because of the hurt that is in your heart. Forgive those who have wronged you and then believe that God is not finished with you yet. The call upon your life is without repentance.

God knew you, loved you and called you before you even knew Him. You were still living in sin without a Savior. (Romans 5:8). After you came to the realization of His great love for you, somehow you left the path and decided to go your own way, but now your heart is yearning for that closeness you once felt with this God who loved you so much. He still loves you and will forgive you and set you in the wall again. He will restore you, if you will let Him.

It doesn't matter what people say. They may tell you that you will never amount to anything. They may tell you you can't serve God in a certain capacity because of your great sin, or because you never went to Bible school. But, love them anyway and determine to move on with God and believe Him. Do not allow bitterness and resentment to enter your heart, and you will be blessed. God is the restorer of hearts and He will do the work regardless of what people say, if you will believe and trust Him.

David was God's choice to be king. Do you think God was shocked when David committed adultery? Do you think He almost had a heart attack when David committed murder? Do you think, God was saying, *"Oh, no, I made a mistake"*? No, God knew what David would do before he did it. But, He also knew David's heart.

David had a love for God and a heart of repentance. If you will have a heart of repentance, God will forgive, turn you around and put you on the right path. He will take your heart of stone and turn it into a heart of love for Him and for mankind. He is that kind of God.

God is visiting many men and women today who are in prison for unthinkable crimes. Many have never heard the gospel before, but they are hearing it now. Not only are they hearing it, they are receiving it with joy. They are being taught and trained while in prison. Many of them will come out from behind those prison bars ready to take their place in the army of the living God. Some will be pastors, some will be evangelists, teachers, prophets, and yes, even apostles by the grace and mercy of God.

Maybe you are one of these beloved ones in prison right now. Trust God to work in your behalf. Some will declare you unfit to stand and preach the Word of God after what you have done. Many will resent the honor that God will bestow upon you. The brother of the prodigal son was not happy to see the reception that his brother received. When the wanderer came home there was great rejoicing and the brother couldn't understand why such honor was given to this sinner.

So, it will be with many of you. But, the closer you get to God, the less it matters what people think or do. His approval is all you need. His heart is what you want. It is God that calls you, not man and the call is without repentance. In other words God does not change His mind. He knows the end from the beginning. You are not a surprise to Him.

Many of those in the Church, who have grown lukewarm, will be angry and jealous because these restored burnt stones are being promoted. They will complain to God and His leadership. *"Why are these ones getting the blessing and the anointing?"* they will say. *"We have been here serving You,*

God, all along and have not strayed." The answer will be the same as the one given to the brother of the prodigal son. They could have had their inheritance all along, but chose to serve God halfheartedly.

These complainers have not strayed, but they have not done His will. They have chosen to perch and keep the pews warm Sunday after Sunday and they have grown lukewarm. Jesus says in Revelation 3:15, 16 it is better to be hot or cold than for a person to be lukewarm. In fact, Jesus says that when a person is lukewarm He will vomit them out of His mouth. Lord, help us! Let us realize how our complacency sickens our Lord, and turn from our wicked ways!

Let's allow the Holy Spirit to heal our wounds of bitterness, anger, resentment, lack of forgiveness, and jealousy so that we can be fully dressed for battle as soldiers of the Lord. If we don't, we will be ineffective as overcomers. We cannot wage effective warfare against the enemy with sin in our lives. Let's forget the past, forgive those who have hurt us, and let the wounds heal so that we can put on the armor once again and go to battle!

Let us arise from our sitting positions and shake off our lethargy and apathy and return to our first love. Let us work together to take back territory from the enemy, not just clutch what we have currently in our hands. Let's abandon our garments of rebellion and put on His clothes of righteousness so we can see and hear our Lord as He shapes us into what He wants us to be. Yes, let's allow God to build us into a spiritual house that He can inhabit, that the world might see and know our God!

CHAPTER 4 - OVERCOMERS UNDERSTAND THE BUILDING PROCESS

Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.” Jeremiah 1:9, 10 (NIV)

Words have Power

Building in the Kingdom of God is a process and it begins with words. Jeremiah was a prophet of God, appointed by God to go to God’s people and speak. God touched the mouth of Jeremiah and Jeremiah walked away with the words of God in his mouth. These words had power to effect change in kingdoms of the earth.

God’s words have power. In Hebrews 11:3 scripture tells us if we have faith to believe, then we will understand how the world was created. This passage of scripture says that it was all done by the words that God spoke. In the first couple of chapters of Genesis we see where God said something and whatever He said had the power to create. God spoke and out of nothing came something.

John chapter 1 says that Jesus is the personification of God’s Word. It claims that Jesus, the Word was in the very beginning of time and it was really Jesus, the Word, who created all things.

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. John 1:1-4 (NLT)

Verse 14 goes on to say that this Word that was in the beginning came to earth in human form. He was the Son of God, Jesus. He spoke and people were healed. He spoke and a fig tree dried up and died. He spoke and demons fled. He spoke and the waves became calm. Nothing exists outside of Jesus. In Him we live, and move and have our being.

Words have power, power to create and also power to uproot and destroy. Jeremiah was a man. He wasn’t God. But, God illustrated through Jeremiah that it is not a person who has power, but the words of the person that have power. Proverbs 18:21 (NLT) says **“The tongue can bring death or life; those who love to talk will reap the consequences.”**

We are created in the image of God. We do not realize the words we speak are extremely powerful. We have the power to create life or destruction with our words. As a spokesperson for God, it was immensely important for Jeremiah to have God touch his mouth before he spoke. It was absolutely critical that the words out of his mouth line up with the perfect will of God. If we are going to be a mouthpiece for God, we must also allow God to purify us from the inside out, so we speak from His heart. Like Jeremiah and Isaiah we need the fire of God to touch our tongue.

Tear Down Before Building

Building in the kingdom of God consists of first a tearing down of something that currently exists and then the building up of something new. God will not build on wood, hay and stubble. He will not cover human building material with His material. He will not build on any foundation other than what is laid by Jesus His Son. Every man-made structure built in the Master's Name must be torn down. His hand is not upon it.

Often before something can change in our lives, we have to examine what is coming out of our mouth. If we are constantly talking about how sick we are and all the things we can't do because of our illness or weakness, we will never see ourselves being built into a healthy, energetic individual. If we talk about always being poor and never able to get ahead, we can never see a vision of ourselves living in an abundant life like our God promised to us.

First there must be a tearing down or an uprooting of the mindsets that cause our mouth to speak opposite the Word of God. We must feed on God's Word concerning His desire for our health and well-being until the old roots of the sickness mindset have been yanked from the ground of unbelief. Then the fruit of health and well-being can begin to be produced from the seeds of health planted in the fertile soil of faith that now exists in our heart. Before the good seeds can be planted, the roots of the old plants must be uprooted and destroyed.

Many so-called Christian activities and monuments produced by religious institutions today were never built on a solid foundation. They were built on dreams and desires of men, not of God. God never spoke them into being. Many leaders have not submitted their mouths to the touch of the fire of God so His words are spoken through them, not their own words. These monuments will need to be torn down before something precious and anointed can be built.

True overcomers have come to the place where they understand the process and are ready for God to lay an axe to the root of the works done by man, the works produced from the carnal nature. John the Baptist was preparing the crowds for the Son of God who was coming to baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. He said in Matthew 3:10 that this One who was coming to them would chop down the trees that do not bear fruit and cast them into the fire. The fire is not something to be feared, but rather welcomed.

If our works are not based on the foundation of Jesus, they are wood, hay and stubble, which will be consumed by the fire. If the words we preach do not line up with the precious Word of God, they are worthless. However, if our works are based on the foundation of Jesus, they are gold and silver, and the fire only purifies and takes out the human impurities. We should welcome this process.

God never tears down to destroy or hurt in His children's lives. When He tears something down He has a plan with a purpose in mind. His purpose is to build something better that will last for eternity. If He wants to tear down some things in your own life, it is so He can make you into something far superior. He wants you to become like Jesus, His Son. That is the ultimate goal, the finished product.

I always thought it would be fun to buy a large old country house, neglected over the years, and restore it to its original beauty or even something better. It is fun to watch something old and rundown turn into

something beautiful again. God is in the restoration business. The old house of the old covenant was God's idea, but it was only a picture of what was to come, the house that Jesus would build.

And so, dear brothers and sisters who belong to God and are partners with those called to heaven, think carefully about this Jesus whom we declare to be God's messenger and High Priest. For he was faithful to God, who appointed him, just as Moses served faithfully when he was entrusted with God's entire house. But Jesus deserves far more glory than Moses, just as a person who builds a house deserves more praise than the house itself. For every house has a builder, but the one who built everything is God. Moses was certainly faithful in God's house as a servant. His work was an illustration of the truths God would reveal later. But Christ, as the Son, is in charge of God's entire house. And we are God's house, if we keep our courage and remain confident in our hope in Christ. Hebrews 3:1-6 (NLT)

God is Building a House

God is building a house and He put Jesus in charge of it. We are the house being built into greatness and brilliance. He is not constructing and establishing a physical church building. He is not building multiple buildings so there can be a church building on every corner. He is not building something different for every brand of doctrine there is today. He is building one house made of human stones that have chosen to obey Him and are cemented together with love. This is called the Church, the "called out" ones.

David is a type or a picture of Christ in the Old Testament. His life was used to illustrate New Testament truths that were to come. He represents the new covenant. Abraham looked into the future and saw the "city of God". David wanted to build a house for God, but God said no. Instead God told him, **"You will not build me a house, but I will build you a house."** David began to see into the future, desire it, and pull it into his day, so he might taste of the goodness of the Lord.

It would be very beneficial to read the whole chapter seven of II Samuel. It is a beautiful picture of God's plan for the future. The old covenant house was directed by God, but was built by man. The new covenant house is built by God. God wanted to live among His children. He wanted to live in them and them in Him. Jesus said it best when He prayed to the Father for us to be made one with God, just as the Son and the Father were one.

I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. "I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. John 17:21-23(NLT)

This could only happen by the Spirit of God. Man could not build a house of unity like this, only God could. As Jesus came to earth and lay down

His life for the Father's plan, He became the cornerstone of the Father's house and men and women became the living stones.

You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor. And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. As the Scriptures say, "I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem, chosen for great honor, and anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him. But for those who reject him, "The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone." And, "He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they do not obey God's word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them. I Peter 2:4-8 (NLT)

We are the living stones being placed in the wall of the house of the Lord by His loving hands. If we know Jesus as Savior, God dwells in us individually. However, He also wants to inhabit us corporately. This is why we are told in scripture that we should not neglect our assembling together. God will do the assembling, the developing of relationships, the bringing together with the cement of love. Overcomers understand this and will allow God to do whatever needs to be done to fit His stones together.

We are all being built together into God's house. He is the one that builds it, not us. So many of us are actively trying to build our own ministries with our own visions, thinking this is what will please God. We are trying to build a house for Him, but He is telling us that we are not to build Him a house, but rather, He is building a house using us as His building material.

Many assemblies picture themselves as a house that God is building. It may be a small group, so leadership begins to pressure the people to evangelize, to witness, to invite more people so the building can grow. They need more stones to grow and build a house. They need more people to help fulfill the vision of the leadership.

But, we desperately need to understand that God is not building individual houses. He is building people, molding and shaping individual and unique stones for their proper place in the wall of the house. There is only one house in all the earth that He is building. We fail in our attempts because we don't recognize the stones of God outside our little group. This must change.

It is this carnal view of the Church that ends up frustrating not only leadership but many of the people. We are building with bricks and not stones, and when the bricks take themselves from the wall, the building is either lopsided or it collapses. Everyone has their own view of the building that they think is being built. When a person's individual view doesn't line up with the view of the leadership, chaos happens. Leadership attempts to pick up the pieces out of the ashes and start the process all over again trying to rebuild only to fail over and over again. Albert Einstein called this insanity, doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

Until we learn and understand deeply that it is God who is the one building the house and there is only one house that He is building, we are

doomed for failure. It is only He who knows each stone and their heart and abilities, because He is the one who created them and understands them. He is the one that understands their place in the wall of the House of the Lord. He is the one who understands their purpose and their place.

God never commanded us to build our own houses. In fact, if you read the book of Haggai, you find God was disappointed with His people because they had spent their time building their own houses and had neglected the Lord's house. Oh, if we would only have eyes to see what the Spirit is showing us today. We have spent decades building our own houses. God is not pleased.

God's glory is not going to fill a thousand little buildings. His glory is going to fill individuals who have allowed the Lord to mold them and position them in the place He wants them, doing what He has told them to do. As each living stone is positioned, from the throne room in heaven it looks like a huge house not made with human building material, but with supernatural stones, polished by the Master Builder Himself, and placed tenderly and lovingly in the wall exactly where He wants them. It is the glorious House of the Lord fit for His habitation. He will not inhabit anything made by human hands.

The Uniqueness of God's Building Material

Too many of God's leaders, who are attempting to build for God, do not understand how to discern between bricks and stones. God only uses stones. Bricks are manufactured, made with human hands and human labor with human sweat. Bricks all look the same. God's stones are unique, all created with unique fingerprints and DNA, all specially designed by the Master. No two are alike.

So many sermons have been preached and books written on how a prophet or an apostle looks and acts. Leadership thinks if you don't have these characteristics, there is no way that you are called as a prophet or an apostle. But, I say to you by the Spirit of God, that it is God who calls and commissions. It is God who gives anointing. It is God who determines your place. Do not let any man convince you of something contrary to what the Spirit of God has already told you.

A great number of leaders today will not let you "perform" in their assembly unless they recognize the gift first. Many times the leaders are using carnal methods to determine the gift and they are measuring against a model they have planted in their mind. There are leaders in God's true house that will recognize the gift as the Spirit reveals. In the meantime, it does not mean that you should sit and wait. A gift is who you are and it cannot be contained within four walls.

God's gifts are recognized by the Spirit of God communicating with your spirit. You recognize them by the fruit that they bear, not by their methods and their words. If we operate from our carnal nature we will try to mold everyone to look and act the same way. This was never God's intent. We need to let God be God and let Him form people into His image, with all His glorious variations.

Most religious institutions have an agenda or a vision designed by its leadership. In order to fulfill this vision, the institution needs people, not just any people, but people who conform to what leadership needs to fulfill their

vision or advance their agenda. Many times leaders begin to manipulate and control the people in order to mold them into what leadership needs or wants, instead of allowing each person to be the individual God designed them to be and operate with the gifts and talents that God has given to them.

In many cases, leadership ends up intimidating people into performing in certain roles and gifting that are not a part of God's design for that individual, because leadership wants to be successful. They need people to accomplish certain things in order to support the vision of the institution. Many people are told what to say and what not to say. They often need approval before speaking in front of the people.

People who may be called to five-fold ministry gifts are required to be recognized by leadership and their callings confirmed before they are allowed to speak or do anything in the congregation. This is a religious spirit in operation. God is the one who calls and He is the one that confirms. He is your Father.

Many young people who have a call of God on their lives are waiting around for a father of the faith to confirm and release them, and they are frustrated. Their spirits are eager to run, but they are told if they run before they are approved by leadership, they will be in rebellion. I say to you today, "Be free and run the race God has for you and don't look back!"

This is a debilitating religious spirit sent to keep these precious ones in bondage. It is a lying, deceiving spirit that steals the visions and dreams of young people who want to fly, who have great hopes. This is extremely sad and hurting to the heart of God.

Brothers and sisters, you are released to go and be all that God has called you to be. You are only subject to the will of God for your life and His voice. He calls you approved of Him. You do not need anyone else's approval. You are His precious child and He lives in you. He will correct you. Yes, He can and will use others to bring correction to your life, but the ones He sends to you will correct in love. These true leaders will have a desire to see you succeed as long as your heart's desire is to serve God with a whole heart. This is not a license to do whatever you want, but it is a license for you to go and do whatever your Father wants.

Lamentations chapter four says that God's children are precious, like sacred gemstones and worth their weight in gold. But, something has happened to them. They have become like common pots of clay, all looking the same. God's leaders have mass produced Christians to look the same and act the same instead of allowing God to polish them into the shining, precious unique gemstones that they are. Lord, help us to understand and turn from our wicked ways. We are not building the house, You are!

Psalms 127:1 tells us that any construction that we do ourselves is done in vain if the Lord is not the One directing it. There is a lot of vain labor going on in the name of Jesus. We build a house and we tack on a name: "Baptist", "Pentecostal", "Lutheran", "Catholic", "Word of Faith", "Prophetic" or "Apostolic". The list goes on. The same thing was true in the early church. Some wanted to say they were followers of Apollos, others were followers of Paul. Paul's response was that we should all be following Jesus, the builder of the Church, not man.

Are we following Him? Is His kingdom being built or are we building our own? When God builds a house He tacks on names like "*the house of the first*

born", "the redeemed", "the sought after ones", "the no-longer forsaken ones", "the faithful city", "the city of righteousness". The list goes on.

I was in an assembly one Sunday morning worshipping God and crying out for unity in the body of Christ. Suddenly in a vision I saw a beautiful patchwork quilt. Each patch was a different vibrant color that stood out on its own. And as I watched the hand of God set that quilt on fire. The quilt was not consumed, but rather I watched each color from each patch melt into each other, until you could not tell where one color ended and another began. It was absolutely beautiful. God is about to bring us together as the house he has designed with beautiful living stones, all unique and working together. Each one knows their place and fulfills their purpose according to the will of the Father.

God is Healing Us

God has a perfect place for us in the walls of His house. We are His living stones. We must come to understand that it is through Him we live and move and have our being. Because of His great love, He tears down some things in our lives that are hindering us before He places us in the wall,. He must do this before He begins to build us and shape us in His image. He chisels away at us and removes some imperfections. Then He polishes us and places us in the wall.

He knows the exact spot for us and He places us there tenderly and with much love. He knows what He is doing. He is the Master Builder and Restorer. In a previous chapter we read verses from Jeremiah, chapter 30. God said that Zion had an incurable wound. According to Hebrews 12, Zion represents the Church. The Church today has an incurable wound. Our sins are many. God said He is the one who has struck us. He must tear down before He can begin to build again.

He goes on to tell us that even though the wound is incurable, and even though we have brought it on ourselves because of our great sin, He will restore us to health and heal our wounds. He will do this because of His great love for us, because of His great jealousy for us. The world is mocking the Church today and calling us an outcast, telling us that no one wants us. But, our God wants us. He hears the mockery and the taunts and because He cares so much for us, He will come and heal us.

There is nothing we can do to make this happen in our own strength and knowledge. The more we try to heal the problems, the worse they seem to get. It almost seems hopeless. It almost seems like a lost cause. And it is, if we try to fix the problem in our own strength using our own carnal methods, because we can't. We can't demand unity. We can't command everyone to believe the same way. We can't demand that everyone work together in love, but He can make it happen. He will restore us to health. He is the one who will build the house. Our God is in the restoration business.

God is Dealing with Shepherds

Then this message came to me from the LORD: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds, the leaders of Israel. Give them this message from the Sovereign LORD: What sorrow awaits you shepherds

who feed yourselves instead of your flocks. Shouldn't shepherds feed their sheep? You drink the milk, wear the wool, and butcher the best animals, but you let your flocks starve. You have not taken care of the weak. You have not tended the sick or bound up the injured. You have not gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost. Instead, you have ruled them with harshness and cruelty. So my sheep have been scattered without a shepherd, and they are easy prey for any wild animal. They have wandered through all the mountains and all the hills, across the face of the earth, yet no one has gone to search for them. Ezekiel 34:1-6 (NLT)

God compares the leaders of His people to shepherds who watch over sheep. It was the shepherd's responsibility to make sure the sheep were fed and protected. If the sheep were sick, the shepherd was the one who should be caring for those sheep. God spoke through His prophet Ezekiel about His unhappiness with the way the sheep were being treated by their shepherds.

In John chapter 10 Jesus declared that He was the Good Shepherd. He cared enough for His sheep to lay down His life for them. His sheep heard His voice and they followed Him. God has called some of His people to be shepherds, to be leaders of His flock. These leaders are not called to separate the sheep into their own sheep pen and build walls around them. They are called to make sure the sheep recognize the Good Shepherd and follow His voice. They are called to be like the Good Shepherd so that the sheep will desire to follow Jesus, not a man.

Far too many leaders set themselves up as a shepherd to be followed, instead of pointing the sheep to the Good Shepherd. These shepherds seek and sometimes receive a huge following. The shepherds make a big name for themselves and their ministry. They encourage the sheep to not associate with anyone else, not to trust any other voice that speaks to them.

Leaders fail to teach the sheep to hear the voice of Jesus for themselves. This process has so deteriorated the willingness of people to hear Jesus through His sent ones that many sheep will not receive a prophetic word as being from God if it doesn't come through some big-time prophet with a huge following that has been approved by their own specific religious group.

My friends, this should not be! The sign of a true prophet is not determined by the size of his or her following. The job of the leaders called to five-fold ministry is to teach the people how to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd for themselves and to set an example for them. Too many leaders are teaching the sheep to be dependent upon them, and then we wonder why the sheep do not mature.

When I was a child growing up on a ranch in Wyoming, my dad raised several hundred head of sheep. Every spring when lambs were born we would have several bum lambs that needed care. Bum lambs are lambs whose mother died giving birth or whose mother rejected the lamb and would not feed it.

My siblings and I would feed these lambs milk from a bottle with a rubber nipple several times a day until they were able to eat grass. These lambs ran loose along with our dogs and when we would play games or run with the dogs the lambs would be there, too. We would give names to these

lambs. But, once they grew up, we would turn them loose again with the rest of the herd in the pasture.

We would not see these lambs for days or even months, but once in awhile we would move the sheep from one pasture to another. We would look at the flock and to us they all looked the same, but we could call out the names of these lambs we had named and one by one they would come to greet us. They knew our voice and they knew their name. Each subsequent time the sheep that we had known were less likely to respond to the sound of our voice. Over time, because they did not spend time with us, they lost the ability to recognize our voices.

We are like those lambs. When we first come to Jesus, we are so carefree and happy in His presence. We spend time with Him. We hear His voice and we are eager to do all that He says. But often as time goes by, we get involved in day-to-day activities and begin to neglect His Word. Spending time with God is no longer a priority and suddenly the voices around us are louder than His voice.

God gives us shepherds to guide us and help us stay close to Jesus. He has even given us leaders to be a spiritual father or mother to us. As parents we desire the best for our children, but we do not want to make them dependent upon us for life. So we teach them how to make decisions for themselves and we pray for them. We desire for them to grow up, mature and be even more successful in life than we have been.

There are too many men and women today calling themselves apostles, fathers or mothers of the faith, who do not have the success of their spiritual children in their heart. It seems that in many places today an apostle is called into an assembly when the leader thinks the sheep need a spanking. The tougher you talk, the more apostolic you are! Oh, people, if you really knew and understood how this hurts the heart of God!

False Leaders

I have seen it for myself many times. So-called apostles come into an assembly to stir up the crowd. They tell God's people *"You have to listen to me. I am your apostle. If you do not do as I say, you are in rebellion."* They are harsh and unloving in their comments and there is great fear among the people that they will be ridiculed and receive a harsh word in front of their peers.

Some pastors, who have a true heart for the sheep do not like this, but are often afraid to do or say anything, because they have been taught that apostles hold a higher rank (although different terminology is used) than pastors. Pastors themselves have been called rebellious when not submitting to an apostle.

People are told sometimes that the basic reason the assembly is not growing is because the sheep are lazy and complacent. After all it is the sheep's job to go out and compel the people to come into the assembly, right? The assembly house is where the works of the Kingdom are done by God's leaders, correct? Wrong!

This is a religious spirit in operation and not the way of our Lord who directs His people by love. I have heard many a leader rail against the congregation for not bringing people into the meeting house on Sunday, but

these same leaders do not have a clue how many people were ministered to at work, at play, and at home with their families by these same people. Living the God kind of life, is living it from the inside. It is not about what we do, but about who we are. It is not about what we do on Sunday, but who we are everyday of our lives as we advance the Kingdom wherever we are.

Yes, God is indeed dealing with His shepherds today. It displeases God immensely to see His shepherds neglect or abuse the flock. He developed a job description and a performance review process for shepherds. God said the sheep are His. The people in the assembly are His sheep.

God has given the responsibility of caring for the sheep to His appointed shepherds. These shepherds are supposed to take care of the sheep. There are many shepherds who have not taken this responsibility delegated by God seriously. They have not sought the face of God to find out how to care for the flock of sheep under their care. They have built their own kingdom and become rich. They have treated the sheep harshly and with brutality.

The sheep want to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus. The shepherds that God has placed over His sheep are supposed to hear His voice and confirm to the sheep what is the will of God, not what is the will of the leader. They are admonished to teach the sheep how to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd for themselves.

Sheep should not grow up being dependent upon the under shepherds. No wonder there are so many rebellious sheep. They want to hear the voice of the true Shepherd through their leaders, and instead they are hearing another voice. Some are willing to follow this other voice, not knowing or caring that it is not the voice of the Good Shepherd.

Scripture has a lot to say about false leaders. False leaders many times are believers. I hesitate to call them Christians, because that word means "*Christ-like*" and that is not a picture of false leaders. These leaders may very well have a call on their life, but they operate out of their carnal nature instead of being led by their spirit. They often force their way into leadership without going through the proper preparation by God for their position. They have not humbled themselves under the mighty hand of God, and let Him raise them up and set them in their place of authority.

Many of these shepherds operate out of their own authority, which they believe is given to them by God. But, there is a difference between operating with man's authority and man operating with God's authority. You cannot just say because you have been called to be a leader that you automatically operate in the authority of God. When you operate with the authority of God, signs and wonders follow your ministry, and you do not have to drag the people with you, kicking and screaming. You do not have to whip the people into submission.

Many people are looking for leaders who operate under the true authority of God. They are looking for someone to follow. Plenty of people will follow a false leader blindly because they are just looking for someone to lead. But, there is a dissatisfaction stirring in the hearts of God's people in this hour and they are crying for godly leaders. They are looking for a leader like Paul who could tell the sheep with conviction "*Follow me as I follow Christ*" and they could see with their own eyes that he did follow the Savior with his whole heart, soul, mind and spirit.

To Wander or Not to Wander

Many of the sheep have scattered and they wander from place to place looking for a shepherd who will lead them like Paul did. They are looking for a shepherd who will feed them, a shepherd who will care for them, a shepherd who will hear the Good Shepherd speak and will lead them in the path chosen for them by God. The sheep are scattered on every mountain, every high place looking for the Good Shepherd. High places represent places of worship; mountains represent kingdoms or places.

That is exactly what is happening today in many assemblies. Sheep are wandering from place to place looking for somewhere to belong. They are looking for a family. They are looking for the voice of the Master through a shepherd.

The same thing would be happening in most of the other denominational settings, too, except for one thing. Many people feel it would be a disgrace to their heritage to attend a place of worship of a different denomination or affiliation than where they were raised. They would not even think of moving, even if the place they currently attend is dead.

Where people met for worship as they grew up, is often what determines where they meet today. If they become dissatisfied with the assembly they attend today, they may try a different assembly in the same city as long as it is of the same denomination. If there isn't another place of worship they are likely to just drop out all together and stay home. Seldom do they think to ask God where He might want them to assemble with other believers to worship. It doesn't dawn on them that He might actually have a plan for them.

I am not promoting or degrading any particular denomination or affiliation or place of worship. God's people are important to Him and He is building them into a place of worship. The building or the name on the building is not the important thing. People are the important thing. Jesus told us that where two or three are gathered in His Name, He is right there with them.

I Thessalonians chapter 4 indicates that we should encourage each other and build each other up in the faith. It also says that sheep should honor the leaders in God's work because they give spiritual guidance. I found as I matured in the things of God, He would often move me to a different assembly that was right for me at that time in my spiritual journey.

The key is to find the place where God wants you to be. In that place there will be a true godly leader following the heart of God. That leader will not care how large the flock or how great is the name on the building. True godly leaders will care what happens to the sheep entrusted to their care by the Good Shepherd Himself.

We are also told in scripture not to forsake to gather together with other believers. Nothing says this has to be a building or a certain type of building. It doesn't say it has to have a certain banner over the top of it. It could be a home, or a restaurant where people have gathered to share around a meal. It could be in a park. It could be a dozen different places.

Traditions of Men

Traditions of men have dictated to us what this all means. We must be open to hearing from God. He will not put new wine in old wineskins. Again, He is not building a physical structure, but a spiritual building of living, breathing stones that He has made and designed for His house. Where and how He does this, is His business. We just need to hear His voice and obey.

Traditions of men and religious spirits have put so much emphasis on how to “*conduct church*” and when services should be, and what constitutes a place of worship that we have lost sight of the biblical purpose for assembly. Sometimes we are afraid to go somewhere else, because the leaders have labeled those who leave as rebellious towards God and out of order. Some have even gone so far as to say that the assembly is better off without them because they had a Jezebel or controlling spirit. The scripture from Ezekiel at the beginning of this chapter challenges leaders with “**You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost**”.

Where are the shepherds who have the heart of the Father? They are out there. I have met some of them. I tell you this by the Spirit of God, there is a changing of the guard. As the sheep cry out to God for good shepherds who will love them as God loves them, then God will raise these shepherds to new places of authority. They will not fear the label of “*being rebellious*” given to them by the status quo.

These ones waiting in the wings have been trained, and have spent much preparation time on the mountain of God. They understand they have no authority of their own, but because they have laid down their lives for the Master He has given them His authority. Because they have seen His heart, and they carry His heart in theirs, they are ready to step in and take the people into their promised land.

Many of these next generation leaders are in our midst right now and current leadership often does not recognize them, but God does. This new breed looks and acts differently and many leaders reject them because they are not the norm. But, the remnant of overcomers will recognize them and they will follow, because this new breed of leader is following Christ with a whole heart. They are saying to the people just as Paul did, “Follow me as I follow Christ”. Any leader who is not following Christ should not be followed.

God says in Psalms 92:12-14 (NLT) “**But the godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon. For they are transplanted to the LORD’s own house. They flourish in the courts of our God. Even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green.**” This is not talking about being planted in any old place. It is not talking about a building. It is talking about the house that God is building.

God has a purpose for His sheep and His leaders. If you hear His voice and obey He will plant you where He wants you to be. He will plant you with a group of people whose heart’s desire is to enter into God’s Promised Land and finish the work He put us on earth to finish.

Whether you are called to leadership by Jesus are not, He wants you to know how much He loves you. If you are a leader He wants you to provide food and nourishment to His sheep. If you are one of His sheep, He wants you to know that He does not want you to be fed stale bread or given watered down milk to drink. He wants you to have a spiritual mother or father who will be interested in seeing you mature in the things of God and be able to feed yourself.

Change is Coming

Yes, God is dealing with shepherds today. Will we choose to follow Him and feed the sheep? Will we choose to obey our master or will we continue to misuse and abuse the sheep? Will we take this responsibility seriously? In this hour God is visiting the shepherds and the shepherds are being given a choice to follow God and obey or be on their own, separated because of their carnal nature from what God is doing in the earth today. Verse 10 of chapter 34 of Ezekiel goes on to say God will hold His shepherds accountable for His flock. If they do not listen to God and obey Him, they will be removed as shepherds. God is going to rescue His sheep.

In prayer one day a few years ago God revealed to me that He is visiting every assembly and organization that names His name. He is bringing a broom with Him. He is telling His shepherds to take the broom and clean up the place, or He will return and do it for them. We must judge ourselves, or He will judge us.

Judgment will indeed begin in the household of God. Again, judgment is not to be feared, it should be welcomed. It is a revelation of that which is right in God's eyes and an understanding as to what God wants to accomplish in order to correct the situation. Interestingly, this is not the first time God referred to a broom.

“I will make Babylon a desolate place of owls, filled with swamps and marshes. I will sweep the land with the broom of destruction. I, the LORD of Heaven's Armies, have spoken!” Isaiah 14:23 (NLT)

Babylon represents religion and worship of self. The Commander-in-Chief is leading His remnant, His army, against the Babylonian spirit that exists in much of what the world calls the church. He is bringing a broom. He is bringing destruction to the things made of wood, hay and stubble. For some assemblies there will be nothing left, because they have not built on the lasting foundation of their Lord.

God brings things hidden in darkness into the light in order to deal with them, not to hurt us, but to rescue us. If you are a leader, don't you want God to shine His light upon you and show you what is right in His sight, and what is not? Don't you want to know that you are following the right path? Don't you want to know if you are pleasing your Heavenly Father or not? Don't you want to know if the things you have spent your time doing are considered wood, hay and stubble in His sight instead of gold and silver?

The godly leaders do. They want to know if they are heading in the wrong direction, so they can make some adjustments. They welcome the broom. They welcome the discipline of the Lord. For their greatest desire is to help prepare a glorious bride for the Lord. They know at the end of the journey, they will hear “Well done, good and faithful servant”.

In scripture we find that most of the time when judgment or justice is mentioned, righteousness is also mentioned. No one really wants to talk about judgment. In fact, many teach today that judgment does not fall under the new covenant, if you are a Christian. **“Do not judge, or you too will be judged”** from Matthew 7:1 (NIV) is quoted all the time. There is a misunderstanding of

judgment. In fact, in I Corinthians 6, verse 3 (NIV) Paul has a lot to say about judging. he asks the assembly in Corinth **“Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?”**

We are not to judge men, nor are we to judge situations by men's standard, but we can (and must) judge by the Spirit of God, reach into a man's heart and discern situations or issues that are causing a person to do certain things or to act certain ways. We can look into situations and understand why they are happening which is judging, and then we can discern what is needed to change the situation, which is applying righteousness to that situation.

John 12:48 says that it is the Word of God that judges us. God's Word is the standard for living and everything we do or say is judged against that Word, whether written or spoken to us. Again, judgment is not something to fear in a Christian life. Judgment is really just determining how much and where we are falling short of becoming like Jesus. Therefore, we judge situations according to the Word of God, and then we apply righteousness to that situation. If we do not judge for ourselves, then God will judge for us, and when He makes adjustments, sometimes it can be painful.

Righteousness is another word that is greatly misunderstood. Many people think it equates to holiness, but that is not it at all. Jesus is always righteous. In other words He always does the right thing according to the will of the Father. When Jesus gave us righteousness, He gave us the ability to always know what the true will of the Father is and to be able to do His perfect will. When we judge ourselves we are looking at where we are not following the perfect will of God for our lives, and then through His gift of righteousness, we understand what we need to do to adjust our path.

On our designated road in the Kingdom we are to look into every situation we personally face, or we see in those around us, and judge that situation and how it needs adjusted to be in the will of God. Then we apply righteousness to that situation. For instance, a person we know suddenly becomes sick. We judge the situation according to the will of God for that person, and we apply righteousness to that situation. We know sickness is not the will of God for us, since He healed us from all our sicknesses and diseases at the cross.

As we discern that sickness is not the will of God, as we pray we will understand by the Spirit of God exactly what to do in order to bring righteousness into the situation. It could be prayer. It could be laying hands on them and commanding sickness to leave their body. It could be through various methods and means, as Jesus did when He walked the earth. Jesus only did what He heard the Father say and see the Father do. That is the example for us.

We know that it is God's desire that we all walk in health because that is what His Word declares. Jesus went around healing the sick and doing what was good. Love demands righteousness and judgment be executed in behalf of those we meet. John 9:39 (NLT) says **“I entered this world to render judgment—to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind.”**

A whole book could be written on the topic of righteousness and justice, but for now we just need to know enough to understand when God deals with shepherds and sheep, it is not something horrific or to be feared. It

should be something that we value and desire. For God to open our eyes to see where we are missing His will and then to set us on the path of righteousness is really a wonderful display of His great love for us. Shepherds are needed to help set the foundation of the spiritual house God is building with Jesus as the chief cornerstone.

In Psalms 23 God reveals to us that the true shepherd uses both the rod and the staff. The rod is symbolic of authority and correction. The staff is symbolic of comfort and caring. Paul asked the Corinthian church if they wanted him to come to them with a rod of correction, or with love in a spirit of meekness (I Cor. 4:21). Both are needed and a good shepherd caring for the sheep will know when to use the rod instead of the staff. The sheep are God's. You just happen to be one of the tools or vessels He uses to accomplish His plan. The pattern for His people, His building is His, not yours.

Jesus is not building a physical ministry or a physical house. The plan is His and the path to get there is His. You may be called to a different ministry and even to establish a building to work from, but the goal is always the same. True godly leaders understand the goal of preparing stones for the house that God is building. People are those living stones and they need both the rod and the staff applied in love at appropriate times.

An Appointed Time of Favor

Psalms 102 was written for a future generation. This generation could be living in the earth today. It is a generation of overcomers, a generation that looks upon Zion with compassion. They see the dust from the rubble called the Church today and they have great pity. They understand the great love of the Father for these living stones, and they regard the stones as items of great value. This generation of godly overcomers loves these unpolished, undignified stones and they desire to see the hand of the Lord mold and shape them for their place in His house.

This chapter in Psalms describes a time when God would look down on these unpolished, undignified stones and declare His favor over them. He said there was an appointed time for the rebuilding of Zion. When is the appointed time? The appointed time is when God's servants who are called to prepare a bride begin to see the condition of Zion and to have pity on the stones. The appointed time is when the remnant of overcomers has an unquenchable desire for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt. The appointed time is now.

What happens when Zion is rebuilt and the stones are in their proper place? The glory of the Lord fills the place. Not a building, but the living stones show forth His great glory all across the earth from every nation. Lord, let it be so. Let this be the appointed time. Let your servants arise to see as You see, O Lord my Redeemer. Let the restoration begin!

I love the Old Testament. It has many pictures and shadows that represent new covenant truths. Ezekiel chapter 44 is a picture of God visiting His temple. He comes to the North Gate where His glory is seen. Psalms 48:1-3 reveals God's holiness and how His holiness is seen enthroned in His people on the north side of the Mountain of God. His glory is seen through His people who are made holy through a holy God. It is seen through a people who have made Him King and allow Him to rule in their hearts and minds.

Remember God knows the end from the beginning. Ezekiel chapter 44 records how Ezekiel began to see what God desired for His temple. But, then God points out the current situation. The nation of Israel had allowed foreigners to defile the temple, those uncircumcised in heart and in the flesh. Foreigners are those who do not know God after the heart. They know about Him, but they have never really spent time with Him to really know Him.

We have so many people in our assemblies like this. They believe abortion and gay lifestyles are okay, because God is love and He does not condemn us for these things. They do not know the heart of God. He loves people, but these are detestable practices to Him. We bring this into our assemblies and preach against the heart of God.

We preach from our carnal nature. If we do not preach that this is acceptable, we do not preach at all for there is fear of being labeled as “*old-fashion*” or “*prejudicial*” or even worse “*homophobic*”. So we deliver watered-down versions of God’s will and His ways. It must be love that drives us to preach the truth in love, not fear of what man can do to us.

We come into our assemblies and we worship with our flesh instead of our spirits. Many times we do what is going to get us attention, rather than desiring the attention of our great God and no other. We can’t play in the band or sing in the choir, unless we can sing perfectly or play perfectly. We are performing for an audience, not for our Lord.

Our hearts have not been circumcised. Circumcision was an act that signified that flesh had been cut away and there was a dedication to follow the heart and will of God from that time forward. By this act a man signified the flesh would no longer direct his thoughts or actions.

This chapter in Ezekiel goes on to say that the true leaders of God’s people were to teach the people the difference between the holy and the defiled, the clean and the unclean. When there was controversy they were to stand in their place and judge the situation by what was right according to God’s holiness and righteousness. They would then be able to bring justice into the situation. That is what is going to bring the glory of God into His house.

God is Dealing with Sheep

“And as for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says to his people: I will judge between one animal of the flock and another, separating the sheep from the goats. Isn’t it enough for you to keep the best of the pastures for yourselves? Must you also trample down the rest? Isn’t it enough for you to drink clear water for yourselves? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Why must my flock eat what you have trampled down and drink water you have fouled? “Therefore, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will surely judge between the fat sheep and the scrawny sheep. For you fat sheep pushed and butted and crowded my sick and hungry flock until you scattered them to distant lands. So I will rescue my flock, and they will no longer be abused. I will judge between one animal of the flock and another.” Ezekiel 34:17-22 (NLT)

The sheep have judged other sheep. They have judged others by

appearance. They have judged them by what they do for a living. They have judged them by how much money they make, how much makeup they wear, and how they are dressed. The sheep have judged wrongly in the house of God. They have not judged according to God's standards.

God is going to be the Judge in this hour. He will judge rightly through His holy, set-apart leaders and sheep that know His voice and His heart and will judge with righteousness. As we have indicated before, we don't judge people, we judge situations and heart attitudes rightly and then we apply justice to bring that situation into compliance with the will of the Father. Only those who have spent quality time with the Father and know His heart will be in a position to judge correctly.

God will make known the ones who have true hearts to follow Him. We have driven some of God's true sheep away from the fold with our judgments. This has got to stop. God is not going to tolerate this much longer. According to this scripture in Ezekiel, not only is He going to separate His true sheep from the goats, He is going to judge between one sheep and another.

I know of an assembly where one of the deacons would meet people at the door on Sunday morning. If he thought a woman was wearing too much makeup or her skirt was too short, he would tell her that she couldn't come into the building. If he thought a man wasn't dressed just right, he wouldn't be allowed into the building, either. The pastor did not want to deal with this, because the deacon had a lot of influence and money, so he let it continue to happen.

God says in Ezekiel 34 that He is going to break off the yoke of bondage and rescue His sheep from those who have enslaved them. Heaven help us, if we are one who has enslaved the sheep instead of helping them find their place in God's plan. Repent and be a true leader, rather than a hindrance to the plans of God. God is setting us free in this hour to serve Him. We are His sheep and He will show us how to be productive in the Kingdom and we will bear much fruit. He will give us shepherds after His heart. True shepherds know there is only one true Shepherd and they must lead the flock to Him.

Many people are going to be surprised when they see the ones that God anoints in this hour. For the most part, they are not going to be the flashy ones that always find their way to the front of the assembly. They are not the ones who toot their own horns or pattern themselves after the leaders. They will not be the ones coming out of a well-polish seminary.

They are not going to be the obvious ones. They are not going to be the clones. They are not going to be the ones who have spent twenty years warming a pew. They will not be the ones who move from place to place looking for someone to recognize their calling and great anointing. They will be ones who know who they are because the most important thing in their lives has been sitting at the feet of Jesus and learning from the Master. They have a stamp of uniqueness on their souls that says "fashioned by the hand of the Master".

There is a false anointing and a true anointing. When we finally see the real, we will wonder why we accepted such an obvious fake. The true anointing will be found in strange places. For the most part it will not be seen behind a pulpit. But, it will be seen on many who have been rejected by both the world and the "church". It will be seen on many who found God in prison. It

will be seen on the homeless, and those who have come out of drug addiction and prostitution. It will be seen upon ones who have been rejected by leadership, who have not been polished enough or do not have a natural charisma that draws crowds. The anointing comes to those who love Jesus with a passion unseen before.

When a people experience great love and forgiveness there is a passion that burns like an eternally grateful flame that gives great hope and a reason for living. Many people are going to be offended by this. The traditional "church" is not going to like this. The fact that God uses these ones that others have ignored is going to be an offense to many, a stumbling block, but it is going to be God. They will speak with boldness the will of the Father, instead of watered-down political correctness.

There is going to be a great anointing on young people. This too will offend the church. Many older people in the church will try to stop these children and young adults from ministering. The older generation of pew sitters will think that these ones could not possibly know what God is doing because they have not lived long enough. But, these young people will keep on doing what they are doing and many people will respond to the message this young army preaches and many will be delivered.

God is placing a special anointing on those who have eyes to see and ears to hear what the Spirit is doing in this hour. Many are now being called as leaders to assist this army of young people and set them free to do the will of the Father.

There is also going to be a great anointing on senior citizens, the generation that has been forgotten and often treated as if they have no value. God is not done with them, and when they get the message of who Jesus really is, the message that no one bothered to tell them as they were growing up, they are going to suddenly become alive and even as Caleb, they will take their mountain in old age. They are going to trade their walking sticks in for rods of authority.

What the world has considered worthless, God has considered of great value and they will be polished and made to shine in His Kingdom. You will see the young army and senior citizens rise up hand-in-hand and they will march forth to take the land that has been denied them in the past. You will see this young army preaching the word to their grandparents and great grandparents. Many of these strongly anointed ones will be the ones who came extremely close to being exterminated through abortion. God is restoring and building. What the world counts as great treasure is dung in the eyes of our God, and what is dung in the eyes of the world is great treasure to our God.

God goes on to say through Ezekiel in chapter 36, that the nations have ridiculed Israel and made fun of her. This passage explains the natural state of things with the nation Israel, and it is certainly still true today. However, it is also a picture of spiritual Israel (the Church) today. The world has mocked us and ridiculed us and spit upon us and we have suffered scorn at the hands of the mockers. The world has plundered and made a mockery of God's people and leaders and has stolen their pastureland. And it seems to be accelerating at an increasing pace in recent days.

But, God gives a promise to His people in this chapter. He says that there will be branches bearing much fruit in the Kingdom of God. And the

ruins will be rebuilt! Glory! He will multiply the people and they will be numerous and we will no longer be deprived of our children. He will do this! He goes on to say that it is our own fault that the world has treated us this way. We have sinned and profaned His holy name. He says He is going to turn things around because of His holy name. He is not doing it because we deserve it. It is because of His holiness.

We, His people, have made a mockery of His name and His holiness in the past. Praise God, we can't stop this rebuilding from happening. We can't sin enough to keep it from happening. God says it is going to happen. God will have a people after His own heart that will stop at nothing to see God's people set free and entering into their promised land of blessings. He will have a peculiar people, who show forth His anointing and holiness. He will have a remnant of overcomers!

Therefore, give the people of Israel this message from the Sovereign LORD: I am bringing you back, but not because you deserve it. I am doing it to protect my holy name, on which you brought shame while you were scattered among the nations. I will show how holy my great name is—the name on which you brought shame among the nations. And when I reveal my holiness through you before their very eyes, says the Sovereign LORD, then the nations will know that I am the LORD. Ezekiel 36:22-23 (NLT)

The nations are going to know that He is Lord, and they are going to know it by looking at us. He is going to have a holy people, a purified people. He is going to have a people stripped of all the things that once held first place in their lives. All the idols are going to be torn away and in their place is going to be a new devotion and love for our God.

He will take the hard places out of our hearts and put a heart of flesh in us. There will no longer be famine in the House of God. Places where people meet together to worship God will once again be known as Houses of Bread. He says these places will be filled with flocks of people when the ruins have been rebuilt. Praise God. He is in the restoration business.

The disgrace that we have known will be gone, not because we deserve it but because of His holy name. He's doing it. It can't be stopped. Praise God! We can't do anything to abort it, because He said He is doing it. It is not dependent on us doing anything other than loving Him. However, there are some things that we can do if we truly want to be a part of what He is doing. He will not violate our will.

We can choose to be a goat or be a part of a goat assembly, if we so desire. He'll let us, but I don't want to miss out, do you? Let's choose to allow the Lord to tear down whatever needs to be torn down in our lives so that He might build in us the things that are good and pure, that the world might see Jesus in us, His house, His dwelling place. We will be the place where His glory is seen in every nation. We will be His precious lambs, His remnant, His overcomers!

CHAPTER 5 - OVERCOMERS SEEK GOD AND LIVE

This is what the LORD says to Israel: “Seek me and live; do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba. For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be reduced to nothing. ” Seek the LORD and live, or he will sweep through the tribes of Joseph like a fire; it will devour them, and Bethel will have no one to quench it.

Amos 5:4-6 (NIV)

A large portion of the Church today is walking around like a dead man. There is no life in our meetings, in our worship. Even in those who call themselves a spirit-filled assembly, much of what is done has become a ritual. God says that if we are to live, we must seek Him. This is the message I find myself preaching more than any other: seek Him. He is all we need. Ezekiel saw the valley of dry bones, dead men's bones, which is a picture of the body of Christ today.

These bones are beginning to show signs of life. They are starting to move in response to a sound rising in the earth that speaks life to these bones. There is a voice coming from God's apostolic and prophetic people declaring the will of the Lord. There is a voice speaking forth the cry of the Father's heart for the bride that is being made ready for the Son. In the heart of God's remnant there is a passion for God arising in His people that nothing else or no one else can satisfy.

Until our eyes and ears have been opened to hear the voice of the Master, we see things differently than God does. We use our natural mind rather than the Mind of Christ (which has been freely given to us) to make daily decisions of life. In our own natural thinking a man must first be born and then he dies. But God's way is that a man must first die before he can live.

There is a cost to walking with God. If we want life, we must first die. We must place our lives on the altar. We must become a sacrifice, not our will, but His. This is a hard thing. Many seek after an easier substitute. They want some kind of warm and fuzzy feeling that somehow they have appeased God by their works of service.

Religious Activity and Traditions

In this scripture in Amos, there are three places that God tells His people through His prophet not to seek. Prophetic voices are saying the same thing today. Let's take a closer look at these places. The first is Bethel. Bethel means "*House of God*". Why are we not to seek after the House of God?

Bethel was the place Jacob had a dream and saw the angels of God ascending and descending a ladder. It was a place where God revealed Himself to Jacob. Jacob called the place "*the house of God*", and "*the gate of heaven*". (Genesis 28:17) Bethel was on the prophetic circuit of the prophet Samuel. (1 Sam. 7:15, 16) This city had prophetic visitation. It regularly heard the word of the Lord. Why would it not be a place that we should seek? What went wrong?

When the kingdom of Israel split into the northern and southern kingdoms, Jerusalem was in the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom did

not want their people going to Jerusalem to worship God, but Jerusalem was the place designated by God for worship. God had not given them instructions for a different place to worship. But, the northern kingdom decided they needed a place different from Jerusalem so they instituted Bethel as a substitute place of worship.

In I Kings chapter 13, we find that God had to send another prophet to this town to cry out against the idol worship that was taking place. In the chapter before it is mentioned that golden calves were placed in Bethel and Dan. The idols marked the boundaries of the northern kingdom. These calves were made for the sole purpose of worship. Both Hosea and Amos, prophets of God, were sent to this town, but Amos was commanded by the priests not to prophesy there anymore.

Bethel represents assemblies who were organized to bring glory to their God, but over time allowed religion and religious activity to become the focal point. Bethel started out as a true house of God, but it gained more importance than it was suppose to have. God never commanded them to worship at Bethel. Bethel was called the “*gate of heaven*”, and many today believe that to get to heaven all a person has to do is go to church and fulfill their religious duty. Many assemblies preach this false doctrine. You can never work your way to heaven. You can never be good enough to earn the good graces of our God.

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. Ephesians 2:8, 9 (NLT)

Salvation only comes from faith in God and accepting the sacrifice of His Son for our sins. When this happens your spirit comes alive in you. That is what Jesus was explaining to Nicodemus in John, chapter 3 when He said that Nicodemus needed to be “*born again*” in order to see the Kingdom of God. Jesus went on to say that you are first born of water which signified your natural birth, but there was a second birth that took place when you were born of the spirit.

Many assemblies have lost the revelation of the fact salvation is only made available through Jesus, our Savior. It doesn't come by works, but by love. We have lost that first-love so we end up worshipping things instead of the true and living God. Even in many Spirit-filled, charismatic independent churches, people have come to love praise and worship, free form services.

Unfortunately there are many who never really meet God in this place we call a house of God. Many don't come there to meet Him, they come to have fun, feel good, get their batteries recharged just to make it through another week or at the very least, do their religious duty. God forbid. We must seek Him until we find Him and then we must never let Him go.

Like the northern kingdom, we have desired to build our own kingdoms. We have not been interested in God's plans, only our own. Heaven help us if God sends a prophet into our midst and he starts exposing things deep within us. If he doesn't prophesy nice things, we tell him to go somewhere else. Many are thinking “*see how prosperous we are, God is truly blessing us*”. And all the time the prophet is declaring “*you think you are rich and you do not*

know that you are poor and wretched and blind. Wake up and tear down your idols. Seek your God and live”.

Jesus told the religious leaders in His day that their traditions had made the Word of God of no effect in their lives. We have operated out of our traditions, as well, with the precious word of God having little effect in our plans and daily choices. We play church instead of realizing we ARE the Church.

Bethel was no longer interested in hearing from God. We are not much different in our time. Oh, yes, I know. Many people flock here and there to get a word from the Lord from some well-known prophet. But, so many of these people desiring a “*word from the Lord*” take only the good parts of what they hear and ignore the parts that require adjustment or repentance on their part.

Many are not interested in hearing the “whole” counsel of God. They only want to hear what they want to hear. Oh, the poor preacher who dares to preach on repentance! He is almost tarred and feathered. But, repentance was the message of John the Baptist as he prepared for the coming of the Messiah, and it is the message of the spirit of Elijah that has been released in this hour before the coming of our Lord again.

God is calling His people out of the Babylonian spirit of religion, religious activity, and compromise with the world. He is calling us into Zion, into true relationship and partnership with Him. We must not seek after Bethel. We must not seek a substitute. We must let go of religious tradition. We must seek relationship with our Father and begin to comprehend the heart of God.

Man’s Choice or God’s Choice

The next place that Amos warned God’s people not to seek is Gilgal. Gilgal means “circle of stones”, or “rolling”. It was named at the time that Joshua reinstated circumcision after Moses had died. It was named Gilgal because God said that the reproach of Israel had been rolled away. Once again, this city initially was a good place, a city established by God and fulfilling its prophetic destiny.

It was in Gilgal that Joshua followed the command of the Lord to circumcise the men who should have been circumcised under Moses, but Moses had failed to do as God commanded. Circumcision represents the destroying of the flesh. Before we can enter our promised land we will need to destroy the works of the flesh. It was a good place instituted by God as a sign of what obedience requires. We must deal with our carnal nature.

But over time something happened that perverted the prophetic purpose for that city and it didn’t take long. God had given Joshua specific orders that he was to destroy the neighboring nations. One of those nations, fearing annihilation, sent men disguised as people who had traveled a long distance. They tricked Joshua into believing they were from a far away country, and so he made a covenant with them.

Where was God in all of this? Why didn’t Joshua ask Him what they should do? Did Joshua just assume that they could make these decisions on their own? Why shouldn’t he make such assumptions, we do it all the time. We just decide what we are going to do in our assemblies. We decide what programs we will have, what meetings we will have, who will do what, all without asking God what He wants and it is suppose to be His house, His

people. We do this in our own personal lives as well.

Many leaders of ministries today think it is they who should decide what is best for their assembly. They choose who can be invited to the assembly to speak and who can't. And heaven forbid that anyone from outside the denomination or affiliation be invited to come and speak. They might preach false doctrine to our sheep. It is thought that only leaders are capable of being close enough to God to discern the truth. Many leaders feel that sheep are too gullible and will believe anything they hear, so they must protect the sheep from false teachings.

This creates a real dilemma since most leaders want the sheep to mature and yet they teach the sheep to be dependent upon leadership to feed them. For the most part, the sheep are not taught to feed themselves. They are not taught how to go to the Holy Spirit to get revelation for their own lives, so they are dependent upon the leaders to feed them and bring them revelation. They don't know how to seek God and find Him for themselves, because we have taught them to be our sheep instead of the Lord's. Therefore, we think we must be the ones to feed the sheep, no one else.

They are our sheep? Really, are they? When are we going to understand they are His sheep? He is the Good Shepherd and all His sheep should be able to hear and discern His voice. We have made the sheep to be dependent upon us. We are the voice they hear telling them what their Father is saying to them. We decide what they should eat spiritually, what ministers they should listen to or what books they should read.

Many years ago I belonged to an assembly. The pastor would come to the house occasionally. He would go straight to the bookshelf to see what I was reading. If there was something there he did not approve of, he would tell me to be safe I should only read books that were authored by men or women of the affiliation I was associated with at that time. He did not trust me to be able to discern false doctrine from what was from the Father's heart. This happens all the time.

Our assemblies are far from what God desires. They were never meant to be a one-man show, but a coming together of God's people to share and encourage each other. Perhaps we attend a place where the decision has been made to do away with bulletins which publish the songs and the order of the service for that day. But, we still have the same order Sunday after Sunday, and oh, the wars begin if the speaker goes one minute past noon. I have been a part of assemblies where members have warned the speaker they would walk out at exactly noon, even if the speaker was not done with his message.

Assembling together as a ritual, in order to pay what we think we owe to God, is worthless. It means nothing to God, and He hates it. We might as well stay home. Most of our services are so far away from what God really wants. For the most part, God's people don't have a clue what they are doing is nothing more than religious activity. We have substituted relationship and worship of our God for some traditional religious activity and it is a stench in the nostrils of our God.

Gilgal was a place where God's people compromised with the enemy. They were deceived. Many of God's people today are in Gilgal right now. They are deceived into thinking that they are doing much for God. They are proud of all their programs and all their activities, but if God never told them to

do these things, they are dead works. If God is not in the programs, they are wasted time and energy.

Gilgal was also on Samuel's prophetic circle. He traveled to this city to let them know what God was speaking to their nation and to their city. They had to know what God was requiring of them. And yet, there was no real sign of obedience. This is obvious as we see the people's choice for king. Saul was man's choice for king. He was chosen at Gilgal and he was later anointed there (I Kings 10, 11). Saul became king over Israel.

There was a time during the reign of Saul over Israel when the king and his son had just defeated the Philistines at Geba. The Philistines were very angry and were preparing to attack the Israelites. Saul summoned the entire army to meet at Gilgal. (I Samuel 13) Samuel had instructed Saul to wait in Gilgal for seven days until Samuel would arrive and offer a burnt offering unto the Lord. But, Samuel was late and so Saul decided to present the offering to the Lord himself defying the order that Samuel had given him.

Samuel arrived shortly after Saul's sacrifice was done. He was not happy Saul had taken matters into his own hands and offered the sacrifice. Saul had disobeyed the Lord. In I Samuel 15 we find that Saul once again disobeyed God. Afterwards he went to Carmel to set up a monument to himself to display to the world what a great leader he was.

Samuel finally caught up with Saul again in Gilgal and declared to him that the kingdom would be stripped from him and given to another. Gilgal represents man's choice, not God's choice. It represents man's ways and not the Lord's ways. It represents men trying to build their own kingdoms, instead of obeying the Lord and establishing the Kingdom of God.

How often in our assemblies do we look at the smartest, the best dressed, the most naturally talented people, to be the leaders. We choose what looks good to us, when the Spirit of God would choose quite differently if we would let Him. We must not seek Gilgal anymore. If we truly want to see God's glory and if we truly want to see His stones polished and fitting properly in the walls of His house, then we must hear His voice clearly and we must be obedient even when we don't understand everything.

We must be able to recognize who God desires to promote into positions of leadership. This leadership will understand and see what God is building, not what man is building. True godly leadership is interested in preparing a bride for the Lord, and advancing the Kingdom of God. They are not interested in building their own kingdom. We must want God's choice for leadership. These anointed ones will not compromise with the world.

Saul had been given clear instructions to go to Gilgal and wait for Samuel who would then offer a sacrifice to God. Samuel was late and the crowd was getting restless. Saul, out of fear of man, offered an illegal sacrifice. Fear of man will stop the anointing of God. We must bind that spirit and keep it from operating in the midst of God's people. All true leaders God is raising up in this hour will truly be tested in the fire until this spirit of pleasing men is removed from them. They must hear and obey the voice of God at all costs, no matter what any man would say to the contrary.

We must not seek Gilgal anymore. We must not seek the approval of man. We must not look through our own eyes to determine what is of God, but we must seek Him until we know His heart and then we must obey no matter what the cost.

The Truth has been Compromised

God, spoke to the nation, Israel, through the prophet Amos and told the people not to seek Bethel and Gilgal. There is one more place they were told not to seek. These places have symbolic meaning to us, the Church, as spiritual Israel. We should also avoid these places. The third place mentioned is Beersheba. The name Beersheba has the meaning of "*well of an oath*", "*the number 7*", or "*completeness*".

Beersheba is the place where God met Hagar and Ishmael after Sarah and Abraham had told them to leave their camp. Hagar had birthed a son by Abraham, but Ishmael was not the promised son, the one who would inherit the promises of Abraham. However, God did make a covenant with Ishmael at Beersheba. He promised to make Ishmael into a great nation, also. God's truth was spoken into their lives, and they believed that He would be true to His word.

This place was originally a place of blessing and hope. It was a place for a new beginning. It was a place of faith and a display of God's great love. Although Ismael was not chosen as the son through whom the Savior would come, he was a son of Abraham and God showed him and his mother favor, even though He knew in the end they would turn from this blessing and become the enemy of Abraham and his family.

Beersheba is also the place where Abraham made a covenant with Abimelech after lying to him about Sarah. Abraham and Sarah had been moving from place to place and came to live awhile in the land of Gerar. Abimelech was king over this land.

Since the king could demand any woman he wanted to be his wife or mistress, Abraham was afraid that he would look at Sarah and desire her because she was beautiful for her age. This might mean that Abimelech would have Abraham killed so Sarah would be free. Because of Abraham's fear, he told Abimelech that Sarah was his sister, which was only partly true. She was his half sister, but more importantly she was his wife.

Abraham lied out of fear of man. So, this place called Beersheba began as the place where God spoke truth and presented hope, but later became the place where man watered down the truth and presented a lie. Isaac did the very same thing at this exact place with Rebekkah only a few years later for the very same reason.

This, too, is a picture of God's people today. In some assemblies the truth is so watered down you can't even recognize it. In other places the so-called "*truth*" that is presented is nothing more than blatant lies. Abraham watered down the truth out of fear of man. This happens in our assemblies all the time. Pastors are afraid to preach the truth out of fear of losing their congregations, or in some cases, fear of losing their positions. Many today fear the government's intrusion into church business if they speak the truth.

Fewer people mean less money. This cannot always be attributed to the spirit of greed, although there is plenty of that type of assembly in existence today. Rather in many cases lack of funding threatens the very existence of some assemblies. If there is no money, there is no building. If there is no building, there is no assembly.

It is a threatening thing for a leader of a group of people to be in this

type of situation. Instead of listening to God and depending on Him, the leaders are enticed to compromise their message to keep the people. God declares He has had enough of this compromise. We must learn to trust Him fully and present the reality of Jesus, who declared to the world that He was the personification of truth.

If an assembly is truly established by Jesus and is dependent upon Him, He will see that it is not destroyed. He may require things to be done differently, or in a different place, but it will not be destroyed. God desires a place to inhabit His people and bring glory so the world can see Him through them. The building or the place is not the important thing. The building of the people into vessels of glory is. Presenting truth is the important thing, and it desires to be heard.

We must seek after truth. God said in His word that there would be a time that truth would spring up from the earth. Could it be that this is the day in which we are living? I believe God offers these things to every generation and then watches and waits for the generation who will latch on to the truth of His desires and make it happen. He is waiting for a generation who will see and know His heart. Are you a part of that generation?

Truth Has a Voice

I listen carefully to what God the LORD is saying, for he speaks peace to his faithful people. But let them not return to their foolish ways. Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, so our land will be filled with his glory. Unfailing love and truth have met together. Righteousness and peace have kissed! Truth springs up from the earth, and righteousness smiles down from heaven. Yes, the LORD pours down his blessings. Our land will yield its bountiful harvest. Righteousness goes as a herald before him, preparing the way for his steps. Psalm 85:8-13 (NLT)

The Kingdom of God is anywhere His people have recognized Him as King and have enthroned Him. In this place there is peace. Through the Kingdom in our hearts His glory can be displayed all across the land. Do you want to see His glory?

We sit and wait and pray for the display of His glory, but it is not so much about what God is about to do. It is more about what God's people are about to do in the earth because they love God and know His heart. The glory of God you so desire will be displayed through you, as you allow His Kingdom to be established in your heart and in your life. Not only does this bring His glory, but it brings His peace.

It is in this place in your heart where He reigns that mercy is found and truth is known. There is no truth apart from Jesus, and without being in His presence and getting to know Him, it is impossible to know what truth is. Jesus declared to us in His Word that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. What does that mean? It means that as we allow Him to reign in our lives, He provides the way for us to walk everyday understanding and living in truth.

If we follow Jesus on the path of life, then we will know truth for every situation we face, and we will have life. Not only will we have life, but we will have it in abundance. If you are not living the abundant life, then move closer

to the Lord and allow Him to reign in every area of your life.

The psalmist says that righteousness and peace kiss each other. They are that close. Righteousness is provided to us freely by our Lord when we accept His sacrifice on the cross for our sin. Having righteousness means we have the ability to not only know what is right in the sight of God, but we also have the ability to do what is right every second of every day!

Righteousness takes our eye off of what we think is right, and puts them on Jesus who is truth personified and always does what is right. He is the way of truth and leads us into what is right in every situation we face. We can know what the perfect will of God is for us by allowing Jesus to rule in our hearts through His peace.

Peace is provided as a guide to us. Did you ever wonder why there are times when you don't feel peace about a direction you are contemplating? Maybe it is because you are headed in the wrong direction according to the will of God for your life. Often times we base our concept of what is right or wrong on what we perceive as sin. But, sin is really nothing more than going a different direction than what our Lord desires for our lives. Some sin is obvious, other is not.

When you understand the right way to go in the eyes of God for your particular situation, you can always count on the peace of God being there and ruling in that situation no matter how dark and impossible it looks to your physical eyes. If there is no peace, then you have not found the way of righteousness for your situation. Draw closer to your Lord, and He will draw close to you and He will show you the way and bring peace to your heart! Peace will always guide your steps!

Now back to Amos, chapter five. Amos goes on to describe the lack of justice. Having an understanding of righteousness and justice is critical to being successful in the Kingdom of God. This book has already described how they relate. Justice comes as we apply righteous judgment to a situation and take action to right the injustice.

Judgment is not a dreadful thing. The ability to judge situations is a precious and awesome gift from our Father. God has given us the ability to judge situations that we face or others around us face and to understand His perfect will for that situation.

There is a good illustration found in the Old Testament. Solomon was faced with a situation concerning two women and one baby. Each woman claimed that the baby was hers. One of the women had a baby earlier, but that baby had died. The woman who had lost her baby was lying, but which woman was it?

How would Solomon know which one? He prayed for wisdom in order to judge the situation correctly so that he could do what was righteous or right in the sight of his God. As Solomon prayed, God revealed to him the perfect test to give to determine which woman was telling the truth.

In our lives we will face situations where we don't have the answer. We will face people who will easily lie to us, or attempt to deceive us. How will we know the truth? How will we know what to do or how to react? Unless God reveals the truth to us so that we understand the situation or judge the situation, we will not know how to apply righteousness to that situation.

This is all about advancing the Kingdom of God. When we judge a situation correctly and we apply God's remedy of rightness to it, we are

advancing His Kingdom in the earth. Not only is it our responsibility, but it is ultimately the greatest joy we will experience. Walking hand-in-hand with our Lord every moment of the day, doing His works with Him by our side is the ultimate high! We are His and He is ours. We are walking as one with the Father and the Son as Jesus prayed while He walked this earth.

Restoration of Judges

God is restoring judges in this hour that His people might understand righteousness and justice again. This is so extremely critical to understand because it is the principle to advance the Kingdom of God in the earth. The function of the apostle is much like that of the Old Testament judge. This is why apostles are so important to the body of Christ.

We must not fear the apostolic anointing. We must welcome it, if God is going to display His glory in the midst of His people again. Apostles will show and train God's people in how to walk in righteousness and effect justice where ever they go. God will have a people that will return to loving good and hating evil. This army of overcomers will understand righteousness and maintain justice so that the Kingdom of God can be advanced in the earth.

The rest of Amos chapter 5 is a discourse on the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is a day that is very dark. It is a day that is not to be desired. I believe God included this passage of scripture here to warn us that in order for us to make it through the coming days we must take seriously the things that He had just proclaimed.

God warns us what we need to do to prepare for the day of the Lord. We must seek Him if we are to live. He hates many of our religious feasts and He cannot stand many of our religious assemblies. He says our songs are nothing but noise to Him. How can this be?

If we have not put God first in our lives and in the assemblies where we meet together, then whatever we do is religious activity and is noise to Him. It is not pleasing to Him. Many times we spend the entire service talking about God, and singing songs about Him without even talking to Him or truly worshipping Him.

We must seek Him. We must turn away from our religious activities. They are only a substitute for the real thing. They are nothing more than dead works. True worship from holy hearts is a sweet smell to God. It is not about what we do, but about who we are. He desires us, not our religious activities. If He has our heart, our worship, then what is born of that is godly activity and pleases Him.

In Mark 7 the Pharisees asked Jesus why His disciples didn't follow their age-old tradition of the ceremonious washing of their hands. Jesus called them hypocrites. He told them the prophet Isaiah was right when he prophesied concerning them, the leaders of God's people. Isaiah had prophesied that there were leaders among God's people who worshiped God with their mouths, but not with their hearts. These leaders also crafted rules for the people to live by, and said that they were God's rules when they were only the traditions of men.

If we would only open our eyes, we would see how many of the rules in our assemblies are really traditions of men and not rules to live by set forth by our God. Until we stop worshiping with just our mouths, and start worshiping

with our hearts, we will not see that he who the Son has set free is free indeed! We will not hear the voice of the Lord say, *“Set My people free, so they can worship Me!”* Will we as leaders take the shackles of tradition away and set the people free?

We attend our services in our assemblies out of duty and traditional requirements and we call it worship. We leave our weekly meetings feeling that somehow we have earned a place in the good graces of our God. Like the church in Revelations, we do not see we are poor, wretched, and blind. If we would allow Him to rule in us, in our families, how quickly He would transform our families, our communities, our states, our organizations, and yes, even our country.

Let the prayer of our heart be heard, *“Lord, help us to see that our religious activities are nothing but wood, hay and stubble in Your sight. They are an abomination to You. You hate them. It is only works done out of love for You, Lord that truly please You. Let us seek Your face to understand what true worship really is. Let us understand that we have put other things before You. We have created idols from religion instead of truly worshiping You. Forgive us, Lord and set us on the right path to understand Your truth and Your way.”*

Complacency

The entire congregation must have been upset with Amos for all he had said, yet he continues by crying out **“Woe to you who are complacent in Zion”** (Chapter 6 verse 1 NIV). Zion is a picture of the Church, the dwelling place of God. So we could say woe to those in the family of God who are complacent. The word “woe” means great sorrow, grief, or trouble. Amos is saying that there is great trouble, sorrow and grief for those who are complacent in Zion or in the Church. He is not wishing this on the people. He is not cursing them. He is making a statement describing the direct result of the sin of complacency. It is what it is.

God speaks through Amos to His people concerning the dreadful day of the Lord and He warns them about how difficult it will be in that day. He warns us that we will not make it through the times ahead if we do not come to the place where we are completely dependent upon God. He wants us prepared for the days ahead. He knows what will happen if we procrastinate in our complacency.

The word *“complacent”* means to be at ease in a bad sense. It means to feel comfortable and content where we are; to believe we are secure and nothing evil can touch us. It means to be haughty, which is to have great pride in ourselves or show contempt for others. It means we are self satisfied and smug, thinking we have arrived.

I was a part of an assembly once where we knew by the Spirit of God that complacency, apathy, and lethargy had joined together to attempt to keep us from moving forward in Kingdom principles and life. As I prayed, the Lord showed me that you cannot effectively deal with these problems without dealing with the religious spirit. It is religion that allows these lethal three to operate in our midst. When you find it difficult to deal with the religious spirit in a particular place, it often means that spirit is entrenched in the leadership.

I want to emphasize here that I have a great love for the Church, for

God's people. I want nothing more than to see her prepared in holiness to meet her Bridegroom. Therefore, I must speak against anything that hinders the preparation of the bride for her great Lover. God has called some of His people to leadership whose purpose is to help prepare the bride for her Lord.

Often those placed into leadership positions are not God's choice and they end up abusing the sheep. They push and rail at the people for not witnessing enough, not praying for the sick enough, not bringing enough people into the assembly. They assume the people are not doing the works of the Kingdom enough, because they don't see the results of additional people in the assembly. The size of our assemblies is not the measurement of how well we are advancing the Kingdom of God. The assembly maybe in the Kingdom of God, but the Kingdom is MUCH bigger than the assembly.

Carnally-minded leadership then calls the people lazy and complacent and blames the congregation for why the assembly is not growing and expanding. Anywhere there is an emphasis on works instead of worship it is a good sign of a spirit of religion operating in that place. Works can never substitute for relationship. God is foremost interested in a relationship with us. It is out of a heart of love for God, that works are done which are pleasing to our Lord. We cannot grow and sustain an assembly based on works and programs. It will not last.

The Lord spoke clearly to me once and told me, "*It is not about WHAT you DO, but it is about WHO you ARE*". In Him we move and live and have our being. If we perform works in order to try to get acceptance from God, that effort is pure religion and means nothing to God. If we have relationship with our Lord and know His heart for people and it is our love for Him which drives us to lay hands on the sick, then our works are real. The spirit of religion drives us to work, relationship causes us to rest in the finished work of Christ and it brings peace to our heart. Out of our hearts flow the love of our Lord and it causes us to live a life that touches others from a heart of love.

I lift my eyes to you, O God, enthroned in heaven. We keep looking to the LORD our God for his mercy, just as servants keep their eyes on their master, as a slave girl watches her mistress for the slightest signal. Have mercy on us, LORD, have mercy, for we have had our fill of contempt. We have had more than our fill of the scoffing of the proud and the contempt of the arrogant. Psalm 123:1-4 (NLT)

The psalmist tells us what our attitude should be. We must look to the Lord for everything. Out of His hand good things come to us. We need His mercy. We must understand His heart of love for us. Anyone who is truly interested in serving God and trusting Him for everything will find those who will oppose them. Unfortunately, much of this opposition will be found in the assembly.

When you refuse to go the way everyone else is going, many will get offended. They will challenge your motives as a product of pride. They may insinuate that you think you are better than they are. This is often a mechanism to get you to compromise so you won't make the rest of them look bad by your success. Don't give in! Verify often with your Lord that you are hearing correctly. When your Master speaks you have no choice but to follow! Go and have no fear! He is with you.

The Bible tells us that many are called, but few are chosen. Why do you think that is? Because very few are willing to seek God first in everything. Few are willing to pay the price. Few are willing to walk the way He chooses and to receive from His hand only. Few are willing to ignore the crowd of naysayers. It is a lonely path you will choose, but He has already provided for everything. It is yours. You don't need to beg for it. You were made to overcome, the choice is yours.

Jesus died on the cross in order to provide justice for us. Injustice is when the will of God is not happening. For instance, if you can't pay your bills, that is injustice. Even when they came to Jesus and Peter and told them they owed taxes, Jesus provided for both of them. When Jesus died on the cross and rose again, He paid for injustice. He paid for all your diseases. He paid for your sin and your sorrow. He paid with His life so that you could have what you don't deserve. You don't have to work to obtain justice; it is a gift from your heavenly Father and your big Brother.

Jesus purchased us and freed us from the curse of the law. A curse is when we do good things and get nothing in return. Jesus died to set us free from the curse. But, we still don't get it. We think we don't deserve anything without working for it. We take pride in the works of our hands instead of depending on the works of our Lord who set us free from the demand of works. Many would rather have the praise of man than long for the *"well done, thou good and faithful servant"* from the mouth of their Lord.

The works that we are called to do are the ones born out of the heart of the Father for mankind. These works will always bring justice to an unjust situation and will not always bring us glory or popularity. We must do what we need to do because we are who we are.

Our hearts beat with the heart of the Father who desires to set all men free from the clutches of the enemy. Religion and complacency have no place in us. Our desire is that those spirits have no place in Zion, the dwelling place of our God, either.

More Shaking to Come

"On that day," says the LORD, "a cry of alarm will come from the Fish Gate and echo throughout the New Quarter of the city. And a great crash will sound from the hills. Wail in sorrow, all you who live in the market area, for all the merchants and traders will be destroyed. I will search with lanterns in Jerusalem's darkest corners to punish those who sit complacent in their sins. They think the LORD will do nothing to them, either good or bad. So their property will be plundered, their homes will be ransacked. They will build new homes but never live in them. They will plant vineyards but never drink wine from them. That terrible day of the LORD is near. Swiftly it comes—a day of bitter tears, a day when even strong men will cry out." Zephaniah 1:10-14 (NLT)

This whole passage of scripture is verbalizing the relationship between the economy and the complacency of sin in God's people. The fish gate was the place where the merchants brought fish and other items to sell. God often sends us warnings so that we will understand what is about to happen. We have seen stock market crashes in our time, but nothing like that which is

about to come upon the world.

It is awesome how God used His prophets to tell about events to come with pictures they can't totally understand. They talk about things in the future which were hard to describe because the prophets had never before seen what they saw by the spirit. At times the prophet used the same terminology to describe the events they saw, as we would use today. The prophet called this event a "crashing".

Today we see many large corporations in trouble. We see stocks having great value today, and tomorrow are worth very little. God's people see this and begin to fear for their future as much as the world does. We begin to pray to God for these things to stop. But, we don't see the plan of God or understand His ways, and often we end up praying against what God is doing.

We are not supposed to live by the standards of the world, but rather live by the standards of the Kingdom of God while living in the earth. We are in the world, but not of the world. We live by a completely different standard. We must choose which set of standards by which we will live. Will we be carnally-minded or godly-minded?

Before praying for or against something, we must determine what God is doing. We must be able to discern the times and seasons of God. We must be able to see His hand. God is shaking a lot of things in this hour. One reason is to fulfill His word which declares the wealth of the wicked will be shaken loose and placed in the hands of the remnant. The remnant will use this wealth to arise and do battle for the souls of men. If we cannot discern what He is doing in the shaking will He trust us to understand His will and His way with the wealth He wants to place in our hands?

What if God's people understood the economic condition of a nation is not based on the corruption of its leadership, but upon the complacency of God's people in that nation? Today many of God's people have lost their moral compass. What if God's people returned to God with a whole heart and became dissatisfied with the way things are?

What if God's people really believed that they could make a difference? What if God's people believed the wealth of the world is being taken from the hands of the wicked and placed in the hands of those who knew their God and were ready to do exploits in His mighty name? We must shake ourselves out of this blindness, this lethargy that makes us hide.

God said He would search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who were complacent. Jerusalem was the city of God, a place considered holy and sacred and where the Jews came on special occasions from all over Israel to worship God. It was David's city and a place designed for true worship.

God declared through the prophet Isaiah that in the holy place God would turn up the light. Where is the holy place of God's dwelling today? 1 Corinthians 3:16 (NIV) declares **"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?"** It is in your heart that the Lord is going to shine His light so that things hidden in darkness can be brought into the light and considered. The shaking begins in you.

Psalms chapter 29 is a beautiful chapter describing God in His holiness and glory. The sound of the Lord's voice is awesome, it is powerful, it is majestic. Verse 8 (NIV) declares **"The voice of the LORD shakes the desert; The LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh."** The word *Kadesh* means "holy".

When we are complacent and at ease and believe we have arrived, we are in a spiritual wilderness. It is in this desert place in us who God makes holy, where He begins to shake us so we might leave the land of complacency and move on into our promised land.

In the days ahead the light is going to be turned up in our places of worship, as well. Many things that have been hidden in the dark are going to come into the light. Those who are complacent and at ease, those who are satisfied with where they are will suddenly be shaken awake. It must be so, if the Kingdom of God is to be expanded in the earth. We must not focus our eyes on our little kingdom any longer rather gaze upon our majestic Lord whose voice must be heard in the earth.

Have you ever been in a deep sleep when the alarm sounded and you jumped at the loudness of it? Wasn't that a horrible feeling? That is the way it is with many of God's people. He comes seeking our hearts, our devotion, not for His sake, but for ours. He wants us to dwell in the secret place of His love and protection so He gently woos us. He knows that if we seek other things and are satisfied with what life has to offer apart from Him, it will lead to our destruction. If we continue to ignore that gentle calling, there comes a point where God must shake us to awaken us.

My children, whom I love very much, have sometimes done some pretty foolish things. They are all adults now and they would likely say the same thing about me. I am sure your children are no different. There are times when you warn them that if they continue in a certain direction, there will be consequences. You are sure they will listen and never do that thing of which they were warned. But, for some reason they ignore the warning. And sure enough, it happens, just exactly what you told them would happen. And you want to shake them and say, *"Hello, is anybody home in there? Why did you not listen to me?"*

That is the way it is with God. He is our loving Father. He does not want to see us go the wrong way and suffer consequences that we could have avoided. He warns us. He gives us advice through His word. He guides us through the still small voice inside of us every moment of every day. But many times we do not listen. We continue to go our own way.

He said He was going to shake us, and anything that could be shaken, would be shaken. There has been a lot of shaking in the Church lately, and I believe it is a wakeup call from God for His people to warn us of the shaking that is to come. But, we go right on living the same old way, doing the same old things, and we don't realize that soon there will be a rude awakening, like the obnoxious alarm clock.

A NOW Word from God

I had this word from the Lord for my assembly a few years ago. I want to share it with you here, because it really is a NOW word from the Lord and is what I believe the Lord desires to communicate to His people everywhere.

"Prepare for change, my people. Prepare for change, for before the glory falls, there will be much change", says the Lord. "There will be much shaking. And there will be shakings all over the world and there will be shakings in places and things that you thought were safe from being shaken.

The mountains will shake and many hills will fall, but many of My

people have said, 'Praise God, I am safe for I live in a safe place. I live in the middle of the valley and I am safe'. But, I am telling you that not even the middle is a safe place," says the Lord, "for I will cause the valleys to split open and be exposed. And many will hide in caves and the caves will burst open. And I will do this in places where no one thought it could ever happen. And there will be signs in the heavens and in the earth. And you will know that I am God, and My glory will not be hidden and it will not be trampled on and it will not be given to another, any more.

For suddenly those things that My people have held dear will be stripped from their hands and taken away because they have not been put into a safe place. Oh, yes, you thought they were in a safe place, but they were not. They have been precious to you and you have protected them, but they are not safe.

Many have moved from a place of tremors to another place to avoid the coming season of shaking, but they have not moved to the right place, for you cannot escape the shaking by that way."

For the Lord says, "I do this, because I love you, because I care about you, because the day that is upon you is a dark and horrible day. Who can endure it? But, My people have put their trust in Egypt instead of Me. There are things that My people have placed in high places, in places of honor and don't you know all the high places will be torn down and destroyed. You have placed things in places of greater honor than you have placed Me.

For don't you know that I am the only safe place there is. Don't you know I am your only security. I am your only stability. My mountain is the only place that will not be shaken and cannot be shaken. If you will dwell there, the day of shaking will not and cannot touch you. Don't you know I would have you safe. Don't you hear me calling you? Come!"

As the Lord spoke this word to me, immediately I saw in my spirit a vision of a young boy in bed. His mother had called him several times to get up and he had responded with a groan, but then rolled over and went back to sleep. Finally she went in and shook him to get him fully awake so he would get out of bed.

I then saw another bed with a man in it. He too, had received the same wakeup calls, but had rolled over and dozed off again. However, when he was shaken, it was obvious that he had a hangover from a drunken stupor and no amount of shaking was going to make him get out of bed or enable him to function in his daily activities.

There have been many wakeup calls given to God's people, the Church over the last several years, and many have heard and responded, but there are many, many more who have rolled over and gone back to sleep. The shaking that is coming to the Church is the last effort to get the Church to wake up and get ready for the harvest and the day of the Lord and for the glorious wedding feast.

When the New York twin towers were destroyed by terrorists on September 11, 2001, among other things, it was a wakeup call to the Church. Suddenly we saw how one event that was unprepared for and unexpected could make such a drastic change in our lives. We saw how one event could so drastically affect the economy, not only of our own country, but the world.

Before this event we felt secure. We never thought anything like this could happen to us. Where were God's people in all of this? Could it be that

we are walking around in our own little world oblivious to what is going on around us?

Drunk, Really?

As I was contemplating the vision of the man in a drunken stupor ignoring the wakeup call, my natural mind thought the man represented the people of the world, who were oblivious to what was going on around them. Then the Lord reminded me of I Thessalonians, chapter 5, where Paul declares that it is God's children who are children of the day and should not be like the children of the night who sleep in the day and get drunk at night.

Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. I Thessalonians 5:1-8 (NIV)

God says, through Paul, those who get drunk have no self-control. If you have ever been drunk or have been around people who are drunk, you know this to be true. A drunkard's vision is distorted and his perception of what is going on around him is perverted. If God has to warn us not to be like this, then there is a possibility that we can be seen in this condition. Paul is likening a physical condition to a spiritual condition.

There are some people in the Church who lie sleeping in a spiritual drunken stupor, oblivious to what is going on around them. Even when the shaking comes into their lives, they will not understand what is happening or why. Many will even curse God for doing this to them. They have failed to draw close to Him and understand His great love for them. The shaking is a call to wake up and return to His presence so we can understand what He is doing and be safe and secure in His love.

As soon as I understood the meaning of this vision, God gave me another vision. I saw a tree in a beautiful garden. As I watched, I saw a master gardener come and begin to prune the tree. He kept cutting and cutting and cutting and I wanted to cry out for him to stop. It looked like there would be nothing left of the tree if he continued.

Then suddenly the vision changed and I saw an old tree in a very different garden. Everything looked dead in this garden. This tree was very old and looked like it had never been trimmed. It had old dead leaves hanging from it. In my spirit I began to feel pity and sorrow for this old tree.

As I watched, the vision changed and I saw the two trees side by side. The wind began to blow with such fierceness that I thought the trees would

never survive. They would be destroyed. Much to my surprise, the tree that had been pruned hardly felt the wind at all. It didn't even bend. But the other tree swayed first one way, then another, and eventually the wind was so strong that the tree snapped in two.

The Lord is the gardener and He is working in His garden right now. Winter is a time of deadness and hibernation, sleeping and being unaware of one's surroundings. Many of God's people, who are hearing the call, are awaking out of winter. They are submitting to the hands of the Master, allowing him to prune them and prepare them for the season of harvest.

There will be a cutting away of much of the old season, and some of that will be very painful. It will seem that there is not much left when He is done, but it is needed in order to produce a great and mighty harvest in each tree that submits to the pruning. Those who will not submit to the pruning will end up being tossed by the winds on every side and will eventually break under the weight of it all.

Again, as I first saw this vision, I thought the first tree represented the Christian and the second tree represented the world. But that was not the case. They were both God's trees and spoke to me of God's shaking of His people. The shaking of God's people must happen before He shakes the earth.

We must awake and let God have His way with us to prepare us for what is ahead. Romans chapter 8 indicates that there is a time coming when God will reveal who His true children are. How will this be done? It will be accomplished through His glory being displayed in us to the world. They will see it!

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. Romans 8:18-19 (NIV)

God will have pure vessels that can be filled with His glory. He will have those who will walk in righteousness and implore God's justice to prevail. But, we each must choose if we will allow the pruning to take place. I was saddened and wanted to weep when I knew many would not heed the shaking. It seemed such an easy choice to make. Yet I knew many would not choose to wake up from their slumber. Many would not choose to allow God to prune them and prepare them for the days ahead. The thought of this was almost more than I could bear. I wanted to cry out for all to hear, that the day is soon approaching, even sooner than we can imagine.

God longs for a people that will know His ways and not just desire to see His acts. He wants a people ready to receive from His heart, not just from His hands. We are a people who want to see a demonstration of power and glory and that is good, but we need to understand God's ways like never before if we want to see these things. We fail to understand that His display is not from the outside, but from the inside. His power and His glory are so awesome that they cannot be touched or mishandled.

If we do not understand His ways we will not be able to stand His acts. This is why we have seen so little of His power displayed. We cry out to see His glory displayed through His leaders and we flock to huge meetings to find it. But, God would rather that you cry out for you, yourself, to be a vessel to

display His glory, His light to the world. We will see Him to the extent that we yield to Him and allow Him to awaken us and prune us. He plans to display His great glory through us!

The Sounding of an Alarm

Verse 5 of the first chapter of Joel (NIV) says, **"Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine; wail because of the new wine, for it has been snatched from your lips."** God wants His people to wake up so they won't miss out on what He is doing in this hour. If we don't wake up, we will miss out on His glory and the NEW WINE. If we are too interested in drinking the wine of the world, and reveling in all the glitter that the world offers, we will miss out on the better wine. If we serve self instead of God, we are drinking the wine of the world and will not receive the best wine which comes from our God and is specially prepared for us.

God is doing a new thing in the earth. If we do not understand that, we will miss out on some awesome things in this hour. We must prepare our lives to receive the best, because the new wine will not be put into old wineskins. God does not withhold from us because He is mean, but He knows that if we are not prepared to handle the good wine. If He gave it to us in our carnal condition, it would destroy us.

Priests are those who minister to God and for God. Revelations 1:6 tells us that Jesus has created us to be priests and kings. We can all stand in these positions. This chapter in Joel talks about the priests mourning because of the condition of the house of God. Why? Because the day of the Lord is near. It will come like destruction. We may feel safe and therefore not be concerned about ourselves, but as priests we should care about the multitudes of others who are on the verge of destruction. Are we sounding the alarm? Do we care?

Many sheep are mourning because there is no pasture. They are hungry but what their leaders are feeding them is not satisfying. Have you ever run through all the different foods that you like trying to find the one food that will satisfy those sudden hunger pangs? It is like that in the spirit right now. There are many people feeling the stirring in their hearts by the Holy Spirit to look for pasture, but they don't know where to go or what to do. They do not know what will satisfy the hunger in their soul.

Jesus said in His famous sermon on the mount, documented in Matthew chapter 5, that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled. Those who are hungry for more will be filled when they understand the concept of righteousness and justice in the Kingdom of God. When the glory of God is upon us, and the Spirit of God in us is communicating with our spirit, then we understand what is right in every situation. Then we can rightly apply the justice of God and set people free every day of our lives and that is what satisfies and makes us feel alive. That is advancing the Kingdom of God in the earth at its best.

Chapter 2 of Joel calls for the blowing of the trumpet in Zion. The sounding of the alarm means the situation has become serious. The day is upon us. The day of the Lord is coming. There must be a sounding of the alarm in the Church today across the entire earth. It is a terrible day, a day of darkness and gloom.

Because of what is about to come on the earth, God begins to call His people to come back to Him with all their hearts. Verse 17 in Joel chapter one, says that the priests, who minister before the Lord, should weep between the temple porch and the altar. In other words, let those who can see what is about to come, let those who live in that place of fellowship with the Lord and know His heart, begin to pray and stand between God and the people and cry out to God on their behalf.

Many of us have been taught that the day of the Lord comes after we have all been taken from the earth, so we don't have to be concerned. In a day of judgment, God called Noah and his family into the ark. God is sounding an alarm and calling us into a safe place from the judgment coming on the earth. That safe place is with Him on the mountain, where no one can touch us, where He is our front guard and our rear guard. For as long as we are here on earth, He gives us His mountain as a place of safety.

There is a place of complete safety and protection in the shadow of His wings, but we must be able to hear His voice and heed His call. We must be able to discern events by the Spirit and not our own thoughts. We must understand what the righteous will of God is in every situation and then apply the correct judgment or action to the situation according to what we discern from the Father's heart.

God's Heart of Restoration

God desires for His people to understand that He is in the restoration business. Those who have become mature overcomers will have a heart for what God desires to do for His people. God is both a loving God and a righteous God. There is a point at which His judgments must come, but He always sends plenty of warning. God is looking for a prophetic people who will see the time of judgment approaching and call out for God's mercy on behalf of the people who are about to experience God's judgment.

Again, we must be careful how we look at judgment. Righteousness comes from God. God is always right. Every situation, event, or activity is measured against what is right in the heart of God. Judgment is what God would do to bring those situations into alignment with the perfect, righteous way of God. Sometimes it is just a minor adjustment. Other times it is repentance and a complete about face that is required. God would rather that we would listen to His heart and make adjustments knowing what is right in His sight, than for us to do nothing and suffer the consequences of our rebellion to His will.

In chapter 7 of Amos, God calls for judgment. After God had given His people instructions through His prophet Amos, and warned them to seek Him and live, God showed Amos what He was going to do against Israel. Amos cried out, "*O Sovereign Lord, forgive!*" And God relented. Again God showed Amos what He was going to do and Amos cried out, "*O Sovereign Lord, I beg you stop*". And the Lord relented.

God didn't change His mind. God looks for men and women who understand His heart and will stand in the gap between justice and humanity's sins. Ezekiel 22:30 (NIV) indicates God is always looking for someone. **"I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy**

it, but I found no one.” God still looks for people who will understand their role as kings and priests ruling with Him from His throne on high.

God goes on to show Amos that His people will be measured and they will not be spared any longer. It was a warning that judgment can only be stayed for a short time. There are only so many opportunities granted for people to turn from their wicked ways. We must awake from our complacency. We have a Kingdom to advance. We need the kings and priests to take their places of authority in the Kingdom.

The LORD was pleased for His righteousness’ sake To make the law great and glorious. But this is a people plundered and despoiled; All of them are trapped in caves, Or are hidden away in prisons; They have become a prey with none to deliver *them*, And a spoil, with none to say, “Give *them* back!” Who among you will give ear to this? Who will give heed and listen hereafter? Isaiah 42:21-23 (NASB)

God is referring to His people in these verses. They are robbed and devastated. They are snared, caught in traps, and most of them don't even know it. Traps have been set to capture God's people and make them prey for the enemy. God says in these verses that there is no one out there to set His people free from these traps. That is really sad! The enemy is robbing and stealing from God's people and they don't even realize it.

The enemy is so brazen that He does this even in our assemblies and places of worship. He tells God's people that the season of miracles is past. He tells them there is no healing available today for God's people. Again, the sad truth is it is hard to find those who know and understand God's heart. There are few that understand wherever we find injustice; we can make it right according to the heart of God. Where are those who will call for restoration in behalf of these ones whom the enemy is deceiving?

Many times when God has moved to bring truth back into the Church the people who heard from Him and instigated the return to truth were persecuted by the rest of the Church. Many times this new group isolated themselves from the rest of the Body of Christ, becoming a new movement and believing that they were the ones with the most truth. Many were not interested in sharing this with their brothers and sisters in other assembly settings.

These isolationists were not interested in crying out for others to embrace truth that they might march on together. *“No”, they think, “they didn’t treat me right, so why should I give them something that will make them better? Besides, their place might begin to grow, and we could lose our people.”* And so they are busy building their own little kingdoms instead of understanding the heart of their Lord to build His house.

This has been the attitude of the Church for centuries and it has come up before God as a stench in His nostrils. He is asking those who love Him and seek after Him to understand His heart for restoration and to call out to Him in behalf of our brothers and sisters, no matter where they may be. We must not separate ourselves from each other anymore.

We do not need to give up our individual meeting places, but we dare not separate ourselves from others. Our relationship with each other must be out of our love for our Savior, not out of our doctrine or which assembly we

attend.

Those in independent “spirit-filled” circles have sometimes been the worst. We have been so proud of all the Lord is doing in our midst, that many times we have thumbed our noses at those in denominational settings. But, we are all a part of the body of Christ, and we need each other. I grew up in a Baptist church and I praise God every day for those who instilled in me a deep knowledge and love for the Word of God. We can learn from each other. We must see His heart and call for truth to come to His body in this hour.

There are many assemblies that have set up a secondary headquarters, like the Northern kingdom of Israel did with Bethel. But, for the true Church of the living God, our headquarters is in heaven and our commander-in-chief is the Lord of Hosts. God doesn't have a hundred armies He has one.

When the sheep hear His voice and begin to seek Him with a whole heart, then the sheep will begin to march in step regardless of what assembly name they carry. Then the devil will be in big trouble. The enemy of the Church does not want this to happen so he does his best to keep us separated from each other.

Do you hear the call of the Lord for restoration, for unity? Who will listen? Who will pay attention to what the Lord is saying? Those who seek God's heart and His way are hearing the sounding of the alarm by the spirit. This remnant is beginning to understand that they are overcomers in this world! They are beginning to see the will of the Father through His eyes. They are beginning to understand how to apply what is just and right according to the heart of their Father to the situations they face every day. They cry out for truth and restoration wherever they go. Soldiers, march on!

CHAPTER 6 - OVERCOMERS IN THE FURNACE OF AFFLICTION

For my own name's sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to destroy you completely. See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.
Isaiah 48:9-11 (NIV)

We want God's glory to be displayed, but we often don't realize that He displays His glory in and through us. Are we willing to allow God to do what He needs to do for that to happen? The fire of God brings the glory. There is no glory without the fire. In this passage of scripture in Isaiah, God is talking to the Israelites in Isaiah's day. They had done all kinds of detestable things in God's sight, but He told them that He would delay His wrath for the sake of the reputation of His own name.

God wants His glory to be displayed in vessels that will bring glory to His name. But, His glory will not be shared with those who are trying to bring recognition and glory to their own name. Vessels are tested in the furnace of affliction. The refining process takes place in the furnace. Egypt became a furnace of testing for the Israelites. God brought the Israelites out of the iron-smelting furnace according to Deuteronomy 4:20. When were they in the furnace? While the Israelites were in Egypt undergoing tests, trials, and afflictions, they were in the furnace. Things got pretty hot for them.

Joseph was Tried

Joseph experienced the furnace of affliction when his brothers sold him into slavery. He had everything going for him in Canaan. He was from a well-known family. His father loved him very much. Then overnight everything changed for this family and particularly for Joseph. God had impressive plans for Joseph, but first He had to test the things that were in Joseph's heart. Proverbs 17:3 (NIV) pronounces **"The crucible for silver, and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the heart."** Solomon tells us in this proverb when the Lord tests our hearts it is like silver and gold going through the fire. It is through the fire we are refined and made pure. It is through the fire the true treasure within us is discovered.

In Psalms 105 we find what God has to say about Joseph. This chapter is a declaration of the wonderful works of God, which He makes known to His people. Verse 17 says God sent Joseph into Egypt as a slave. It doesn't indicate that it was Joseph's brothers who sold him into slavery, which they did. It says God did it. The important thing in all of this is God had a plan and He was orchestrating events to serve His purposes. God had called for a famine to be in the land and He needed someone there who would hear his voice and obey Him.

This passage continues on to say that Joseph was in chains until the word of the Lord had tested and tried him. This is one example of God's wonderful works. God will accomplish a wonderful work in us if we are willing to be tested and tried in the fire of affliction, so our motives and actions can be purified.

Remember trials that come our way are tests of strength. How strong are you in the Lord? Trials are meant to encourage us to build spiritual muscles, not for us to be defeated. If we want to become strong in the principles of Kingdom living and walk effectively in the earth as an overcomer, we have to face our trials and not run away from them.

Nothing that comes our way is a surprise to God. He knows what is good for us and He is right there with us. Just like He was in the furnace with the three Israelites thrown into the furnace in Daniel's day, He is with us when we go through fire in our lives today.

God tested the heart of Joseph and found it to be true. Joseph had developed a heart for God and God's ways. When Joseph was finally released from prison God worked events so that later he could be reunited with his brothers and be able to forgive them and love them. He understood the purposes of God in his life. Bitterness and anger could have raged within Joseph for what his brothers had done, but Joseph understood the greater purpose. God was molding him into an effective overcomer and was preparing Joseph to be able to save God's people during the famine to come.

We all experience trials in our lives. There is not one of us exempt from this process. But, many times God's people do not understand the process because they have not spent time in God's word. They have not come to the place where they understand His great love for them and trust Him. Because of this, people often allow circumstances to make them bitter, instead of better. They blame God, instead of allowing Him to give them understanding of the trial in the overall purposes of God for their life. Trials should drive us to God, not away from Him.

Abraham was Tested

Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 17 says that when Abraham offered up Isaac as a sacrifice, it was a test of character and righteous judgment. **"It was by faith that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice when God was testing him."** (NLT) Abraham's faith in God was tested. Laid before him was a path to follow God with a whole heart or not. Would he be obedient? Our faith in God will continually be put to the test. It is our faith in our Father's love and greatness that causes miracles to happen in our lives. It is what makes the impossible, possible.

We are not even to be surprised when these tests and trials come into our lives. Scripture in I Peter, chapter 4, verse 12 indicates these are not strange events in our lives. We are to expect them. **"Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you."** (NLT)

We are to rejoice when trials come, for as our faith is tested and we are found faithful it will result in bringing praise and glory and honor to God. Trials should also build our strength in our faith in our Lord to be there for us regardless of the situation. Jesus will be revealed and the Spirit of God will rest upon us. There is always a test between the promise and the fulfillment of that promise.

And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards

those who sincerely seek him. Hebrews 11:6 (NLT)

Faith is such an important key to being effective as an overcomer that the devil will try to steal and destroy your faith every day. In fact, the Bible tells us without faith it is impossible to please God. God wants a strong people with strong faith in Him. He wants a people who understand that He is a God who rewards faith. These are the people who will do exploits in His name. Faith is to know who your God is and who He is in you.

James also emphasizes in chapter 1 of his book, not only are we to expect trials and tests, we are to receive them with joy. How can we do that? We can't without faith in God. It is our faith being tested when trials come our way. Instead of grumbling because of another trial, we should be shouting *"Hallelujah! Here's another opportunity for our God to show Himself strong in behalf of His people"*.

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. James 1:2-4 (NLT)

We want to escape from our problems. We want everything to be roses all the time. We moan and groan and say, *"Why me?"* when things happen. We have been taught all negative things that happen to us are from the devil. This just isn't so.

God does not sin, but He does allow certain events into our lives for our benefit and our growth. And He allows the devil to go only so far with us, because God wants us to learn to use the weapons He has given us. We have been provided with everything we need to overcome the enemy.

Faith and trials are mentioned hand-in-hand in James. We are not to be double-minded and waver in our faith. In the past few decades God has emphasized and drawn our attention through His leaders to the importance of faith, but many who talk it do not walk it. God wants a people that have such a relationship with Him, that they know He will never fail them. He wants a people whose faith is built on relationship not on empty words they have said in repetition.

Many people have faith in faith, but the words they speak come from the head and not the heart. Only a true and intimate relationship with God will produce true faith. We must be doers, as well as hearers. Much of what we have learned has become a religious exercise in futility. Faith in God only increases as we spend time with Him and know His great love for us, and His heart for all of mankind.

We are to persevere in the midst of trials, knowing that the trial will not last forever. And when we have come through the furnace of affliction, we will know we have been tested and approved by God. Our faith will grow stronger and we will be ready to take on bigger and better things in the Kingdom of God.

The greater the call of God on your life, the greater the training will be. The greater the anointing is to be placed on our lives, the greater the need to understand servitude and humility according to God's terms. We must learn to

persevere. We must get intimately acquainted with our God, and not just give Him lip service. He is awesome and there is nothing too hard for Him and He lives in you and me!

Glory on the Mountain

To the Israelites standing below the Mountain of God looked like a devouring fire. It was terrifying! The presence of God was manifested on the mountain. God is a consuming fire. The fire represents His glory. God declares that He will shine forth from Zion. His glory will be seen by the whole earth. This is prophetic of the last day Church. God will shine forth in glory from His Church, His people who have humbled themselves to become vessels fit to hold and display His glory. The face of Moses was ablaze with the glory of God when he came down from the mountain after meeting with God.

The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: “Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?” Those who walk righteously and speak what is right, who reject gain from extortion and keep their hands from accepting bribes, who stop their ears against plots of murder and shut their eyes against contemplating evil—they are the ones who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress. Their bread will be supplied, and water will not fail them. Isaiah 33:14-16 (NIV)

When God begins to show forth His glory in the Church, it will terrify and frighten those who are living in sin. He is not talking about the heathen here. He is talking about sinners in Zion, sinners in the Church, those who profess to be Christians, but refuse to give up their sin. He is talking about those who operate out of their carnal nature and not their spiritual nature. Our assemblies are filled with these people.

Those living their lives for Jesus want to live in the anointing that the early Church had. In some places it is happening today but is not as common place as it should be. I believe there is a remnant being prepared to lead God’s people where no man has gone before. We will do the greater works, as Jesus declared before he returned to heaven. We will. We will walk in even greater glory than the first Church did, not because we are better than they, but because our Master has saved the best wine for last. He is showing us the way.

God hates a mixture. He would rather we be hot or cold, but not lukewarm. If a person can pretend to serve God and live continually in sin, then that person is lukewarm. Don’t misunderstand. We all sin and come short of the glory of God, but Jesus and Paul both commanded us to forsake the sin and move on in God. The choice is ours. Sins forgiven and forsaken are sins forgotten. Stop reminding God of them. They are gone. They do not exist anymore!

But are we ready? Are we ready to walk in the same anointing that was

in the assembly in Peter's day, when Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit and fell dead at the feet of the apostles? Are we ready to invite the judgments of God to come into the assembly? There was great fear in the assembly that day and there will be fear in the house of God once again. For where the glory is, there is the fire of God. And the fire of God will destroy that which is not of Him. It will set on fire all that is wood, hay and stubble and burn it into non-existence. It will set on fire that which is gold, silver and precious stone, so that it may come through in Holy Ghost purity.

Those who truly love the Lord have no need of fear. They understand judgment is for their good. It is those who say they want to be a part of God's family but refuse to give up sin that will be dealt with severely by the fire. They continually operate from a carnal mindset, the old nature, rather than putting on the new nature and having a Kingdom mindset. God is separating the pure from the impure.

God is a Consuming Fire

Yes, our God is a consuming fire. It is a part of His nature. Fire goes before Him wherever He goes. This fire consumes everything in its path which can be consumed. In fact, Joel declares this army of God which is coming forth in this hour is like the crackling of a flame of fire consuming the stubble. Fire devours those things which can be devoured and refines those things which can be refined.

In the Old Testament, whenever the Israelites were allowed to bring back items from cities they had captured, the items had to be purified before they could be used. Whatever could withstand the fire, had to go through the fire to be purified for use. If an item could not withstand the fire, it had to go through the water to be purified. Before God will use us in any great measure, we, too, must submit to the purifying process of the fire.

“Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me; all of them are bronze and tin and iron and lead in the furnace; they are the dross of silver. Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Because all of you have become dross, therefore, behold, I am going to gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into the furnace to blow fire on it in order to melt *it*, so I will gather *you* in My anger and in My wrath and I will lay you *there* and melt you. I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you will be melted in the midst of it. As silver is melted in the furnace, so you will be melted in the midst of it; and you will know that I, the LORD, have poured out My wrath on you.’” Ezekiel 22:18-22 (NASB)

The wrath of God is compared to a furnace in which the dross or waste material is burned. It is an awesome and serious thing to approach a holy and righteous God. In the Old Testament book of Leviticus, chapter 10, the story is told of Aaron's sons offering the wrong kind of fire to the Lord. As a consequence of that act, fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them. The fire of God will consume that which is flesh and preserve that which is spirit.

We all must face God at some time or other. How many will face this consuming fire, having never known His love, but now face His wrath? What an awesome privilege and responsibility we have as His children to take the gospel to those who are lost. The thought of people facing our God without having known Him must first drive us to our knees and then to the streets. The zeal of God must consume us, until we become His servants of fire, taking his message of reconciliation to the world. We must have more of Him!

In our hearts we cry for God to come closer to us, but we do not realize what we are asking. He can get no closer. He is already in us. What we really need is for His Spirit to commune with our spirit so we can get our soul and our flesh under control. We are really asking for a consuming fire to come to us. It means we must be willing to let God burn up the things in us that have no value, and to refine those things in us that do have value. If we are to be effective overcomers, we must be willing to submit to the fire.

A Humbling Experience

Coming into the presence of the fire, is a humbling experience. Isaiah came in contact with the fire as recorded in chapter 1 of his book. He saw the Lord and realized how unworthy he was to be standing there. When we come in contact with the fire, we will realize we are nothing compared with Him. Humility is a part of coming through the fire. The Holy Spirit reveals our inadequacies so we will realize our need of God's grace and mercy. We are only something because of Him.

According to James 4:6, God resists those who have pride in themselves, but He gives grace to those who realize their need of God. Joseph was proud as the favorite son of Jacob. Joseph was raised in a wealthy family in Israel. But, his brothers in their jealousy sold him into slavery. He was taken into Egypt and eventually ended up working for a very important man. The wife of this man accused Joseph of trying to rape her. This angered the man so much that he had Joseph arrested. Joseph was humbled by being sold into slavery and then later he was humbled by being thrown into prison for something he didn't do.

Another example of pride changed to humility is found in the life of Moses. Moses was an Israelite who had the privilege of being raised by Pharaoh's daughter. He was educated in the best schools and was elevated to a high standing in Egypt. But, when he killed an Egyptian and his own people turned on him, he had to flee for his life. Humbleness came to him by 40 years in the desert raising sheep.

Both Moses and Joseph were called as deliverers to God's people. They probably understood that calling, but they had lessons to learn before God could trust them with the huge responsibility of being the leader of God's people. God tested both men and through these tests pride was destroyed and humility was developed. Only then were God's choices for leadership put into great places of authority.

The Bible tells us that if we would humble ourselves, in due season God would elevate us to positions of authority. Everything depends on us being obedient and on God's timing. We must humble ourselves. We must do it; God will not make the choice for us. He will put us in situations where we are faced with decisions, but it is still our choice.

There is a due season, or a time in God's plan, for each one of our lives. Things don't just happen by accident. We must learn to humble ourselves, if we want to walk in God's authority. We often tend to think we are special when we hear from God and we see what His plan is for us. We then begin to try to make it happen in our own strength.

Between the time God reveals a thing, and the time of its fulfillment is a desert where tests come to change our mindset. This time is preparation time. We cannot enter into our promised land with a spirit of pride or it will be our undoing. When we humble ourselves before Almighty God, at the exact right time God will stand us to our feet and lead us into the thing He has promised us.

If you feel like the glory has departed in your life, humble yourself and pray that the consuming fire would come back into your life. Submit to the working of the fire and God will restore you. We must seek His glory. In John 7:18 (NIV) Jesus said, **"Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him."** Are we seeking for Him and His approval or are we saying and doing what will please those around us?

We are children of the King, the One who created the universe. As we begin to walk in more of the understanding of who we are in Christ and the position of authority that we are supposed to walk in, we can be tempted to walk in pride. But, we must remember that we are made in His image, and His image is love. He desires to reproduce children in His image.

Daniel's Friends Faced the Fire

Jeremiah the prophet had foretold that Israel was going to go into captivity in Babylon for 70 years because they had not followed God's laws in the Promised Land He had given to them. Daniel was a young lad when this happened. In this foreign land Daniel and his friends were faced with many decisions and trials. Would they serve God or give up under pressure? They determined they would not bow their knee to anyone or anything other than the one true God, even if it meant being thrown into the furnace of affliction. Daniel faced the lion's den; his friends faced the furnace. What is it you are facing?

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego declared that God would deliver them from the fiery furnace. They trusted Him, but they told the king of Babylon regardless of what would happen they would not bow their knee to worship idols or men. God was the only one that deserved their worship. This made the king very angry and he gave the command to throw them into the furnace.

The furnace was so hot that the men who were responsible for placing these three young men in the fire, died at the entrance to the furnace. Even as the king saw his own men lying dead in front of the furnace, he saw not only the three young men walking around inside the furnace, but there was a fourth man. It was Jesus. When we are thrown into the furnace of affliction, Jesus is right there with us and He will bring us through.

Psalms 66:10-12 (NIV) says **"For you, God, tested us; you refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs."**

You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance.” If you want to walk in that place of abundance, you must go through the fire and the water. You must submit to the purifying process. It is the only way to become a vessel fit to contain the Master’s glory.

If you are going through some trial right now, have faith. God will bring you through into a place of abundance, if you do not faint and give up. God is on your side. There is nothing that you cannot overcome. You will come through like the three Hebrew children, without even the smell of smoke on your clothes. Don’t give up! Don’t quit! God loves you so much and He is for you, not against you! He wants to promote you!

When these young men came out of the furnace, they were placed into great positions of authority. They had been humbled and were ready for promotion. You, too, will be changed when you come out of the furnace and you will be ready for God to promote you. The fire of God in your life will bring promotion if you will allow Him to purify you. He will purify your motives and desires, so you can be promoted to advance His Kingdom in the earth.

If we are to be a spokesperson for our Lord, God has to apply the fire to our tongues. The book of James in the Bible has a lot to say about the tongue and how dangerous it can be. The tongue is a very small part of the body, but an important part. Even though it is small, it is very hard to control. Isaiah was to be a prophet for his God, but first he must be changed. In Isaiah chapter 6 we find an angel of God sent to Isaiah to touch his tongue so he could give a pure word from God to the people.

When Isaiah saw his Lord, he cried out with understanding that he was a man with unclean lips. God had to deal with this uncleanness. Scripture tells us that it is out of the heart that the mouth speaks. God had to deal with some of Isaiah’s heart issues in order to purify the tongue. God wants us to be able to speak a pure word from Him, also. We often speak both blessing and cursing out of our mouths and yet, expect God to bless us.

God wants to reach a multitude of people and advance His Kingdom, but in order to accomplish this He needs to be able to control our tongue. In order to be able to control the tongue, God has to deal with heart issues in us. Before Isaiah could be a mouthpiece for the Lord, he had to have his mouth touched with a coal from the fire.

David understood the nature of the tongue. In Psalm 39:1-3 (NIV) he said **“I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth while in the presence of the wicked.” So I remained utterly silent, not even saying anything good. But my anguish increased; my heart grew hot within me. While I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue”.**

What David thought about in his heart would end up stirring up fire inside of him. Then out of that fire, he would speak. That which is in your heart will eventually come out of your mouth. The psalms are filled with David emphasizing the need to fill our heart with the precious Word of God. As he meditated, his tongue became the tool to speak forth the Word of God which was in his heart.

God wants to put His pure word on your tongue by first placing His Word in your heart. His word is sharp like a sword and it can divide that which is born out of the realm of the soul or mind from that which is born of the spirit.

We must be able to give a clear, pure word to people. We need our tongues to be purified so others see a difference in us. A tongue that speaks from the righteousness of the heart will have the ability to set people free.

We are to have control of our tongue at all times with the help of the Holy Spirit. A wise person can bring healing to a person's heart with his words, but reckless words can cut a heart like a knife. How many people have turned from God because of our reckless words? How many of God's people have we hurt with careless words? How many people are not fulfilling the call of God on their lives, because we have hindered them and discouraged them with our words?

There is great power in our words. In fact, Solomon said that both the power of life and the power of death are controlled by the use of the tongue. Proverbs 18:21 (NIV) declares **"The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit."**

God brought forth life with creative power by the word of His mouth. He commanded and whatever He spoke came into being. Words have power to create, either good or bad. No wonder Solomon cautioned us that few words are better than a great speech. Even Jesus told us that we would give account some day for every idle word.

We must learn to watch our words. We need to put a bridle on our tongue. We need to pray daily for God to help us only speak the words that come from His heart. Lord, help us to meditate on Your Word and hide it in our hearts so that when we speak it is a pure word and it creates life in those who hear it. Praying in the spirit will help to bring the tongue under control.

Do you want to be an overcomer and be used by God to bring healing to many, to bring words of encouragement and blessing? Then let God set your tongue on fire. Isaiah, after God touched his tongue with the coal of fire, proclaimed that God had given him the tongue of the learned. Let God touch you and give you a tongue that will bring glory to His Name.

Overcomers are ready to submit to the fire of the Lord. They know it is necessary to be purified and cleansed for the Master. Tests and trials in their lives are only meant to strengthen and prepare them for greater things. Only then can they as a holy vessel be equipped and prepared to handle His glory!

Oh, my friend, look at these afflictions that you face today with great joy! Your God has not forsaken you, but out of His great love, He is molding you into a beautiful vessel. He will not ever forsake you. You will come through on the other side with your tongue purified to speak a pure word of God for this generation.

CHAPTER 7 - OVERCOMERS HAVE A VISION

"For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me."

Jeremiah 29:11-13 (NLT)

The God who cannot lie says that he has a plan for you. He knows the end from the beginning. He knew even before time began that you would be born in this period of history, and He established a plan for your life. He created you with just the right personality and all the talents you would need to be successful in life. He has given you the gifts and callings to acquire the expected end that He has for you. You were never meant to live your life to the tune of *"Whatever will be, will be"*. God expects you to live an abundant and fully productive life. Life was never meant to be boring and mundane.

God Has a Plan Just for You

God's plan for you is unique. It is as unique as your fingerprints or the pattern of your voice or your DNA. Your plan is unlike the plan for any other human being on earth. We will not know all the details of God's plan for us initially. We may not even know for sure what the final outcome will be. But what we need to do is find the piece of that plan that He wants us to walk in right now. His plan is always revealed to us in increments as we are prepared for each step.

God knows the end from the beginning, but it would probably overwhelm us if we could see our entire life when we were young. If we could see the end result, we would undoubtedly be unable to handle the enormity of it. By His grace, God reveals His plan one step at a time for our good. He doesn't play cat and mouse with us. He wants us to know His plan. He is not trying to hide it from us. In fact, so many times He is sending us clues through the events that come into our lives. All we have to do is ask and He will tell us of things to come.

Often He shows us a piece of His plan, but He doesn't show us all the steps that it will take to get there. He lays out each step in His time and in His way. As we are obedient to take the step that He shows us, the next step will be revealed. Sometimes a step may look like it leads in the opposite direction from our destination that we believe God has revealed to us. We tend to hear God say *"This is where I am taking you."* And then we try to figure out what steps we can take to get there. But, if God has a destination in mind for us, do we not believe that He will prepare the steps to get there, as well?

When the steps that God shows us do not seem to line up with what we envision, we begin to question if we are hearing from God. We are tempted to go our own way and many times we get off track because we trust our own eyes of flesh more than we trust the Spirit of God. We end up in disobedience and God has to take us and put us back on the right path after we repent of going our own way.

Let's go back into time again and take another look at Joseph. Joseph had a dream, and in that dream he saw his family bowing down to him. He

knew what it meant but he had no idea how that would ever happen. Have you ever questioned the things that lie in front of you that seem to deter you from your destination? Have you ever questioned the validity of your dreams or what you believe you have heard from God concerning your destiny?

Joseph had this dream and told his family about it. His brothers came against him and sold him into slavery. Did Joseph question the validity of his dream? I am sure he did! I am sure he said, *“Hey, wait a minute, God. You said that I was going to be in some great place of authority where even my family would bow down to me. How can this be happening? Why aren’t You doing something to stop this? Did you lie to me? Did I misinterpret my dream?”*

I am sure he questioned God’s direction again when he was thrown into prison in Egypt for something he did not do. How could that dream be fulfilled when he sat behind prison bars? Do you think that Egypt looked like a step in the right direction to having that dreamed fulfilled? No. He must have been thinking about ways of getting out of Egypt. Nothing good had happened to him since he had been in this strange land. But, in reality, it was the very step that set events in order so that the dream could come true. It is all about whether we are going to trust God to work all things for our good, or are we going to get distracted and work against God.

God’s Plan for Moses is an Example for Us

Let’s take a look at another man in Old Testament scripture. Moses was being raised up by God to deliver God’s people from slavery and to lead them back to the land promised to Abraham and his descendants. Abraham had been told that his family would go to a country where they would be treated as strangers. God told Abraham that they would be in this land for 400 years (see Genesis 15). He said after the appropriate time had passed his people would come out of this land with great possessions and would travel home to the land promised by God to Abraham and his descendants.

Maybe this promise was carried down through the generations. Maybe when Moses realized he was a Jew he began to understand why he had been preserved from death by being raised by Pharaoh’s daughter. Perhaps God began to reveal some of His plan to Moses. What if I am that great deliverer that God spoke about to Abraham? Maybe I should just do something to deliver my people from slavery? Moses tried to do it on his own. He failed. He killed an Egyptian and had to run for his life. How he must have questioned God’s direction as he spent the next forty years in the desert.

He probably questioned his calling. Surely he feared that this one foolish action would disqualify him from leadership. No doubt he re-lived that moment over and over in his mind. In all probability Moses thought all the same things that cross our minds when we fail, when we make mistakes, when we take the wrong path, make the wrong choices. But, God didn’t give up on Moses, and He doesn’t give up on us.

God sent Moses to the desert to prepare him for his calling as deliverer, but Moses didn’t realize the purpose. I am sure he felt like a failure. Life went on for Moses in the desert. He married and then spent many years tending sheep for his father-in-law. The dream of delivering the Israelites from slavery was basically dead. All the stories he had heard concerning God

saving his life as a baby were long buried in the recesses of his mind. Most assuredly he felt that he had failed God and missed out on any great plan for his life that God might have had for him at one time.

He had failed God and he had failed his fellow Jews. There was nothing left to do but be content in raising sheep. How could herding sheep in the desert possibly be a step in the right direction for Moses to enter into the plan of God for his life? Things are not always as they seem.

Forty years of waiting. Moses had thought as a young man that he was to be the deliverer of God's people. He took things into his own hands to make that happen and he failed. How many times do we hear from God and think we have it all figured out, so we step out to make it happen in our strength and in our own way. But, whatever we do in our own strength fails.

Another forty years later, the dream given to Moses was all but dead. Moses was a shepherd living a quiet, peaceful life. I am sure the dream of being a deliverer and the sting of failure had all but dissipated in his mind. He must have felt of little importance. He probably had the same thoughts we do when we step out to do something and fall flat on our face. Had he by his failure lost his opportunity to walk in the plan of God for his life?

Then one day out of the blue God shows up and tells Moses that He hasn't given up on him. God confirms that Moses is the deliverer that God wants to send into Egypt to deliver God's people. All that failure comes rushing to the forefront of Moses' brain, and he does not want to go through the whole thing again. He failed once, what is going to keep him from failing again? Moses had to see that God has a specific way and time for when things happen. He had to become completely dependent upon God.

Moses had tried to do things before in his own strength. This time would be different. He would go in God's strength and in God's timing. Moses had to come to the place where all the pride inside of him was gone. He had to learn that he could do nothing in his own strength. Then God could promote him. Moses had to put aside the past and have faith that he was hearing God correctly. Then he had to act on what he had heard God say.

It takes faith in God to walk the steps He lays before us, trusting that eventually these steps will take us to the place that He has shown us. I cannot count the number of times I have heard someone say, "*Oh, that can't be God!*" Why? It's because we expect God to act a certain way. We expect God to do things a certain way. But God is a God of infinite variety and if we pre-determine how He is going to do what He has said He will do, we will miss Him almost every time.

We must come to the place where we know for certain that His plans for us are good and not evil, and then just leave it to Him to work out the details of the plan. We can trust Him. His plan is far better than any plan we could devise on our own. At the end of our life, if we have attained our expected end, we can look forward to hearing the words from our Master's lips, "*Well done, good and faithful servant*".

God's Plan for You Existed before You Did

For years I lived in a beautiful land of hills and pine trees. Old railroad beds, long ago abandoned, had been turned into wonderful hiking and biking trails. One day, I was walking on this trail not too far from my home. I was

praying and preparing for a message I was to preach in a few weeks at a gathering in North Dakota. As I was walking, I thought, *"I will walk for an hour and then sit down and rest for a few minutes before walking back"*. I began to pray for a rock to be in the right location at the right time, so I could sit and rest in the shade after I had walked an hour. It was a warm and humid day.

As the end of the hour approached, I began to think, *"What a stupid prayer."* What was God going to do, pick up a rock and move it just so I would have a place to sit in the shade? About that time, I came upon the perfect rock. It was the right height and flat on top. It would make an ideal rock on which to sit and rest. There was only one problem. It was completely out in the open with not a bit of shade. I thought to myself, *"It is not entirely what I asked for, but it will do."* Immediately, I heard the words in my spirit *"Good is the enemy of best"*.

Suddenly, I was aware of God's presence and I felt His love surround me. I knew at that moment if I chose to stop at this rock, I would miss God's best. I knew that the rock for which I had prayed would be in the place where I had requested it to be. So I kept on walking. Not too far from that spot there was not only one rock, but there were several rocks in the shade. I chose one and I sat down. I thanked the Lord for not only providing, but providing abundantly. That is what our Heavenly Father is like!

As I reflected on the events that had just taken place, I was suddenly aware of how much God cared for me and provided for me. I wonder how this is possible and yet I know it is. Even David marveled at God's love and goodness and how He could do all the loving things for him. How could He know everything about me? How could He be in front of me leading me, and at the same time be behind me, following me? It was too great of a concept for even David to comprehend, but he knew it to be a fact.

O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD. You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand! Psalm 139:1-6 (NLT)

When God formed the world, He looked down through the corridors of time and saw me. He knew that in this particular time in history I would pray for a rock in the shade. I could see Him smile, as He placed the rock there just for me. He planned for a railroad to run right beside that rock, so that someday when I walked that old railroad bed and prayed, the answer would be there. Time has no bearing on God. He is eternal. Time is a human concept. We can't wrap our brains around that concept, but if we receive it by faith we will see we can break out of our time constraints as well.

He planned for your every need, even before you were born. He knew the talents and desires He would put into your heart even before you were conceived. He prepared it all for you! How much He loves us, even when we don't think much of ourselves. We settle for second best many times when best is just around the corner. Instead of pursuing God's desire for us, we settle for whatever comes our way.

David, the psalmist, understood how much God planned for us. In the fortieth chapter of Psalms, he declared that the things that God had planned for each one of us could not be recited, because they were too many to even remember. He said that if he were to speak of them, they would be too many to declare.

Some people would say, *"Well, yes, I understand that God had all these things planned for David. After all, he was in the lineage of Jesus. He was to be a great king in Israel. But why would He do that for me?"* The answer is simply because He loves you, because He created you for Himself. If you are a father then you know what it is to look down at a newborn baby and feel that heart of love and pride for that little one. God created you to bring joy to His Father heart. David said that God had planned things for "us". We are His children. I am so glad David said that little word, "us".

Sometimes, we compare ourselves to others and get discouraged. We think surely we are nothing in God's eyes in comparison to someone else we know. We would all like to be like Billy Graham and have his results, but God doesn't call everyone to be a Billy Graham, or some other famous person either. God tells us that along with the gifts He gives to us there is more responsibility. We must never judge ourselves against another person's accomplishments.

God measures us against how well we heed His word and follow His plan for us. He measures us against the expected end He has planned specifically for us. He never measures us against a plan He has designed for someone else. His plan for us takes into account our abilities, plus His ability to work in our lives. If we hook up with His plan for our life, we will make it. Not only will we make it, we will enjoy it abundantly.

Now, there are things that will come against us and attempt to defeat and discourage us, to keep us from obtaining the expected end for us. We all have the same goal, but different paths to get to the goal. Our goal in life is to become like Jesus in the land He has promised to us. In doing this we please our Father and we advance His Kingdom.

The devil does not want you to succeed. He does not want God's Kingdom to be advanced. He wants his own kingdom. But, he has no power except what power we give him when we lack faith and understanding in Kingdom principles and our wonderful Lord. When trials come our way, it is an opportunity for us to learn and grow in the knowledge and wisdom of God. To get from one place to another in our journey, to reach God's expected end, we often have to face opposition which is intended to train us for what God is calling us to do. This is the purpose of our trials.

We need to see past the trial, to the purpose of the trial. We need to see the big picture. If we seek God's face and His wisdom, we will begin to see what is on the other side of this trial and with joy we will begin to push through to victory. We ought to look at our trials as one more opportunity for God to show Himself faithful, and one more rung on the ladder toward the fulfillment of our calling.

When God reveals to you a major portion of His plan for you, chances are it is bigger than you are. You're going to say, *"I don't know if this is God, because I don't see any way that I can do this"*. But that is God's way. He wants you to know that He is God, and with Him nothing is impossible. If you could do it, perhaps you would take credit and God wouldn't get any of the

glory.

God is not egotistical, wanting the glory for Himself, but He knows that if others see what is possible with Him through you, they will believe in the impossible in their own lives. This is what expands the Kingdom of God on earth. This is what is real and will touch the hearts of people.

If God gives you a vision for something that seems too big, put it aside for a while and see what happens. If it is from God, He will continue to bring it back to you, until it burns in you and faith begins to develop in your heart. And if it is too big for you to handle alone, God will raise up others to carry the vision with you.

Abraham's Vision

God gave Abraham a very large vision. He had a plan for Abraham's life. He looked down upon His creation and saw a man who had a heart that would listen and obey. Abraham lived in the city of Ur of the Chaldeans. Ur was a very advanced city in Abraham's day. Studies of the area have shown that Ur had a well-developed educational system. Commerce, also, was well established, with ships coming in and out of the ports carrying goods and people from all over the world. At one time, it was the most magnificent city of the world. In Abraham's time it was still a beautiful, prosperous, and important city, second only to Babylon.

It is thought that Abraham was very wealthy and came from a good family. Most likely, he was well established and had his entire life planned in Ur without a thought about moving somewhere else. Then God appeared on the scene and interrupted Abraham's nice cozy life. He told Abraham that He wanted him to move to a land that He would show him. He didn't even tell Abraham where it was. You see, God had an expected end for Abraham, but He didn't tell him the entire plan at that time or all that would be required of him over time. Obedience is often required without knowing all the facts upfront. God just said, "Go". He wanted Abraham to have faith and be obedient, two of the keys to overcoming.

Sometimes, in our journey, we, too, will be faced with a major decision to be obedient or stay where we are. We may have everything planned out in our life. We may have a good job, a nice retirement plan, a home that is paid for, a great group of friends. Then God suddenly and unexpectedly interrupts us. He invades our comfort zone. Our faith will be tested. Would we be willing to give it all up for the sake of the call?

God says that obedience is better than sacrifice. Proverbs 21:3 (NLT) – **"The LORD is more pleased when we do what is right and just than when we offer him sacrifices."** In the hour that we live in, it is going to become increasingly more important that we learn to obey the voice of the Spirit at a moment's notice. Those who are obedient will eat the fruit of their labor. We must be willing to be inconvenienced. We must be willing to have our schedules interrupted. We must be willing to change our plans, when God shows us His way.

Abraham was to be the father of many nations according to the promised given to him by God. His descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the sky or the sands of the sea. Both Abraham and his wife were old. They could not have children in the natural, yet Abraham believed God for the

impossible. God performed a miracle and the impossible became possible.

The son of promise came and they named him Isaac. The promise began with one man and a vision to see the impossible. Abraham was the one man God chose to hold the vision, but soon there were two men who would understand and care for the vision.

Isaac grew up to become a man and he married Rebecca. They had twin boys, Esau and Jacob. The promise and the vision were passed down to Jacob. Now there are three men who carry the vision. Over time Jacob had twelve sons. Which son or would all of them carry the vision forward? Was the vision actually passed on to another generation or did it die?

God told Abraham there would be a period of time before the fulfillment of the vision. Abraham would never see it with his physical eyes, but he certainly saw it with his spiritual eyes. So would each generation be faithful to pass on the promise and believe for its fulfillment? Was the vision of a promised land stirring in the hearts of the children?

Scripture doesn't tell us how much was passed on to the children of each new generation. They were commanded by God to pass it to their children. But, even if they didn't, it was still in the heart of God to fulfill His word to Abraham. Eventually, when the time was right, God would come and stir up the vision again. God had made a promise to Abraham and He would bring it to pass in His way and in His time.

The Dreamer

Jacob the grandson of Abraham had two wives and two concubines who bore him sons. Jacob loved Rachel, the younger daughter of his uncle Laban. Jacob worked for his uncle for seven years so that he could receive Rachel as his bride. But his uncle pulled a fast one on him and gave him Leah, the older daughter instead. It was dark in the tent so Jacob did not realize until the next morning what had happened. Jacob wanted Rachel for his wife, so he worked for his uncle another seven years to receive her.

Joseph, the first born son of Jacob's beloved Rachel, had a dream when he was probably still just a teenager. Jacob favored Joseph more than the other sons, because Rachel was his mother and the true love of Jacob's life. His brothers were angry for the preferential treatment that Joseph received from their father.

One day his brothers out of jealousy sold Joseph into slavery. They were going to kill him, but God spared his life. God had great plans for Joseph, but first Joseph had to do some maturing. God had to mold him and shape him into being a deliverer for Israel.

Joseph ended up in Egypt as a slave. Perhaps that would be the end of Joseph. But no, God had a plan and He turned a bad situation around for good. Joseph faced many trials while separated from his family, but God didn't forsake him. The whole time Joseph was growing and learning in spite of his difficulties. God was building character in this young man of destiny. God knew what was ahead for him and He placed him in the right places at the right time.

Joseph was purchased by a high ranking man who was captain of the guards for Pharaoh. God favored Joseph and he became very prosperous. Then suddenly the captain's wife charged Joseph with trying to rape her and

Joseph was put into prison. Sometimes things change overnight and when we look at the events we face, we get discouraged not understanding how something like this could happen when we are faithfully trying to serve our God wherever He has placed us.

God wants us to trust Him and learn to understand that He works all things for our good and will always bring us through to victory. Joseph ended up in prison even though he was innocent. In spite of being in a very discouraging situation, God watched over him and directed his steps even in prison. During this time God would bring Joseph into contact with people who would make a difference in his life. Eventually in God's timing Joseph would be released from prison and elevated to second in command of Egypt.

When Joseph was put into command, God told him that there was going to be a famine in the land of Egypt. He proceeded to give Joseph a plan that would provide food for the nation and get the people through some very tough years. Seven prosperous years were to be followed by seven years of famine. Grain was to be stored during the years of plenty, so that it could be distributed during the lean years.

The drought not only touched Egypt, it extended northward to the Promised Land where Jacob and his family still lived. Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain. They did not know that they would appear before their brother with their request. They did not know that Joseph's teenage dream was about to come true and they would bow their knee before their younger brother.

Once Joseph revealed himself to his family, Joseph wanted them to go home and bring their father back to Egypt. He desired to be near his family so he could take care of them during the famine. This, too, was to fulfill the promise God had made to Abraham about them being in a strange land for a period of time until they would become a strong nation. The steps of God's plan were well ordered by Him.

When the sons returned home and reported all that had happened and that Joseph was alive, Jacob sought the Lord for direction. God told him not to be afraid to go down into Egypt, for while he was there, God would make Israel into a mighty nation. So Jacob and his family moved to Egypt where they were given the best land in all of Egypt, the land of Goshen.

Joseph did not succumb to bitterness and anger at what his brothers had done. He told them that they had not done this to him, but God had. God had a purpose in it all and it saved all their lives. Jacob was reunited with his son Joseph, whom he thought was dead. They lived abundantly in the land to which God had sent them.

The dream had come true just as Joseph had seen it so many years before. As second in command in Egypt, people knelt before him. Here, too, were his father and brothers kneeling before him. But, the pride and superior attitude that dominated Joseph as a teenager were gone. It was out of a heart of love that Joseph now received and forgave his family.

I am sure that Joseph often wondered how God would bring his dream to pass. He probably even played out several scenarios in his head. But, I dare say that even in his wildest imaginations, he never imagined the way it actually would happen.

The Vision Is Revived

God made a covenant with Abraham. The details of this covenant can be found in Genesis chapter 15. God told Abraham that his descendants would be in a foreign land for four hundred years. He said during this time they would be made slaves by that nation. After that they would return as a nation of their own to the land that had been promised to Abraham and his descendants.

Four hundred years later, the Israelites were living in a foreign land, Egypt, and they were prospering. They had grown into a great and mighty nation, just as God had told Abraham they would. I am sure Abraham talked about his vision to his son and grandchildren. I am sure he told them what God had promised him. But God also spoke it to Abraham's grandson, Jacob confirming the vision as real and still obtainable.

Now Jacob finds that his son, Joseph, is not dead but had been sold into slavery in Egypt. He probably had no clue that he was about to help fulfill the prophecy that had been given to Abraham and he was going to live in a foreign land. The great draught had reached Israel as well as Egypt, but Jacob had heard that Egypt had prepared and there was food in Egypt.

Jacob inquired of the Lord whether he should go to Egypt or not. God confirmed that the promise He had made to Abraham those many years ago would be fulfilled in Egypt and the Jews would become a mighty nation. The dream was alive again. They were a people of purpose. Jacob was to go to Egypt. Then at the right time on God's timetable, God would bring them back to the land He had promised them so many years before.

The Jews were commanded by God to teach their children the things of God and to pass down the history of how God had worked in their lives. But here they are in Egypt many years later, and things are not going so good for them anymore. When Jacob first came to Egypt, he and his family were given the best land in the country. They had it made, but over time the Egyptians had new leadership who did not know the story of Joseph. They began to fear the Israelites as they grew in number and in strength. So, the Egyptians made slaves out of them.

God had told them that they would end up in slavery in a strange nation, but He had also promised them He would rescue them after four hundred years in that place. How come no one was standing on that promise and rallying the people for a journey home. Why wasn't it being talked about in their groups? I mean, God had given them an exact timetable. Don't you wish He would do that with us sometimes? Had the families been faithful in passing the promise down through the generations?

The Bible doesn't indicate anywhere that there was anyone saying, *"Hey, God said that in four hundred years we were going back to the land of our forefathers. So I'm out of here."* No! They were content where they were. They were happy in their comfort zone for a while, so the Lord had to stir things up to get them ready to move.

Sometimes change is hard for us. Sometimes it takes more than one reminder for us to be willing to do something different. Sometimes like the mother eagle, God has to strip our nest of its comfortableness, so we will leave the nest and fly. Finally we are faced with circumstances which force us into a decision to change directions.

There were reminders. When Jacob was about to die in Egypt, he

called his entire family to him and reminded them of the vision. He even requested that when he was dead they should take him and bury him where Abraham and Isaac had been buried in the Promised Land. So, Joseph followed his father's instructions.

But, then the promise once again was forgotten for a time as the vision of the Promised Land lay dormant and the family grew and became more and more comfortable and happy with where they were. They prospered greatly in this foreign land. Maybe it could be their Promised Land?

Joseph grew old and before he died, he too called his family together. He made them swear an oath to him that when the time came and God rescued them from Egypt and took them back to the Promised Land, they must carry his bones with them.

Once again, the vision was remembered and the people were reminded that where they lived and worked today was not their Promised Land, even though it was a good place. They were reminded that God had a promised land for them and one day when the time was right, they must go and possess that land. But, during this time of prosperity for the Jews there was no preparation, no crying out to God. Maybe their comfortable nest needed the lining stripped.

Dormancy is Not Death

Once again the vision, the dream of the Promised Land given to Abraham lay dormant. The Israelites continued to be satisfied with where they were. God had to do something to get them stirred up and ready to move. A new pharaoh came into power who knew nothing about Joseph. The number of Israelites in the land became a threat to him. What if they tried to overcome the Egyptians and take over their land? The Pharaoh felt he must do something to prevent this from happening. So, suddenly the Israelites went from being a very blessed people in Egypt to being slaves of the Egyptians.

God's favor still rested on this people and they continued to multiply and take over the land. The Pharaoh then ordered the killing of baby boys by any midwife assisting a woman in giving birth. But, this didn't work, because the law to kill the boys was not always being followed. Some of the midwives did not carry out the order of Pharaoh, so God showed them favor and gave them babies of their own.

Next, Pharaoh ordered the Egyptians to throw any baby boys of the Israelites found into the river. During this time Moses, the coming deliverer, was born. God watched over him and protected him as he grew under the care of Pharaoh's daughter. The slavery and cruel labor forced upon the Israelites was taking its toll and before long they began to cry out for deliverance and their cry ascended to the throne of Almighty God.

How much better it would have been if the Israelites had been faithful to teach their children the promises of God given to their families. If only the message of Jacob, and then Joseph had penetrated the hearts of the people. They could have then looked forward to returning to their promised land as God had promised them. They would not have had to go through some really tough times for as long as they did, if they had remembered the promises and looked forward to them. But they forgot the promises, and God had to bring it back to them. He had to remind them of the promise and the vision given to

Abraham so many years before.

God knew what He was doing. He had a plan for Moses even designed before he was born. He would devise a plan to keep this baby boy alive and raise him to be a man, a deliverer. He planted the seed of the dormant vision inside this man. He could trust Moses to eventually be the man who would fulfill the word of the Lord.

Moses was forty years old when he began to understand his calling. But, like so many of us when we get a word from the Lord, we expect it to happen right now. If it doesn't, we get anxious we take matters into our own hands. Moses couldn't understand why his people turned against him, when he killed an Egyptian. Without a friend, he fled Egypt for his life.

Moses discouraged and alone, spent the next forty years in the wilderness being training for what God was calling him to do, but he didn't know that is what was happening. He had been a prince, raised by Pharaoh's daughter. He was a privileged child, now ostracized with no family. God had to get his attention. He had to free him from the pride in his own abilities and who he was, so that Moses could learn who God was and who Moses was according to his God.

You will spend time in the wilderness in preparation for the vision God has given you. The wilderness is not a bad place, unless you decide to stay there. However, most of the time the wilderness will look the opposite of what God has promised to you. Will you look at what you see with your physical eyes and give up, or will you understand the purpose of the wilderness and cooperate with God?

The wilderness is a place of training and building of character. It is a place for the purification of motives. It is a place where God can change you into His image so that when you inherit your promised land, you will bring many others into His Kingdom. It is a place of decisions.

The wilderness is a place for maturing, for growing up in the things of the Lord. It is a place where everyone must go. It is a place to choose, either you move forward to your promised land, or you go back to Egypt which represents the world. Either you learn how to be dependent upon God, or you go back to being dependent upon the world and your own abilities.

The wilderness is not a place of discipline or punishment for something you have done or failed to do. Never look at your wilderness as a bad place. It is an awesome place! You cannot inherit your promised land without going through the wilderness. It is where you get to know God. It is where you change from an earthly mindset to a Kingdom mindset. You will not be the same person when you come out of the wilderness.

Moses completed his training and, at eighty years of age, returned to Egypt with the renewed vision planted firmly in his heart. He was ready to lead God's people out of slavery. The vision lay dormant for four hundred years, and now it is implanted again in the heart of one man. How easy would it have been for one man to come to a satisfied people and tell them they had to move? Not very easy at all, so God prepared the Israelites by making them uncomfortable, so they would be willing to follow the man with the vision.

Rebellion and Unbelief Will Destroy a Vision

God's plan for our life is pure. He presents it to us in pure form.

However at the time we begin to see the vision God is presenting to us, we have the tendency to filter it through our experiences and our understanding at the time. As we try to decipher what we have seen, we often mix spirit understanding with our life experiences.

It takes time to understand the vision and to get ready for its fulfillment. It takes time to develop the skills and attitudes needed to handle the vision. We must come to the place where we die to our own ideas and are resurrected to the purity of the vision of God. Many times God requires us to completely separate ourselves from the vision for a season. This may mean moving somewhere else which seems so far away from the thing God has promised. It definitely will mean spending some time going through the wilderness. There is no promised land without the wilderness.

You may have a vision that God gave you a long time ago, but the zeal and the burning desire for that vision has long ago faded. If the vision was truly of God, chances are it will start to come into focus again. You wonder why after all this time it keeps invading your mind. Suddenly you begin to feel uncomfortable or dissatisfied with where you currently are. God begins to strip the nest of all its comforts and He challenges you to move on again.

When the time comes for a baby eagle to leave the nest, the mother makes the nest a very uncomfortable place to be. The eaglets can't fly, but they can't stay in the nest forever either. We will have the same uneasy or uncomfortable feeling when God begins to press us to move out of our "comfort zone". Don't be afraid! Move on with God. He's taking you closer to the fulfillment of the vision.

When God had put all the pieces of the puzzle together He gave Moses instructions to lead 3-5 million people out of Egypt. He was taking them on what should have been a very short journey home. This huge nation of people crossed the wilderness with God demonstrating His provision and His love to them every single day. It only took them a few days to arrive at the edge of the Promised Land, but oh, what a wondrous few days, full of miracles and provision by God. Unfortunately the vision that was in Moses' heart had not yet entered into the hearts of the people.

Moses sent twelve spies into the land to see what was there. Only Joshua and Caleb brought back a good report. Only Joshua and Caleb saw the vision of God in their hearts. Only these two men understood the true promise of God to them. The rest were afraid and did not trust God to fulfill His word after spending forty days in this new land. Consequently, only Joshua and Caleb would be granted the privilege of entering the Promised Land.

The rest would die after wandering around in the wilderness for forty years, one year for every day of their rebellion and unbelief. They had scoped out the land and were afraid to enter in spite of knowing God's promises to them. They never possessed their inheritance because of fear and unbelief. During the forty years of wandering in the wilderness the next generation was being prepared to carry the vision of God.

When God's timing was right, after the older generation had died, the vision came alive in an entire nation of people. The vision initially given to Abraham by God, and passed down to Moses, now lived in Caleb and Joshua and eventually passed to an entire generation.

Don't be afraid or disappointed if no one else sees your vision. If God is

in it, He will stir you up to keep going after it. Overcomers keep pursuing, until their vision becomes a reality. Never let go of those dreams! Only rebellion and unbelief can keep you out of your Promised Land. Don't be concerned or overwhelmed by the massiveness of the dream. Others will be raised up to see the vision in due season.

God may need to adjust your vision many times, as we have a tendency to mix soul and spirit together. God does not want a mix. He must purify our vision and separate what is pure from the impurities. We are perfected in the fire of His holy presence. He takes you through the fire for your benefit because above all He wants you to succeed.

“Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. “For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you. “Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. “Lift up your eyes round about and see; They all gather together, they come to you. Your sons will come from afar, And your daughters will be carried in the arms. Isaiah 60:1-4 (NASB)

This passage of scripture is talking about Zion. In Hebrews, chapter 12, we see that Zion is a picture of the Church, God's people. Isaiah is giving a prophetic word not only for the people of his time, but looking down the corridors of time the word is applicable for the Church today.

First of all, Isaiah saw a thick darkness all over the earth. That is certainly true today. Sin and rebellion are rampant in our generation. If we are looking at the darkness, we can't see anything but the darkness. But the Spirit of the Lord says that if we will lift up our eyes and see by the Spirit, we will see the light and the glory of our Lord upon us.

Lift Up Your Eyes

When problems and trials come our way, we seem to get bogged down in the mud in our own backyard. Our eyes are drawn to the struggle to raise our feet and walk forward. Nothing else around us seems to matter. There is a whole other world on the other side of the fence that surrounds us. We can't seem to get our eyes off our current predicament and gaze over the fence. We can't see anything else around us, but the darkness of the trial.

Our focus is on our problems, instead of on the awesomeness of our Lord. When we face a trial or a test, we must lift our eyes and see as He sees. We must become a people of vision. The trial is our wilderness that we must cross on our way to a new promised land of blessing from our God. If we understood this, we would gladly raise our eyes to see His glory on the horizon and we would pursue Him at all costs!

God told Abraham to climb to the top of a mountain. He wanted Abraham to see beyond the moment of time that existed then and see what lay ahead for him. God wanted Abraham to have a vision of the land that his God was promising him. On top of the mountain Abraham could see clearly. God told him that all the land that he could see would be given to him. That promise is for us today. God is still saying to His people, *"As far as your eyes can see, that's the land I'll give to you".*

Elisha was a prophet of God. His story begins in I Kings chapter 19. God called Elisha to take Elijah's place when Elijah was called home. Elisha caught a vision of this and desired the anointing of God on his life so much that he followed Elijah around every place he went. He wanted to walk in the Spirit of God as Elijah did. He saw the miracles that Elijah did when the power of God came upon him, and Elisha wanted to operate in that power as well.

Elijah had great miracles operating in his life. He called down fire from heaven and prayed for the holding and the releasing of rain. But, he also had great trials. There were those who sought to kill him. At times he was depressed. Elisha saw this, but still wanted the anointing of God on his life, even to the point of asking for a double portion of it. He had to know that along with the double anointing added trials and testing would come to him.

Yet, Elisha saw by the Spirit of God what he could have and he wouldn't let go of God until he got it. Is there something God has promised you that you want so desperately you would do anything God requires, even if it is hard? Do you want it even knowing there will be people who will reject you and your message?

Is your desire so great for God that you would give up everything to have what He has promised you? Will you be the seed He buries in the ground only to come forth out of death into an abundant harvest? That is what it is going to take, but you will never get to the place of full surrender to God's vision for you until you lift your eyes and see the greatness of it.

Finally, the prophet Elijah knew it was time to leave the earth. Only Elisha was there. The other prophets who had been following from a distance were not there. Only the prophet with the desire and hunger to go to new heights in the anointing of God was there. He told Elisha *"If you see me leave this earth on my way to God the Father then you shall have what you have desired. The double portion of my anointing will be yours"*.

Elisha was prepared. He had spiritual eyes to see beyond the disappointment of having his friend and traveling companion leave. Elisha had seen what God had for him and was not going to let go of his promised land from God. He knew God had placed in him the gifts he needed to possess the promises that were given to him. Elisha was determined to go after it all. He would not let go of his dream and vision.

For a time Elisha walked in the wilderness following Elijah wondering when his time would come. He prepared himself and hung on to the vision of God inside of him, until the timing of God was right. He saw Elijah caught up to heaven. Elisha left that place with assurance that he had now what God had promised him. He would walk in the double anointing.

How much do you desire the fulfillment of the vision God has given you? Are you lifting your eyes to see the possibilities of the land you could possess? God is bigger than any current circumstance or trial you are facing today. What is His plan for you tomorrow? Lift your eyes today.

During Elisha's time, the Syrians were fighting against Israel. The enemy did not know that Israel had a secret weapon. Every time the Syrians made plans against Israel, Israel was ready for them. That secret weapon was Elisha. Elisha could see in the spirit what the enemy was planning. He would then tell the king of Israel what was going to happen. Elisha's spiritual eyes were open all the time.

The Syrians were upset when they found out how their plans were

being revealed. They went and surrounded the town where Elisha was staying. The next morning when Elisha's servant awoke and went to the window, he saw the vast Syrian army. He was very upset and afraid. His spiritual eyes were blind. All he could see were the circumstances surrounding him.

The servant ran to his master in fear, but Elisha was not concerned. Elisha prayed that the eyes of his servant would be opened to see the truth. As the servant lifted his eyes, he saw the mountains full of horses and chariots of fire. He saw the army of the Lord.

Many times when trials come our way we begin to doubt we even heard from God. Other times we are convinced that we did really hear from God, but nothing seems to be happening. We begin to think we must have done something to displease Him. We start to think perhaps we just don't deserve to have the vision fulfilled. We are not worthy of the honor and perhaps someone else would be better fit to have the vision.

The enemy will use all kinds of thoughts to convince you to give up the dream and let it die in the wilderness just as the children of Israel did. In truth there is a death that must take place, but it is not the death of the dream. A seed shall not live and produce fruit until it first goes into the ground and dies. That is what God does with the vision He gives to us. The vision must die to self-fulfillment and come alive again by the Spirit of the Living God with resurrection power.

Depending on the size of your vision and the amount of change that you need to undergo for it to be productive will govern the amount of time needed between the time the seed goes into the ground and the time that it actually produces a harvest. Radishes are ready to harvest in twenty to thirty days. Apples take four to five years. It can take longer if the proper care and nutrition is not provided to keep the plants healthy.

We must care for our dream. We must also lift our eyes and see the unseen things. The spiritual world must become more real to us than this physical world. Things in this world can change, but our God is the unchanging One. If we can lift up our eyes and see what God has planned for us, then we can believe He will fulfill the vision for us.

We need clarity of vision in this hour. If we can see with our spiritual eyes what He wants to do in our cities, He'll give us our city. But let's not stop there. Let's take our states and our country and even the nations of the world. Oh, if only our vision could be expanded to see that far! Overcomers must climb the mountain of God to see what God has in store for them and the nations and then pursue that vision with all that is within them!

CHAPTER 8 - OVERCOMERS ARE NEVER SATISFIED WITH THE STATUS QUO

But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image. II Cor. 3:16-18 (NLT)

Overcomers are agents of change. Change is hard for most human beings and we constantly resist it. But change is inevitable. It takes time for us to institute change in our lives, but it happens all the time whether we like it or not. It is even necessary. Our world is changing at an astronomical pace. Technology developed today is obsolete tomorrow. Government is constantly changing affecting the way we live every day.

Who could have predicted that practically overnight the walls of communism would come down in Russia? How many would have believed that West Germany and East Germany could have been reunited as a country in the short time it took. How was anyone to know that the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 would cause massive change overnight, not only in America, but also across the entire world? Economies rise and fall over night. Change is so rapid today that we can hardly keep up with it.

The Walls are Coming Down

I was standing in line at a very small, but popular restaurant on Valentine's Day many years ago. The Communistic government of Russia had toppled and the news was full of stories of Russian people waiting in long lines just to get bread to eat. Many times they would wait all day only to find the bread was all gone by the time they got to the front of the line.

My thoughts and my prayers turned to my brothers and sisters in the Soviet Union as I stood in this restaurant line that night. Surely, they had been praying for a release from the bondage of Communism, but now that they were free, there was so much hardship. It seemed like no one had anticipated the changes that would take place as a result of those prayers and the people were totally unprepared for those changes.

As I thought about this, the Spirit of the Lord spoke to me and said, *"Just as certainly as the walls of communism came down, so will the walls crumble that hold My people back from fulfilling their purpose. These walls will fall even as quickly and My people are not prepared."* My heart began to cry. What could I do to help them prepare? I was one who had been praying for the release of God's people.

Denominations and religious affiliations have built walls for years that keep God's people divided. Assemblies tell other gathering places, *"We can't fellowship with you, because you don't believe the same way we do."* People of God, that is not what God wants and it really needs to change! Now I am not talking about light having fellowship with darkness. There are some basics that we have to agree upon in order to fellowship together in the Lord.

We must agree that Jesus is God, come to earth in the flesh, and that He died and rose from the dead to deliver us from the clutches of the enemy. It is that precious blood, which He shed, that provides our salvation and eternal life. It is not by works of any kind. It is only by grace. We must believe that the Bible reveals God to us and His righteousness and truth.

If we adhere to these beliefs, then we have light. Light comes from the life of God and God is love. Therefore, the true mark of a Christian is love. If we are going to grow up in the things of God and become mature overcomers, we must put away childish arguments and discussions and clothe ourselves with love.

We cannot love the seemingly unlovable one of the world with the passion of Jesus until we have learned to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. Love will cause the walls to fall. Maturity in the things of God will cause the walls to fall.

Paul had some interesting things to say to some of the churches in his day. He emphasized maturity and growing up in the Lord. He reprimanded some for still needing to be taught at a time when they should have already become teachers. It is no different in many of our assemblies today. There are only a few who can teach the truths of God with accuracy to newborn Christians. We must prepare now, for the walls are being torn down. A great multitude will be released to advance the Kingdom of God. Will we be ready with our marching orders from the King?

People are going to start coming to us seeking truth and answers to their questions that they can't find anywhere else in the world. They are not necessarily going to come into our gathering places. In fact, it is highly unlikely that they will ever step foot in a building that we call a "church". We have to meet them where they are. Let us not be as unprepared as our brothers and sisters were in Russia when the walls of communism fell.

It would be a horrible thing for people to be starving for the Word of God, and then stand in line somewhere only to find stale bread or no bread at all. They are not going to wait for you to go and get your pastor or wait for a Sunday go-to-church meeting to get their answers. They want answers and they need them now. Do you have the answers? If not, do you know the One who does well enough to hear Him tell you?

Who can guess how these hungry ones will find you? Perhaps they read something you have posted on Facebook or a comment you made online in response to someone's blog. Perhaps the Holy Spirit will guide their steps straight to your door. But, somehow, somewhere, someone is going to hear about you on the street from someone that you know.

If you are full of the Word of God and understand truth, God will send people to you. The talk of the town will be that when people get around you and you begin to talk about God, things happen! As darkness prevails, the light gets brighter. Let your light shine forth the love of your Creator.

Perhaps they are hurting and need to know that God cares for them. Perhaps they have received word from their doctor that they are facing a certain death in the near future. They have no hope or will in them to survive. Maybe their husband or wife just left and they do not know what to do. They come knocking on your door hungry to hear a fresh word from the Lord for them. Will you give them a fresh morsel of the living bread to satisfy their hunger or will they leave with only a dry piece of stale bread?

A Day of Change and A Day of Rest

Change is coming and we are not prepared. We should not seek change nor make change happen just for the sake of change. However, there is a change coming that is directed by God. Change will happen at an increasing pace. We saw what happened overnight when the twin towers collapsed in New York City.

We need to be on our faces before God seeking His presence and direction for this hour. I am enclosing an additional word for your edification. The Lord gave it to me as we began to enter into a new century. He told me the walls were coming down. It is about some of the change that God has planned for us. Change can happen overnight, but preparation takes time. God gives us understanding about what is going to happen so that we can prepare.

"As I have said before," says the Lord, "this is a new day. I am taking My people where they have never been before. We are entering the seventh day. The sixth day belonged to man. The seventh day belongs to Me."

"The seventh day is a day of rest, the Sabbath. I am the Lord of the Sabbath. It is My desire to reveal Myself to My people in this hour as the Lord of the Sabbath. I desire to show you how to enter into rest. As I have told you before, rest does not mean a time of inactivity. It is a day where there is no effort and no striving. It is a day when men's activity will fail. It is a day when all men's efforts will produce frustration, and strife, but those activities born of My Spirit will produce life and results."

"My people have been so busy doing, that they cannot hear My voice. In this new day, I will do things differently than I have done in the past. I will not bless just any work, only that work that I have specifically declared. You would be surprised at how much that has been done in My name has been not of My doing or My desire. I am looking for a people who know Me and will do nothing except what they see Me doing. I am looking for a people who will recognize My voice above the noises of the crowd. What I say will not always be popular and well received, but it will bring the results that you are desiring to see."

"The walls that have separated My people for ages past are about to come down even as on the seventh day My people marched around the city of Jericho and the walls came down. Everything that holds My people back is going to be torn away. I have warned My people that this was going to happen, but they have done little to prepare for this day. As the Israelites were silent for six days before the walls came down I am calling for My people to sit quietly before Me and learn of Me and My ways so they can be prepared for the coming days. I am telling My people to wait more than I am telling them to do in this hour."

"Preparation is of the heart. My mighty men are even now being prepared. It is My day and these mighty ones will point the way to Me. In this hour you will have all you need to do what I tell you to do. You will not have to strive for finances or time, or any of the things that hold you back now. There will continue to be a lot of activity and a pulling in all directions for those who have not learned to distinguish My voice."

"You must not look back, either at your failures or at your successes. It

is a new day. There are no formulas for the days ahead. The only preparation is to draw near to Me so that you can hear My voice and know My ways. For as you draw near to Me and hear Me with open ears, your love for Me will deepen and you will find it an easy thing to be obedient. That is all I require of you for the days ahead. Don't rush it. Your times are in My hands. I will do things in a new way and many will miss it because they expect Me to do things always a certain way. It is only as you become more intimately acquainted with Me that you will be able to discern what is really me."

"Do not fill your time with busy work or you will miss My call. Do only what I have told you to do. I know you have dreamed of the days ahead and I have given you a small glimpse of what I have planned for you, but you have no idea the extent of the joy and the fun and the success and the rest that I have planned for you. Today you are tired and frustrated at the amount of effort to produce such small results that you are often tempted to give up. Tomorrow you will marvel at the amount of success that comes from such little effort as I release you into My day. And the amount of energy you will have as My spirit quickens you and gives you life. Wait for it. It will happen in its time!"

Let that word sink deep into your spirit man and give you hope. Change is coming to the people of God. It must. I have cried out to God that if what I see in most assemblies is Christianity, I don't want it. I know my God. There has got to be more than what we see today. I long for the day when we see men and women convicted by the Holy Spirit when they walk into the presence of a Christian who has been with Jesus. It will happen again. I want to be on the front lines of what God is doing in this hour, don't you?

Change in the Natural Realm

For many years I have been a computer specialist by profession and I know all about change. This profession has seen constant change from the time the first computer was invented. If a person does not like change, working with computers is the wrong career to choose. One company I worked for was going through massive changes in a major computer conversion from one type of mainframe computer to another. Everyone would have to be retrained.

As we were contemplating the change and what affect it would have on our staff, my boss said something that made my spirit jump and I realized God wanted me to pay attention. My boss said that there are three types of people who react differently to change. Our staff would be no different.

First, there are those who know change is coming, but they will refuse to change. Second, there are those who don't like change, but when faced with its inevitability they will try to survive the change. The third group thrives on change and is delighted at the prospect of doing something different. It is exciting and they move forward with no fear.

As I contemplated these groups, I realized it applied in the Christian setting. The first group doesn't like change. They are set in their ways and they believe that the current way is the only right way. They are so comfortable where they are that they don't want to try anything different. Faced with change, they will not change, but will fight the change every chance they get. They will eventually grow stagnant and die. They love their

traditions and routines too much to step out into something new and different. They will never believe it is God who is disrupting their comfort.

The second group does not like change but they will go along with the crowd for a time. Change upsets them greatly and they move forward in great fear. They are the ones that say, *"Oh, we have tried this before. It won't work. We'll just wait and watch them fall on their face and then we can say, 'I told you so'."* When it doesn't turn out the way they anticipated and the change not only survives but it thrives, they become frustrated. They eventually rebel and become bitter toward those who instituted the change. If they feel God caused the change, they will become angry with Him. They, too, will not make it.

But, then there is the third group who react very differently. They thrive on change when they know it is God. They love it. It is an opportunity to excel. It is an opportunity for God to show Himself strong in their midst. I am not talking about change for the sake of change, but a change that we know is born of the Spirit of God, even when we really don't know for sure what the outcome will be. We trust our God.

As overcomers in this hour, we need to be like the third group. When we know who our God is, we can enjoy the change that He will bring. Even when change seems to be bad, we know that it won't last, because our God will see us through and in the end, the change will produce life.

Change will come. It is said, and rightly so, that God loves us the way we are, but He also loves us too much to leave us in that place. Growth requires change. We are constantly moving from glory to glory in our Lord. If we do not, we become stagnant and will eventually die on the vine.

The Development Cycle of a Christian

When we were born into this world as a baby, we couldn't do anything for ourselves. We were totally helpless. Our communication method was to cry as loudly as our lungs would allow. Mom and Dad had to be able to interpret that cry and know what we needed. If we were tired, they cuddled us and rocked us to sleep. If we needed fed, they prepared food or drink that was appropriate for our age. If we needed our diaper changed, they cleaned us and changed our diaper. Our parents provided everything we needed to live and be comfortable.

In the spiritual realm, it is the same. When we are babes in Christ, God gives us everything we need to sustain spiritual life. It is fun and exciting to watch baby Christians. When they pray, their prayers are so simple and it seems they get answers right away. But there is a time when God says, *"Okay it's time to grow up. It is time to learn how to feed yourself. It is time to learn to walk. It is time to mature. It is time to learn to live by faith."*

Sometimes these spiritual babies are offensive to Christians who just want them to mature. Sometimes we think they should mature overnight all by themselves. These babies soil their diapers and we can't stand the smell. We burp them and they spit up all over us. We don't know how to handle them. We just want them to grow up right now. If we truly want to see the harvest of souls the Lord has promised, we need to learn how to care for spiritual babies. When God brings the walls down that now hold His people captive, there are going to be many babies that will come to us.

We need to realize that it is okay for them to be babies, but we also

need to realize when God desires them to move to the next stage in their development. They can't remain babies forever. We need to be sensitive to God's leading when He says *"I want you to stop spoon feeding these ones and allow them to begin to learn to feed themselves. I want you to stop carrying them and let them learn to walk."*

Currently, we have assemblies that have allowed people to remain spiritual babies for twenty to thirty years. God desires for these people to mature and is dealing with them now. We must be sensitive to what God is doing so we don't hinder that process. If we were to examine our own lives carefully, we'd probably all find some area where God is saying it is time to grow up. It is time to mature.

We, as leaders, want people to mature, but often times we facilitate their lack of maturity by encouraging them to be dependent upon us. We don't trust them to interpret scripture correctly, so we don't allow Bible studies in the homes unless we authorize or provide the training material. We don't trust people to hear from God, so we will not allow them to prophesy in a gathering without being first sanctioned by the leadership. Leaders must find a way to allow the people to grow and mature. They must move from being babies and adolescents to the next step in life.

As the growth process continues, we eventually enter into the adolescence period where we soon become a teenager. Suddenly our whole world doesn't evolve around mom and dad any more. Friends become more important. Teenagers begin to discover who they are as individuals. They are capable of making choices and decisions on their own, but they still need guidance and direction.

Sometimes the decisions teenagers make are not always the best decisions. They appear to be selfish and their whole world revolves around themselves. This is not a bad thing and in reality it is necessary. It is a part of the normal growth process. We must go through this stage in order to become mature adults.

Spiritual Growth

On the spiritual side, we go through the same process. When we were babies we had to be fed the Word of God. We had to be told how it applied to us individually. As a teenager, we find that we can now feed ourselves pretty well. The Word is exciting and real. We've found that we can even babysit from time to time (instruct and feed the babies in the house of God). Teenagers begin to stand on their own faith instead of the faith of their spiritual brothers and sisters.

They discover that Jesus is their Healer, their Provider. He does what He says He will do. He's their Friend. They are focused on getting their needs met. They challenge their need for instruction from others older in the Lord than them. That's okay for a time because it gets them into the Word for themselves.

There still needs to be someone to watch over these teenagers, someone who will love them through thick and thin until they mature. Only a mature adult with a love for spiritual teenagers will put up with their antics during this time. We don't like being around their self-centeredness, but it's a necessary process.

We must let teenagers be teenagers or they will never grow into responsible adults. It is too bad, but I believe that the Church in recent years has done much to propagate the eternal teenager. We have taught them the truth about living by faith. We have taught them that God is interested in their needs and their wants. And all this is good, but we have not had mature adults trained to help these spiritual teenagers move on into maturity.

If spiritual teenagers stay teenagers longer than God intends, they become very selfish, demanding their own way all the time. They will threaten their leaders with leaving and taking their money with them if things don't go their way. They will spend long hours pouting and grumbling. They will call together others to sympathize with them.

They know how to receive from God and they use the blessings of God selfishly. Rarely are they concerned with the needs of others. Taking the gospel to the nations is never a priority. But when God desires to see them mature by His grace, and He stops or slows down the blessings for a season, they become bitter toward God and very rebellious.

These immature spiritual teenagers that should have matured years ago deplete the energy of many leaders. The energy of the leaders should be focused in other places to facilitate the expansion of God's Kingdom. We need to learn when to cooperate with God and let Him do what He needs to do. He has a design for their lives that would move them on to maturity. Many times we unwittingly hinder that process by pampering these individuals which results in continued immaturity.

Maturity is Necessary

Those who not only endure but welcome the discipline of God will go on to maturity and will emerge as the Bride of Christ, without spot or wrinkle. We must remember that whom He loves, He corrects. Sometimes we want to ease people's pain and help alleviate the situations in which they find themselves.

Our goal as leaders in the body of Christ is to do what God instructs us to do concerning the maturing of the saints. Sometimes the Lord brings correction and discipline into a person's life, and we need to understand what He is doing so we do not hinder the process towards maturity in these lives. We need to be sensitive to what the Lord would have us do or not to do in another person's spiritual development.

We must all go on to maturity. In the natural we grow to be adults, get married and have children. What mother of a three-week old baby would revert back to her old selfish ways, and let her baby cry from hunger while she sleeps. In the Christian realm today, we often do such immature things with those the Lord has entrusted to our care. Sometimes we are more concerned about our own needs and desires than the needs of those whom the Lord has given to us as our spiritual children in the faith. Will we step up and be the spiritual father or mother so many need, but can't find?

As we spiritually mature, we realize life is not all about us and who we are. It is all about Jesus and who He is in us and what He wants to be in us. We put too much emphasis on the "doing" rather than the "being". Jesus didn't say, "I do", He said "I am". It is not about what we do to be seen of men, or to make ourselves feel good that we are contributing to society. Our motivation

comes from our love for our Lord and our heart to do what pleases Him. Works born from a heart of love and knowing who we are in Christ are true treasures and have a lasting effect.

Paul indicated in his day there were those who should have matured enough to become teachers, yet for some reason they still needed to be taught. Their maturity level had not advanced. That is the way it is in too many of our assemblies today. We need to grow up! We need to mature. We need to be spiritual parents and feed our babies properly so they, too, can grow in maturity.

If we treated our natural babies the way most assemblies treat their spiritual babies, we'd be thrown in jail for child neglect and our children would be placed in homes where they would be loved and cared for and nourished. That is what God will do if we refuse to care for our spiritual babies. He will remove them and put them in houses where there are those who will properly care for them.

As believers mature in spiritual truths our prayers become less centered on our needs and more centered on the needs of those around us. We begin to pray for our pastors, our assemblies, our missionaries, and our government. Matthew 6:33 becomes a reality as we seek the Kingdom of God. As we take care of God's business here on earth we are establishing a Kingdom mindset. As a result God will take care of our business.

Growing up in the Lord is a process. It requires change. We must not expect that change in others and ourselves to happen overnight, but we must expect it to happen! God is looking for a mature Church. The bride is being prepared for her Bridegroom! He will not marry a child! We can no longer play games with the kingdom of darkness. It is time to mature and go to battle for the souls of countless men and women in all the nations of the earth.

The Strategies of God

Satan knows his time is short. Living the Kingdom life is serious business and it is going to require a people of maturity obeying their Master to defeat this enemy. We must have God's knowledge and wisdom to deal effectively with the tactics of this foe. We cannot do it in our own strength. We need the strategies of our God. The old methods and strategies will not work anymore. Each situation requires a different strategy. We must be able to hear the voice of our commander and obey what He tells us to do.

There is a wonderful illustration of this truth in I Samuel chapters 3-7. Chapter 3 ends saying that God was with Samuel as he grew up, and God let none of his words fall to the ground. It also says that all Israel recognized him as a prophet and that Samuel's words came to all Israel. Now Israel was hearing the voice of God again and they knew it. Samuel was a respected prophet in the land. Everyone from the north of the land to the south knew about him. They knew that everything he said came to pass exactly as he said it would.

During this time Israel was at war with the Philistines. What was God's plan for the Israelites to defeat their enemy? It doesn't look like anyone bothered to ask God. One day the Philistines attacked the Israeli camp and killed 4000 men. The question of the day was "*Why did God allow this*". Did anyone ask Him? They hadn't gone to God to hear His strategies for victory.

Instead they devised their own plan.

Their plan sounded good and very religious. They would take the Ark of the Covenant with them into battle. Surely that would be the will of God. God is for us, not against us. Who can stand against the covenant we have with God. Sound familiar? We do the same thing all the time in our assemblies. People seem to be leaving the assembly at a steady stream? What do we do? Most of the time we devise another wonderful religious program to try to draw them in to our place. Sometimes it even works for a season, but is it what God wants?

We often use our relationship with God to try to get what we want, to advance our kingdom. God is not in the business of advancing our kingdom. He is in the business of advancing His Kingdom in us, not for selfish reasons, but so that a whole world can know who He is and be blessed through those who realize who He is! If we want our assemblies to grow and prosper, they need to advance His Kingdom, His agenda, His strategy, not our own.

The Israelites marched forward into battle with the Ark of the Covenant with such a loud noise that the ground shook and brought fear to the enemy. But, it was not enough! The enemy knew they must fight for their lives. They feared retaliation. The Philistines had made slaves of the Israelites. What if they lost and the Jews made slaves of them? The enemy fought hard and killed 30,000 soldiers of Israel that day. They also captured the Ark of the Covenant and took it with them. The ark, the shout of God's people, and the fear that the shout created in the enemy was not enough to win this battle.

When the elders (the leaders and wise, mature ones) heard this, they asked *"Why did this happen? We are God's people, why didn't He fight for us today?"* They did not go to God to get His plans for winning. The ark represented God and His glory so surely taking it into battle assured their success, did it not? Because they did not consult with God, but went to battle on their own, the ark was captured and many men lost their lives that day.

Surely God is with us in our assemblies. After all, His name is on our door. He will bless us and our plans. We don't even ask God what His plans are for reaching our neighborhoods, cities, or states. We have our own ideas and so we try to back God into a corner and say because we have a covenant with Him, He has to provide for us. He has to fight our battles for us! So, we name it and claim it. We shout victory. And then we get frustrated and upset when it doesn't work. And we blame God.

After a while the Philistines could no longer stand the ark in their camps. It was causing all kinds of havoc in Philistine towns so they sent the ark back to Israel. Chapter 7 tells us some time had passed with the ark being in the town of Kiriath Jearim of Israel. The Jewish people began to seek after God. Samuel the prophet came to them with the strategy for defeating the Philistines. He told them to return to the Lord with all their hearts, rid themselves of foreign gods, commit themselves to God and serve Him only. Samuel gave them other instructions and they obeyed. Perhaps they had learned their lesson.

The Philistines came up to do battle and this time the Israelites were afraid. What God's people had tried in the past hadn't worked. How many of them would die this time? But this event would be different. They had the clear instruction from the Lord given to them by Samuel. He had been right before. They knew that this man was a godly prophet and heard directly from

the Lord. They had the right strategy. They were not attempting to do this in their own power and strength, so in spite of their fear they went to battle for the third time. This time the Lord thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and the Philistines panicked. The Israelites pursued their enemy and killed them that day.

We must hear and obey the battle plan from our Commander-in-chief for every battle we face. Our families depend on it. Our cities and our country depend on our knowing and obeying the will of the Lord. We can no longer assume whatever we do in the name of God, He will bless. We must seek His face. We must know His heart. We must prepare. We must shout when He says shout. We must be still when He says for us to be still.

Change is Coming to the Church

There are great changes ahead for the Church, the corporate body of Christ. God said there was coming a day when everything that could be shaken, would be shaken. We are living in that day. The economy of our country and the nations of the world are all very unstable right now. Even economists don't know what to do or what to expect. Large corporations are falling. The stock market expands one day and drops the next. Governments are established one day and torn down the next. Our theology is even being shaken.

This should not be frightening to us. This is a day when God is going to show favor once again to His people. Zion is the representation of the people of God who forsake all to advance His Kingdom. Zion is no longer going to be a city that is forsaken or a rejected bride. However, the people of Zion must allow God to shake them loose from the things that have held them in captivity. This is why God has for some time now been instructing His people to get out of debt. Debt binds us and holds us in captivity. It keeps us from doing the things God desires us to do.

In Proverbs 13:22 (NIV) we find **“A good person leaves an inheritance for their children’s children, but a sinner’s wealth is stored up for the righteous”**. God indicates that the wealth of the wicked is being stored up for the righteous, but it is not going to be given to just anyone. You cannot name it and claim it. The righteous are those who understand the heart of their God and know what is right and true in His heart.

This great wealth is for those who face every situation knowing what God would do to make right the injustices they see. It is only given to those who have allowed the Lord to mature them to the point they are totally dependent on Him and are willing to obey Him explicitly. It is only given to those who hear and understand His will, and choose to follow His ways and not their own way. They know and understand what righteousness is, and they judge the right path for them to walk according to the will and heart of the Father.

As noted earlier in this book, righteousness is our ability to know what is right according to the standard of God. God is always right and when we desire to follow Him in His righteousness, we have the ability to hear His voice and discern His ways. Then we can accept His righteousness as our own and walk the path He would walk if He were still here physically on the earth.

These are the people to which God is going to release the wealth of the wicked.

The bride will mature and come to the place where she has so fallen in love with her heavenly Bridegroom, that He has her full attention. Others will not draw her away from devotion to Him. She is getting ready, putting on the heavenly bridal dress in preparation for meeting her Lord. If He wants her to do something for Him, she does it with love and devotion, not whining and complaining. When this happens the bride and the Spirit of the living God are in unity of purpose.

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this message for the churches. I am both the source of David and the heir to his throne. I am the bright morning star." The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." Let anyone who hears this say, "Come." Let anyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who desires drink freely from the water of life. Revelation 22:16-17 (NLT)

There are four groups of people in the earth concerning the return of Jesus. First, there are those who think the return of Jesus to the earth is nothing more than a fairy tale. They mock and ridicule Christians who believe that He will return to the earth. Second, there are those who believe He is coming again, but would rather that He wait until they have had an opportunity to live life to the fullest. They want Him to wait until they are old, and then He can come. They want a chance to live life here on earth before this happens, so they want Him to wait.

Third, there are those who are crying out for Him to come, but they are doing so with the wrong motives. They are tired of fighting. They are tired of hurting. They are tired of all the sin and ugliness they see in this life they live on the earth, and so they want a release for their own benefit. Many of these people are angry with the way they have been treated and just want God's judgment upon the wicked. They want God to punish the wicked for the abuse of God's people.

But, there is a fourth group. Although this group is small in number right now, it is growing quickly. It is the remnant of overcomers. It is the remnant of mountain climbers. This group is longing for Him, with the passion of a lover separated from her beloved. These precious ones long to see His face. They long to be united with Him for eternity. But, they also desire His heart, which is that none would be lost, but all would come to repentance. So, out of their love for their Bridegroom, they work the harvest fields bringing others with them as they cry with the Spirit, "Come Lord Jesus for your bride."

As I was meditating on this, the Lord spoke to my spirit, and said, *"When the remnant, the bride, is complete and she is able to say in unity with the Spirit of God, 'Come, Lord, Jesus', she will have completed her walk down the aisle"*. He was silent for a moment as though to let that sink into my spirit and then He said, *"Don't you know, I won't keep My bride waiting at the altar"*.

We must examine our heart to see to which group we belong. There is much change that needs to come to the Church to prepare the bride to meet her Lord. God has not changed. The Bible has not changed, but our understanding and revelation of it has. God is restoring truths that have been hidden for centuries. The baptism of the Holy Spirit, God in us the hope of

glory, healing, prosperity, five-fold ministry gifts, these are all truths that have been in God's Word from the beginning, but for many centuries they were not understood.

God told Daniel to lock up secrets until the end of the age. There are things that have not been understood before which are being revealed in this hour. We must be sensitive to His voice and flexible. Many interpretations of scriptures that have come down through the ages have been man's attempt to understand God, without truly hearing His voice. Much has come from man's carnal nature rather than being a true revelation born from God's Spirit communicating with our spirit.

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. II Peter 1:20-21 (NIV)

The Bible states that scripture is not for our own interpretation. It was written by men who could hear and understand the Spirit of God. If we truly want to understand scripture, we must have a hearing ear and a relationship with our holy companion. He knows what He wrote. He knows what He meant when He spoke it through his prophets and He knows how to explain it.

God's word is like a treasure house. There is much more revelation in His word than we have thus far comprehended. There is so much hidden treasure that requires us to seek His face to find it. In Psalms 119:162 the psalmist declared that the Word of God brought great joy to his heart. It was like discovering a great treasure. Solomon penned in Proverbs 3 that in the Word of God were hidden treasures of wisdom and insight and we should search for them.

We quote I Corinthians 2:9 repeatedly to tell people that the things of God are very deep and hard to understand. Who can understand them since God is so big? How can we comprehend the greatness of God because He is far above humans? They go on to say that it is beyond our limited capability to understand why and how God does things. But, if you read the next verse, it says those deep things of God are revealed to us through the Holy Spirit.

When our spirit is reborn and comes alive, our spirit is able to communicate with the Holy Spirit. The Word says that God will reveal His secrets through the Holy Spirit to those who love and honor Him. The more you read His Word, the more you discover. With revelation comes a need for us to change, to mature. We must be flexible in this hour and have discerning hearts.

Human beings like stability and therefore we resist change. Despite our resistance to change, we, as God's children, should never fear change because we have the surest of stability in Jesus, the one who never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and forever and He is our anchor. Let us desire to be on the front lines of what our Commander-in-Chief is doing in this great hour. Let us embrace the change that is coming from Jesus in this time. Let us never be satisfied with the status quo. It is a great day to be alive!

CHAPTER 9 - OVERCOMERS ARE A PEOPLE OF PURPOSE

The LORD is the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You support my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me. I will bless the LORD who has counseled me; Indeed, my mind instructs me in the night. I have set the LORD continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will dwell securely. For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever. Psalm 16:5-11 (NASB)

An Assignment from Heaven

We have an assignment from heaven. The Hebrew word translated portion in this scripture means “*weighed out*” or “*a part that belongs*”. There is a portion of God’s overall plan for the earth that has been weighed out and given to you. It belongs to you and no one else. It has been assigned to you by the Master of the universe. It has lines drawn around it. In other words it has been given boundaries. This land promised to you is a pleasant place, a delightful and sweet place, a place to be desired.

Not only has God assigned us a portion with boundaries, He has also assigned us our cup. A cup is a container. Psalm 23:5 says that our cup overflows. There is a cup of goodies, of blessings, of tools that the Lord chooses to give to us. This cup has everything in it that we need to accomplish the tasks He has assigned to us in the portion of His plan He has designed for us. The Hebrew word for cup literally means “*to hold together*”.

There have been times in my life when I could see pieces of God’s plan for my life scattered across my vision like a huge disconnected jigsaw puzzle. I could not see how the pieces all fit together. God wants to take the puzzle pieces of your life and bring them together. He wants you to see clearly your assignment, your portion. He wants it to all come together and be held together with the glue of the Holy Spirit.

When the glue is applied the pieces are held together in their correct position and they are secure. They cannot be moved. He has made your lot secure. The only other place in scripture that mentions “*my lot*” is in Judges, chapter 1. Joshua, the great leader of the Jews after Moses, had just died. He had led the tribes of Israel into the Promised Land. Under the leadership of Joshua, one by one the tribes had fought to inherit the land promised to them by God.

However, there were still two tribes, Judah and Simeon, which had not yet inherited their portion of the promise land. So with Joshua no longer there to lead the Israelites they inquire of God as to which tribe should go to war against the Canaanites. God told them that Judah should go because the land where the Canaanites were living was the land that belonged to Judah. The tribe of Judah asked their brothers from the tribe of Simeon to go with them to

claim their lot. In return Judah would go up with the tribe of Simeon when it was their turn to take their land. In other translations the word “*lot*” is translated as “*territory*”.

God has made your territory, your lot, secure. The word used in the King James version of the Bible for secure is “*maintain*”. Your territory is marked out and is held fast by God. It is maintained by God and no one can take it away from you, if you do not let them. The call is without repentance. God is not sorry that He called you to be somebody and to do something. He planned your life and purpose even before you were born. That plan is secure in Him. Just as God told the tribe of Judah to go up and take the land that belonged to them, He is telling you and me to go up and take the land that He has given to us.

God is giving the land allotted to us into our hands, but the enemy is trying to keep us from possessing that land. The enemy does that in several ways. One way is to keep us guessing about what our territory is. Often He tries to convince us that someone else’s territory actually belongs to us. We need to find out what territory God is giving to us. It has boundaries. Often we cross over into someone else’s territory because we do not see our boundaries. We need to know what our portion of His plan is. How do we know what is our portion? How do we know where the boundaries are?

This scripture in Psalms at the beginning of this chapter says that the Lord counsels us. Even at night our heart or spirit instructs us. The Lord will make known to us the path of life. David says that he keeps the Lord before him all the time. We must walk close to Him every day. We must spend quality time with Him. We need desperately to learn to hear the voice of the Lord and to be obedient to His voice.

According to Psalm 25:12 God instructs those who fear Him in the way that He has chosen for them. We need to learn what it means to fear the Lord. To fear God means we have reverence for our God. It implies that our love is so great for Him, that we fear doing anything that would displease Him. In our heart of hearts, we want nothing more than to do His will in His way and to honor Him. It is all about love and obedience, two ingredients of being a successful overcomer, the theme of this book.

Jesus said that He is the way, the truth and the life. He is the path of life for us. If we move away from Him we miss the way He has chosen for us, and we go down a wrong path. Sometimes the wrong path runs so parallel to God’s path that it is often hard to notice that we are no longer following Him. Eventually that path will move us into a land of lies and misinformation and death. When we move away from God’s purposes for us and His direction in our lives it results certainly in death of dreams and visions, death of purpose in our lives. If we want to enter in to His plan for our life, we must stay close to Him, hear His voice and at all costs, be obedient to what He says.

Run the Race

When a person understands in their spirit that they have an assignment from heaven, suddenly they become alive. They have purpose. They can begin to set goals. The definition of the word purpose indicates that there is something to be reached for or accomplished. When a person decides that

“something” is for them, they suddenly have expectations. They have a reason to live. Paul tells us that life is a race or a course that has been set before us. This course is there by God's design. It is our portion, our assignment.

Before you were even born, God designed you with a purpose in mind. He filled your cup with talents and abilities and laid out a plan for your life. So many people travel through life wondering why they are even here. Just like an Olympic runner has a particular lane to run in on the running track, every runner in the track of life has a lane in which to run. So many people either run on the wrong track because they don't understand they have a purpose for being born on the earth, or they do not stay in the lane designated specifically for them because they don't have a clear understanding of their portion and their boundaries. They don't understand what is in the heart of God for them, because they have never taken the time to consult with Him.

Our primary calling in the earth is to get to know God and to love Him. The goal, the finished product, is for you to look and act like Jesus. The only way for that to happen is for you to really love God with all your heart, soul, mind and body. Only then can you really touch lives around you. Our first and primary ministry is to minister to our precious Lord. Only then are we positioned to minister for Him.

Your inheritance is the place where God has designed for you to operate in the fullness of Christ in the earth. It is the place where you use your gifts and talents to represent Jesus to the people around you. It might be a full-time ministry position or it might not be. It might be a position in your local company. It might be as an owner of a small business. Maybe your promised land is the land of teaching in school, or coaching sports for the youth, or ministering to older people in a retirement home. Whatever or wherever it is, God has given you the tools you need to be the best at whatever He has planned for you.

Many people go through life with the attitude of whatever will be, will be because they do not understand the will of the Father to give them an inheritance. They go through life doing nothing because they have no goals to obtain an inheritance they know nothing about and therefore see no reason to run. If our eyes could be opened to see what God has designed for us and to see the territory He desires to give us, we would run. We would not let anything detain us from our inheritance on this earth.

Paul and many others were ready to lay down their lives for the track that God had set before them to run. When they saw what waited for them, they ran the race with gladness and fortitude. They stayed in the lane that was allotted to them. They knew their boundaries. They saw where they were going and the purpose for which they were running.

We, too, need to become a people of purpose. We need to see the plan of God for our lives and go after it with every fiber of our being. We need to become a people willing to lay down our lives for the sake of the call that is on our lives. That call is to be like Jesus and represent Him accurately in the earth. Wherever He calls us to fulfill that destiny, it is a pleasant and delightful land, an awesome inheritance.

Too many people think in order to serve God they must be in full-time ministry serving in some capacity within a worship center or Christian organization. That is why there are so many frustrated Christians who do not know where they belong. They spend a life time waiting for someone in

leadership to recognize the gift of God in them and to find a place for them within the organization.

Few people realize ministry is not about what you do, but rather who you are. If God has called you as a prophet or a teacher, you don't turn that gift on when you enter a building on Sunday morning and then turn it off when you leave. No, you are a prophet, or a teacher, or an apostle or whatever because that is who you are, not what you do. You are who you are wherever you go, and whenever you go.

Paul, through the Spirit of God, declared the five-fold ministry gifts were given to the Church. The Church is not a building, but a people. If you are called as apostle, prophet, evangelist, teacher, or pastor, you can fulfill that calling in any place God places you. You can fulfill it in the classroom, in your place of business, on the streets or in your home.

We need to get our eyes off who we are in ourselves, and get them on Jesus and who He is in us. Wherever there are people, and you are there with them, you are there in the capacity of a minister of the gospel. Just follow Jesus wherever He takes you and everything will begin to fall into place. Do not sit on your blessed assurance and wait for someone else to point the way.

Scripture says that your gift will make room for you. People interpret this to mean, that my leadership will eventually see who I am and make a place for me. It doesn't mean that at all. It means that you should start using that gift wherever you are with the people God puts in your path, and your gift will work to accomplish what God desires to accomplish in the lives around you.

Lay Aside the Weights

If we are to become a people of purpose we must work hand in hand with God. In Hebrews 12 we are told to lay aside those things that hinder us, to take off the sins that easily beset us. Life is pictured as a racetrack with many watching us. We are told to keep our eyes on the goal, which is our Lord, who ran the race before us and finished it. He is our example. Who is it that runs a race and gets sidetracked? Can you imagine such a thing in a high school track meet? Of course not! We should be as focused on our life and reaching the goal as these athletes are in finishing and winning a race for their school.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Hebrews 12:1-2 (NLT)

Some people I know were hiking in the mountains of Wyoming one time. They were having lots of fun and enjoying the outdoors. When one of the friends wasn't watching, the other two placed a couple of good size rocks in his backpack. When these guys were ready to go hiking, they put on their

backpacks. The one carrying the rocks thought it felt heavier than usual, but perhaps he just was not yet accustomed to carrying the backpack on his back. Maybe he had just grown weak since the last time he had hiked in the mountains. As time went on he began to feel like something was wrong. It shouldn't be that heavy. It was then he discovered those rocks, while his friends laughed.

Many Christians are carrying rocks of sin or just normal everyday care around not realizing it is impeding their progress. They don't understand what is hindering the running of their spiritual race. They have been wearing the rocks for so long that they aren't even aware of them, but these rocks are preventing them from running the race to the best of their ability. What a freedom we would have to run, if we would discover those things hindering our progress and holding us back from God's best for us. If only we would be willing to lay them aside. The exuberance we would feel would be profound. It would be so much easier to run the race.

These rocks can represent many different things. They can represent good things that we are doing that aren't really a part of God's plan for us. These activities keep us busy, but frustrate us as well. The rocks can also represent habits. How many of us have tried to overcome habits by ourselves, only to fail time and time again? We cannot overcome these things in our own power. Neither will God cause us to overcome them against our own will. We must desire to be set free. The power in the blood of the Lamb and the power of our confession of His Word in faith will work together to overcome these hindrances and cast off the weight of these rocks.

They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Revelation 12:11 (NIV)

We must come to the place where we realize who Christ is in us. We must realize we are nothing without Him, but with Him we are everything. We must find our place in the body of Christ. We must throw off anything that hinders us. We must be free!

The General and Specific Will of God

Once we realize that we were not randomly born on this earth and that we have a purpose, we seem to struggle to find out what that purpose is. We go to the local assembly searching for answers. Unfortunately, many leaders are looking for those who can help them achieve their own vision, versus helping individuals see what God has planned for each individual person's life.

The general will of God is so simple. It is simply that we become like Jesus and do the works that He did when He walked the earth. We should be walking the earth in whatever place He has placed us looking for where there are injustices. That is what Jesus did. Wherever there were things happening that did not line up with the Word of God, He would look into His Father's heart and listen to His voice to see how God wanted to correct that situation.

That is our purpose as well. We must access the mind of Christ which is

available to us to determine what is right in God's eyes concerning that injustice that we see. That is called judging the situation. Then we apply what is right to that situation and bring justice to right the injustice through the tools and gifts that have been given to us by the Spirit of God. This is the general will of God for all believers and we can be accomplishing this on a daily basis wherever we are.

But, where do we do these things and what gifts do we use? That part is harder to determine and is specific to an individual. Are you supposed to be a writer, a nurse, a teacher, an engineer, an attorney? Wherever God wants you to serve Him, it will be a place that uses your talents, your gifts, and your knowledge and is something that you will enjoy.

So many times, God's people tend to think that if they are to serve God they have to find their position in the assembly where they attend on a weekly basis. Serving God and being what He has called you to be, have nothing to do with the place you worship. It has everything to do with who you are. And who you are is the same whether you are in a building, in a field, in a store, or wherever.

Spend time with God and you will know what He has for you in His heart. He is the one who created you and gave you all the talents and gifts that you need to do what He wants you to do. Your goal is to become like Jesus in whatever capacity He has assigned to you.

The general plan of God is really the most important place to focus our attention. As we concentrate on getting to know and love our God, the easier it is to see His will for our lives. The general purpose in God's plan for our life is to move toward the goal line, which is becoming like our Lord. What steps do I take, so that the image people see when they look at me is the image of Jesus?

Those who spend time with Jesus, become like Him. There is no changing into His image without meeting with Him face-to-face. Communing with Him every day lets you begin to know and understand His heart. We then can begin to feel the love He has for all of mankind.

Thousands in the kingdom are so busy doing what they perceive to be the will of God, attending all the weekly meetings in the assembly, attending to all the needs of the assembly assigned to them, and doing whatever leadership demands of them that they don't have time or energy to spare when God gives them information about His specific will.

We must learn to hear His voice. If He has not spoken specifically to you about a certain direction, begin to do the general will of God and let His peace direct you. Learn to recognize when peace is not there.

Jesus told His disciples to go and spread the gospel, basically by walking the earth and righting any injustices they saw. They healed the sick, casted out demons, met the needs of widows, orphans, and the poor. They proclaimed the precious love of Jesus wherever they went. Jesus showed them the way. He did not go to the temple and wait for the people to come to Him there.

Prayer and communion with our God is the key to everything. Before giving an answer to a position offered to you, take it before the Lord and let His peace direct you. If you don't have peace then it should not be pursued even if someone is telling you that you are the perfect one for the position. Even if what is being offered is a good thing, it just might not be in the perfect will of God for you. God has a purpose for us, and a lot of the places we choose to work, or

play, God uses as training ground. So the key is praying about everything and then letting the peace of the Spirit of God lead you, so you understand if the current situation will hinder or advance you toward your ultimate goal.

Sometimes we look at an opportunity as not something we would enjoy or be good at doing. We might be tempted to just go a different direction. Often our soul or our mind will reject something that God intends as training ground for us. We must seek the heart of God always. Many opportunities planned by God have been rejected because we haven't learned to discern His will and His heart. Some have been missed as blessed training ground because we judged the task as being below us.

Nothing must deter us from fulfilling God's plan for our lives, either the general will or the specific will. So many times we feel like we are on a racetrack with no finish line. Round and round we go, day after day, in the same old rut. We need to have purpose and strive for the goal. The goal is to become like Jesus, so that others will desire to be like Him and finish their race victoriously as well. We must raise our eyes so we can see the finish line.

God's Treasure

"For iron I'll give you silver, and for brass I'll give you gold." As we sang these words in praise and worship one Sunday night, God spoke quietly to my spirit, "Do you know where my treasure is?" Remembering a scripture I had just been reading in Isaiah, I replied, "Your word says that your treasure is hidden". "Do you want to know where it is hidden?" He challenged me. Of course, I wanted to know where it was hidden. There was silence for a long moment and then He quietly said, "It is hidden in My people and I am calling you to go and mine it, dig it out of darkness and bring it into the light".

"It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'" Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed, Whom I have taken by the right hand, To subdue nations before him And to loose the loins of kings; To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: "I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars. "I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden wealth of secret places, So that you may know that it is I, The LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name. Isaiah 44:28-45:3 (NASB)

Cyrus was the king of the Mede/Persian Empire. Not only did he widely expand his kingdom to become the largest empire the world had seen up to that time, but he overthrew the fierce Babylonian Empire which was thought to be invincible. Cyrus ruled the known world at the time. The Babylonian Empire had previously taken the Jews captive.

It was Cyrus, a non-Jewish king, who encouraged the Jews to return to their land and rebuild the temple. Notice in this scripture God calls Cyrus His servant, His anointed one. Cyrus was not a Jew, yet he was used by God for the purposes of God.

Cyrus is a type of the Apostolic anointing, conquering Babylon, leading the people of God out and restoring them to their own land. Babylon represents religion and self-reliance. We must break out of all of our religious activity and traditions and return to our God. The temple of God must be restructured, rebuilt, but this time it is the Master Builder who is building it on the foundation of the prophets and the apostles and Jesus as the chief cornerstone. We are the living stones that are being put in place to create this magnificent temple of our God.

According to God's Word we are living in the times of the Gentiles. God has a prophetic people in the earth today whose heart is crying out for Jerusalem, the city of God, to be rebuilt, for the foundations of the temple to be laid. Under the new covenant, we are the temple of God. God is building a temple out of living stones and we are those stones. However, God's temple, the Church, has been in ruins for many centuries.

God desires to rebuild this temple and to lay a solid foundation under her, and so He is placing on the hearts of His people a cry for restoration. The restoration of the prophet and the apostle ministries is also critical and essential to the success of the rebuilding process. In their hearts, placed there by God, are the blueprints for what they see in the very Heart of the Father.

God is doing a work in His Church today. As He tells Cyrus, He will open the doors for this people, doors that no one can shut. Those who have seen the magnificent structure that the Lord is building, and feel the heartbeat of the desire of the Master for His bride to make herself ready, call out day and night for restoration and they will not be stopped. This army is ready to follow their Commander into battle for the souls of men, women and children. Jesus goes before them and prepares the way. He breaks down the gates of bronze and the bars of iron.

Brass and Iron

Bronze or brass represents judgment. When there is a sky of brass above us, our prayers are hindered. According to the book of Deuteronomy, this is a curse. God said judgment would come first to the house of God and it has come and will continue to come. Judgment is intended for us to know and understand what is right in God's eyes and then adjust our direction. When we repent of going the wrong direction, we are adjusting our path to follow the Lord in the direction He would lead.

God shows us where we have missed the mark (judgment) and what to do to fix it (righteousness) and then we adjust our ways to match His ways (repentance). He wants a people willing to go from glory to glory changing into the image of God's dear Son so we can influence and set many people free. Only as we become more like Him will our promised land be a place of blessing rather than a weight around our neck.

We need desperately to lay aside those things that keep us from entering into God's best for us. God tells us in I Corinthians 11:31, 32 we should judge ourselves so that He would not have to judge us. Let's repent and move on with doing the Lord's business. God says that He is going to break down the gates of judgment, so that we can move forward. We do not want to be hindered anymore from advancing the Kingdom of our glorious Lord.

Iron represents barrenness. Christians in the United States for the most part have been spiritually barren for many years. People don't want to hear about God. It takes a lot of effort to win a few to the Lord. In other countries, you can stand on a street corner and give your testimony and many will cry out for God. Not in the United States. God says He is going to remove the barrenness of this end-time Church all over the world. Every nation will see His glory. The Church of the Living God will shine forth His glory for all to see. She is going to have fruit. She is going to reproduce.

He will give her (the Church) the treasures of darkness and riches stored in secret places. For centuries, ordinary Christians had no idea of the plan God had for their lives. They had no idea of the gifts He had given them, or what their function was in the body of Christ. Can you imagine - an eye not knowing that it was made to have vision, or an ear not knowing that it was made to hear and interpret sound? That seems absurd! But that is the way the Church has been. God desires a people who know what He is calling them to be and what He is telling them to do. God is looking for buried treasure.

The natural treasures of the earth lie buried. Pearls lie hidden from view inside of oysters. Gold is not found lying in the streets, but is hidden in rock. Diamonds, too, are hidden from view as are most precious stones. Once these precious treasures have been discovered, there is a process that must be applied to them before their beauty and value can be appreciated. They must go through a refining process.

We are all born with a great treasure planted inside of us, but it, like natural treasure, is hidden. Many people go through life never discovering the treasure that is within them. Even after that treasure is discovered, it must be refined and polished before it can be truly appreciated. God is saying to His leaders that He wants this treasure, hidden in His end time Church, to be discovered. He wants them to know that it is He that has done this and He has called them each by name. Hallelujah! What a God we serve.

He has put His treasure in you. And He wants it to be discovered. Talent scouts are out looking for hidden talent in people. They hope that they might be the one to discover the next great movie star or sports figure. We ought to have talent scouts helping God's people discover their treasure, not for the purpose of making super stars, but so God's purposes might be accomplished in the earth through His people. He will do the work to refine it and polish it, but He doesn't want the treasure to be hidden. We are His treasure, His prized possession.

Leadership and God's Treasure

Today our assemblies are filled with people who seem to have no purpose in life. Day after day they go to work with little or no plan for tomorrow. Attending a place of worship has become a ritual, a habit. They attend because they feel it is the right thing to do, as though they are doing God a favor. Most do not attend thinking about what their gifts and talents are and how they could be used by God to touch others.

Even most pastors would have a hard time understanding what the callings and gifts or even the abilities of the people they shepherd are. This is not meant as a word of condemnation, but rather a challenge for each of us to find our purpose for being and to help others find theirs. If God has designated

you to be a leader of His people, I challenge you to seek God's face so you might help His precious sheep find their place.

In the first century A.D. as leaders prayed, the Holy Spirit instructed them to set apart Barnabas and Paul for the work God had for them. The Holy Spirit revealed His plan and purposes for these men's lives at this particular time to them and their leaders. You do not need to wait to hear from leadership what your call is. God's people can and should hear the voice of their Shepherd for themselves. You do not need someone to validate your ministry in order for you to do what God has called you to do.

God is the one who calls you and sets you apart. Trust Him to make His ways known to you. Many times God will test you to see if you are willing to follow Him and do what He tells you to do, even if others do not believe. If there is peace in your heart and you are seeking with all your heart to know God's will He will direct you in the right direction.

Leaders who see and hear from their Master can build your confidence in what you are hearing from your Lord and He will direct them to you in due time. Many have walked away discouraged because a leader could not see the call on their lives. If this happens to you, do not be discouraged. If the call is real, God will have His way in your life. Pursue Him and it will all fall into place in His way and His timing.

Jesus spent all night praying before He selected His twelve disciples. He knew what was in their hearts. By the outward appearance, it would seem to a lot of people that Jesus had made the wrong choice. What a motley group of rejects! But, Jesus knew them by the Spirit.

Leaders have overlooked many of God's chosen ones in days past because these chosen ones did not look or act the part. They were diamonds in the rough with no one to recognize them, no one to pull them out of the dirt and polish them. This must change. We must know the people by the Holy Spirit, not by outward appearance.

In Old Testament times, the Israelites wanted a king like the nations around them. God let them choose and they chose a man's man, tall and handsome. He ruled from his head and not his heart. He did not rule from a heart of love and obedience concerning God. When the prophet went to the house of Jesse to find the new king, he expected it to be the oldest son. But, God's choice was not what man expected. The same is true today.

Christian leadership in the past generally has not functioned very well in their role of "equipping the saints for the work of the ministry". In the dark ages, the common parishioner could not even read the scripture, because Christian leadership felt the common person might misinterpret scripture. The assembly might then be in a position to be embarrassed by the actions of the person who according to them has error in their doctrine.

Even today, there is still much of this religious spirit in our assemblies. These gifts of apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher and evangelist were given to the Church to prepare the living stones. The Church is a people, not a building, organization, or local assembly. People can be equipped wherever there is a way or a will.

Too many assemblies, in order to control things, demand that everything must be done through the local assembly. This is nothing more than a religious spirit that seeks to keep the people of God bound and controlled. The Church is

a spiritual entity not a physical entity. Anywhere there is more than one person gathered in the name of the Lord, He is there. The Church is there. Hallelujah!

There is such a stirring in God's people today to find their place. They are no longer satisfied with sitting in the pew. They want to teach, they want to preach, they want to lay hands on the sick, and they want to minister life to people. Many leaders don't know what to do with this, so they try to put a clamp on it. They tell the people just bring your friends into the local assembly and we will take care of them. This has caused many frustrated pastors and many frustrated Christians.

Many of God's people do not realize that He is preparing His people for the harvest that has already begun. There are not enough pastors and leaders to handle the influx of people who will soon fill our streets, our homes, and our businesses desiring to know more about Jesus. We must let the people go.

Leadership is afraid to turn the people loose, so they try to control them by telling them to bring the people into the local assembly building. In that way leadership can make sure everything is done correctly and in order with no mistakes. They can make sure the teachings align with their particular brand of theology. This is contrary to what Jesus taught. Jesus said to go and do.

Leaders instruct the people to bring their sick, their unsaved loved ones to the gathering place, instead of teaching them to judge situations and apply righteousness wherever they are. We are to go and minister to the people wherever they are. We the people are to do this and leaders are supposed to prepare us to be able to hear the voice of God and know what He wants us to minister to others in any situation we face any day of the week.

We must stop hindering God's people from finding their purpose and we must begin to help them find their place in this mighty army. We must work with them and train them to become the mature overcomers that God has called them to be. Then we must set them free to go, preach, heal, and be all they can be in God's army.

Performance Mentality

Control and manipulation reign in many assemblies today, although few recognize it. Many people are put into situations where they must perform. They are told to prophesy when the Lord has not spoken anything. Others are forbidden from speaking because they are not polished enough, or experienced enough. Many are looking for a father or a mother to accept them and recognize them. Then, hopefully if they wait long enough, and serve long enough the father or mother might give them a promotion.

It saddens my heart to see this waste of lives. A true spiritual father or mother desires more than anything to see their child excel and become all God has called them to be. Their desire is for the child to mature and be better than they are and accomplish more, not worried about completion from their spiritual offspring!

Keeping people from being what God has called them to be is nothing more than a religious spirit working to keep God's people in bondage. Scripture says that it is God who promotes. It is God who calls. It is God who puts the gifts and anointing inside of you. It is God who approves of you. You don't need

man's approval.

That doesn't mean that there aren't good leaders who have walked with God and can give you good advice. It doesn't mean that there aren't good spiritual fathers and mothers there for you. There are and we should take advantage of their wisdom. But, today they are hard to find. I pray that many who read the words on these pages will be challenged to mature into a godly spiritual father or mother to help those with an orphan spirit to be set free.

If we cannot find such a spiritual father or mother, we should not let it hinder our progress when God is tugging at our hearts to move, to go into action. Go forth with boldness and use your gifts and walk in the anointing of your Father God. You don't need a building that is called a church, you are the Church. Wherever you go, wherever you are, you are in the anointing and the gifts go with you.

There is another reason for God's people not knowing or fulfilling their call. We have denied the existence of the apostolic and prophetic callings. We have not allowed these gifts to be resident in our assemblies to help establish. Even in places where these gifts are resident, we have not allowed them to function properly.

We need to recognize the gifts that Jesus has given to the Church. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to individuals, but Jesus has given the gift of five-fold ministries to the Church. He has given these ministry gifts, not to a physical building but to His living stones that make up His invisible building which is the true Church.

The apostolic and prophetic gifts have the ability to recognize the callings and gifts of God's people. They can set apart and establish by the laying on of hands. They can provide mentorship in developing ministry gifts. These things should be taking place on a regular basis in our local assemblies. But, that is not the only place these things should be occurring. If I am a prophet my desire should be that every person learns how to hear from the Lord and prophesy to others. If I am a teacher, I should desire that others learn how to express their faith in ways that will draw others to the Lord no matter where they are.

We want to be able to prophesy in the assembly, but there is something of much greater value in the Kingdom. When you are dealing with someone at work, or at school that has a problem that they cannot solve, wouldn't it be great if you got an answer from God for them and their situation?

They don't know what to do. You begin to pray and the Lord says "*Tell them this*". Then you open your mouth and you prophesy to them and it is exactly what they need. You do not turn these things on when you enter a local assembly and then shut them off when you walk out the door. It is not about what you are capable of doing it is about who you are. And you are who you are, wherever you are because God is inside of you!

Our assemblies should be like greenhouses, where young plants can be cared for and nourished. We need to provide a place where Christians can be called and trained and gain the experience they need to operate in their gifts and callings without the fear of failure. We need a place where we can keep these young plants from losing their bud, because they have tried to blossom too early.

A place must be provided where they can learn to use their gifts while they develop character, a place where they don't feel threatened, but secure.

Gifts are not playthings for having fun. They are tools for building the Kingdom of God. They are important. Have you ever tried to build a house without a hammer?

In an assembly I once attended a man was placed in a position of teaching Sunday school for a group of junior boys. He had very little training or experience for this position. However, it was obvious that he had a desire and a gift for teaching. One Sunday morning the boys were unusually rowdy. This man decided to discipline them by keeping them after class. The morning service had already begun when he released the boys.

This action was not satisfactory to the leadership or the parents and he was immediately reprimanded and released from the position. He was given no other explanation than "*you should have known better*". There was no room for gaining experience or receiving training. There was no spiritual father or mother to step in and tell him "*it's ok*". No one was there to put their arms around his shoulders and help him, only those ready to throw the stones.

We place people in positions and expect them to perform to perfection from the first moment they are on the job. We set them up for failure. We have the mentality that if God called them or gifted them, they should automatically know what to do. This is just not the case and in fact, is a very dangerous practice in the assembly.

We need to provide an environment where people can be mentored, taught, and disciplined, not punished and terminated. If Jesus had discharged His disciples the minute they made a mistake, He wouldn't have had any disciples left. They had three years of training with the Master and they still didn't get it right all the time. Can we expect to be any better?

Our Position in the Army

The prophet Joel described a great and mighty army, beyond number, that he could see with his spiritual eyes. The Lord was leading this great army. Every member obeyed His every command. They all marched in perfect alignment, none breaking stride or getting in the way of another. We are that army, but in order for us to function in this way, we must know our place in God's plan. Jealousy of position will have no place in this army. Everyone gets their marching orders from the Commander-in-Chief, and they obey Him explicitly.

We lay aside our rights and our desire to march to a different drum and we take up His cause. We must mature and not be like James and John arguing over who would sit in a position of authority next to Jesus when He came into His Kingdom. Jesus is the one who writes our job descriptions, who places us in the right position, and only Him. We are all called to be servants to others. The higher the level of authority granted to us, the more we have proven our willingness to serve the Master and the ones He loves.

Today in our society, we hear so much about individual rights. The cry "*My rights are being violated*" is heard all across the country. "*It's my right to do what I want with my body*". In the eyes of the world, this cry justifies abortion and the killing of many innocent babies. "*I have a right not to have to hear a prayer said in school or to see the Ten Commandments on a bulletin board.*" My rights

- my rights, that's all we hear.

Personal rights are not all bad. Our nation was founded on the premise that we all have certain inalienable rights granted by our Creator that should never be denied, and this has made our nation great. But in recent years, we have heard so much about personal rights that we've lost our concern for others. God has called His children, who are sons and daughters and not slaves anymore, to still have a servant's heart and to esteem others greater than themselves.

Philippians 2:3,4 (NLT) says **"Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too."** A person's rights, apart from God and His Word, are not rights at all.

When we were children of darkness, we were slaves to sin. We were in bondage and our rights were being violated. When we were born again, we were adopted into God's family with all the rights and privileges of a first-born son. Paul said in Galatians 4:7, (NLT) **"Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir."** And yet Paul opens his letter to the Romans saying that he is a servant of Jesus Christ. Although he was a son, he elected to lay down his own will and desires and be subject to the will and desires of his Lord and Master, Jesus.

There is a beautiful Old Testament illustration of this in Exodus chapter 21. A servant who was purchased was to serve the master for six years, but in the seventh year he was to be set free. But if at the time the servant was to be released he declared that he loved his master and did not want to be set free, he could have his ear pierced through with an awl. By doing this the servant declared to everyone that he was the master's slave for life. Jesus has set us free from slavery, but if we love Him enough, we will lay down our lives and die to our self-interests so that He can live through us. It is a lifetime decision - no turning back, but it is ultimate freedom and joy.

God's Heroes

The true heroes of the Bible were those who laid down their lives willingly for the Lord. They were not coerced but out of a love for their God, they lived for Him alone. Let's look at David before he was king, for example. Saul, who was the king at the time wanted to kill David, yet David had done nothing to deserve this treatment. Saul knew that David had been chosen to become the next king. He knew that the anointing had left him and had been given to David.

Saul was so jealous and angry he sought to kill David. David ran from Saul on multiple occasions. Even though Saul would have taken David's life if he could have, David would not hurt Saul. One time Saul entered a cave where David and his men were hiding. David would bring no harm to the king because he knew the will of God and obedience was far better than revenge. David could choose. He was close enough that he could have taken Saul's life in a brief moment. This was a test in David's life. Could God trust him to be obedient even in the toughest of situations?

Jeremiah was another man who chose to be obedient to God even when it hurt. Jeremiah was a prophet in Old Testament times and for some reason

God did not permit him to marry. He carried message after message from God to the Israelites, but they rejected them all. Now that is rejection! No matter how many times the people were angry with him and would not listen to him, if God spoke, Jeremiah delivered!

On several occasions he was put in the dungeon because leadership did not like the words he spoke to them. One time they lowered him into a cistern that had no water, but was full of mud. He was left there for some time in those uncomfortable surroundings. And yet he would not stop delivering the word of the Lord to God's people. He laid down his life and his own will to do what his Father asked of him. He was a hero and an example to us. Obedience will cost us much, but it also will also bring us into our own promised land.

In Jeremiah, chapter 20, verses 8 and 9 (NIV), Jeremiah declared, **"Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak anymore in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot."**

Jeremiah chose to obey the Lord even though it was not easy. He was a hero in the kingdom of God. We need heroes in the body of Christ again. We don't need fancy shows and dramatic acts and gigantic followings. There is a difference between celebrities and heroes. I am talking about true heroes who are not afraid to say, *"Thus saith the Lord"*, even when it isn't popular. We need men and women who will be obedient, no matter what man thinks or does. We don't need political correctness. We need those who will hear the voice of the Father and obey Him, no matter what the cost.

In this hour there are going to be people so sold out to God that they will place their lives on the altar. We have seen many martyrs for the cause of Christ since the Church began. We are still seeing them in parts of the world today. We will see many martyrs in this hour of the Church. These martyrs will know their God and just like Jesus did, time and time again they will miraculously escape harm and death because their time is not yet. But when the time is come, it won't be the avengers who take their lives. It will be obvious to all that the martyr is giving his or her life for the sake of the gospel. Each event like that will draw multitudes to Jesus. Jesus will not waste the blood of His precious ones.

A Hero in a Dream

A few years ago I had a dream. It took place on foreign soil. I saw a woman tied to a stake and a fire being lit around her. There were hundreds of people watching and hurling insults at her. *"Where is your God now? Why does He not come to rescue you?"* She spoke not a word. Even as the flames grew higher and higher, not a cry escaped her mouth. Suddenly all were aware that even though the flames were massive, she was not burning in the flames. A holy hush went over that place. As all eyes were fixed upon her, she walked out of the fire.

She had not been harmed in any way. She spoke in a voice so filled with peace that all were amazed. She told them that they did not have the authority or power to take her life. She belonged to Jesus. She spoke to them about Jesus and when she had completed her message to them, she told them how

much Jesus loved them and that He had given His life for them. It was not the Jews that had killed her Savior. He had willingly laid down His life for them.

Then she told these people that because Jesus loved them, she also loved them and she would do anything to show them that Jesus was real. She said she would therefore give her life to prove that Jesus was real. She stepped back into the fire and was immediately consumed by the flames.

Everyone there fell to their knees and cried out to God. There were those in the crowd who were Christians, but had been silent out of fear of the same fate. They could hold back no longer and they began to minister to the crowd. Even though this was a dream, I believe incidents like this could very well happen in the days ahead, and may already be happening.

All of the original apostles were martyred, except for John, the beloved. When I first came into full gospel circles, I remember being told that these early disciples were martyred because they didn't have enough faith to trust God to rescue them. Somehow, we have allowed pride to convince us that we, as the last day Church are superior to the early Church. God will resist the proud.

Yes, the glory on this latter house will be greater by God's design, but that doesn't make us better than our first century brothers and sisters. What a dishonor we have done to these precious ones of God by believing these lies. The Bible says in Revelation 18:24 (NLT) speaking of Babylon, **"In your streets flowed the blood of the prophets and of God's holy people and the blood of people slaughtered all over the world."** There will be those who literally lay their lives on the altar for God in these last days. These are among the true heroes of the faith.

Notice this scripture is talking about Babylon not Egypt. Egypt represents the world, or non-believers. Babylon represents religion. It represents the worship of man or self. It is a substitute for true worship of our Lord. Many of our church organizations are more in Babylon than in the Kingdom of God. There is a cry for God's people to come out of Babylon. Leave religion behind and seek relationship with the God of the universe.

We need heroes with commitment. Wycliffe had a conviction that all men should be able to read the Bible in their own language. He was labeled a heretic for that conviction, but because of his commitment we have the Bible in hundreds of languages and dialects today. Oh, that we would have a conviction to see a worldwide harvest in our day. We would be committed to do whatever it takes to make it happen! Prayer would become a higher priority than sitting in front of a television or computer screen.

If we were to have a strong conviction that the Bible is true and it belongs to us, we would suddenly find what a treasure it is. We would not think of starting the day without reading it. Through those precious pages we would become hungry for our God again. We would pursue with haste getting to know our God intimately and then we would do exploits like Daniel said we would.

It takes a lot more than just knowing about God to live a Kingdom life. It takes having an intimate relationship with Him, where He knows your thoughts and you know His and you act as one. Nothing, then, would deter us from finding our purpose and then fulfilling it. We would gladly run the race that has been set before us, knowing that we will win if we do not give up. We would obey Him at all costs. Will you decide to be one of the heroes of the Church in this age? Be a person of purpose. Go for the gold.

CHAPTER 10 - OVERCOMERS RELY ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:4-5 (NIV)

The Holy Spirit is so important that Jesus, when He was getting ready to return to heaven, commanded His disciples not to do anything until the Holy Spirit came to them. They were not to go and do the works of Jesus. They were not to leave the city. They were not to be ministers of the gospel until they had received the power that could only come through the Holy Spirit. So, they waited in Jerusalem as Jesus had commanded them.

**The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off -
- for all whom the Lord our God will call. Acts 2:39 (NIV)**

The promise is to us today and for our children as well. What is the promise? It is a gift so valuable and precious that Jesus said not to leave Jerusalem until the promise from the Father had come to them. It isn't about what the gift is, but who is the gift! The promised gift to those who waited in Jerusalem was a personal companion, the Holy Spirit. On that day He came to them with fire and power and as He came they were filled and began to speak with other tongues.

Peter then stood up and began to address the crowd that had gathered. He told them that Jesus, whom they had crucified, had been elevated to the right hand of the Father in the place of authority. Just as He had promised they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. What a gift! What a promise! Peter went on to say that the things these people saw and heard were evidence of the Holy Spirit, the promise, being poured out on God's people.

Peter did not stop there, but declared that the promise of the Holy Spirit was not just to this people in this time and place. This promise is to us today and to our children and to the generations to come! Hallelujah! We need the power of the Holy Spirit operating in our lives to fulfill the purpose God has set before us. The Holy Spirit is our companion. He goes with us wherever we go. He is our friend. We need to get to know Him. He speaks, He guides, He comforts. It was the Holy Spirit, as mentioned in the book of Acts, who made it known that Paul and Barnabas should be set apart to do the work they were called by God to do.

All that Jesus did as He walked this earth was done by the power of the Holy Spirit. In fact, you could say that the gifts of the Spirit are really the abilities of Jesus. Jesus said that we would do the same works He did and even greater works. The ability to do the works of Jesus comes through the Holy Spirit and His gifts to us.

At the turn of the twentieth century, there was a renewed emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit. God has shown us that these things did not pass away with the first century apostles as some of us have previously been taught. As

important as these gifts are, I Corinthians 13 tells us the gifts really do not benefit mankind much if there is no love. God desires for His people to walk in the gifts, but He also desires for us to walk in the fruit of the Spirit.

We need to operate in the gifts as we walk by the fruit of the Spirit, or our walk is unbalanced. The fruit mentioned in Galatians 5:22, 23 are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Love is the ingredient that will cause the gifts of the Spirit to operate with the fruit of the Spirit.

If we operate in the gifts and our motivation is to be noticed by man, we are out of balance. We are in pride and pride always sets itself up against God. We should ever increasingly be motivated by love. Love always desires to see an individual set free and operating in the same gifts and fruit of the Spirit in which we ourselves operate. Many times scripture tells us it was Jesus' compassion that caused Him to act upon a person's need. It was His great love that desired to bring justice to all the injustice He encountered as He walked this earth.

The fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians are really manifestations of Jesus' character. They are characteristics of the new nature, the new man. We should be portraying them in our own lives. We put off the nature of the old man and put on the nature of the new man. Paul said he died daily to the flesh. If Paul needed to deal with the flesh daily, we certainly need to do the same. So as the Holy Spirit comes, He enables us to walk as Jesus walked, to be Christ-like or truly "Christian". We are to follow in His footsteps, and that is impossible without the Holy Spirit.

Our finish line, our ultimate goal in life is not to have some super ministry or be someone special that people flock to by the thousands. Our goal is to take on the nature of Jesus so His Kingdom can be expanded in the earth. It is to pass on to our generation as well as future generations the knowledge of our Lord and Savior and His goodness. We must use the gifts given to us by the Holy Spirit as well as the fruit of the Spirit operating in our lives to advance the Kingdom of our Lord. His Kingdom is a spiritual kingdom that exists today and will last forever.

Discerning the Times

Now brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'peace and safety', destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are sleep, but let us be alert and self controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

I Thess. 5:1-8 (NIV)

We are in the seventh day since Adam. The sixth day belonged to man, but the seventh day belongs to God. The day of the Lord comes suddenly and when people least expect it, like a thief. Thieves usually break into homes when they think no one is home. They break into businesses at night when the store is closed. But, perhaps the place of business has a silent alarm. Maybe there is a motion detector that sends an alarm to the police station alerting them to a break-in. The police will hopefully arrive on the scene and surprise the thief before he escapes.

The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night to those who are in darkness. These are the people who are surprised. The people in darkness do not understand the ways of God. But we, as children of the light, should be as those who have a silent alarm. We should not be caught unaware of what is happening. The day of the Lord should not come as a surprise to us.

Through the Holy Spirit we should be able to discern the times and seasons of God. The Holy Spirit searches the heart and mind of the Father. He knows the secret things of God and then He reveals them to us. We really need discernment in this hour. We need to understand the events that are happening in our world according to God's word.

Paul tells us we need to be prepared for the changing times and seasons of God. Paul warns us that we, the children of light, should not be asleep like the children of darkness are. If Paul has to tell us not be asleep, then it must be possible for us as Christians to be caught asleep or unaware of what is happening.

The Church at large has been asleep for a long time. Many of God's people have had a vision of a sleeping giant beginning to come alive. It is slowly awakening and casting off its lethargic spirit. The prophets are sounding an alarm across the earth and calling God's people all over the globe saying, *"It's time to wake up. It's time to discern what is being directed by the Spirit of God!"*

When we are asleep, we don't see the lost dying and going to hell all around us. We don't see the battle that awaits us. We don't see the love of God for the lost in every nation and how the enemy tries to stop them from knowing and understanding truth. We don't see the victory that lies ahead if we could only see and understand God's heart! We are too overwhelmed by our own current problems. Problems often come our way to lull us to sleep spiritually, instead of being the alert overcomers God designed us to be. Psychologists say that one sign of depression is the desire to sleep all the time.

Paul in this letter to the Thessalonians compares those who are asleep to men who are drunk. What happens when a person gets drunk? For one thing their vision becomes blurred and objects look distorted. Judgment is usually not the best since the alcohol affects the brain. The ability to make quality decisions is impaired. Usually, emotions are severely affected. Men want to fight and women want to cry. When we are asleep spiritually, these same things affect us. Our vision is blurred, our judgment is distorted, and our emotions are affected. Paul is warning us that we, the children of light, should not be found in this condition.

Paul is not talking about Christians being drunk naturally. He is talking about a spiritual condition. He is talking about the ability or lack of ability to discern the times and seasons of God. We should not allow our spiritual vision to become blurred and our spiritual judgment to become impaired. We should

not allow our spirit to become complacent to the events around us. We should not let our emotions rule us, but rather be ruled by the Spirit of God and the fruits and gifts that He provides for us to be successful in life. When we are complacent and lethargic in our spirit, Paul likens this spiritual condition to the natural condition of being drunk.

God says through Paul that we need to have clear vision into the spiritual realm. We need to be able to make quality decisions using sound judgment provided by the Holy Spirit. We are to be ruled by our spirit not by our emotions or our mind. The Bible tells us in Luke 21:26 at the end of the age, men's hearts will fail them because of fear. If we operate in the same manner as the children of darkness do, this will also happen to us. We must not be found in a spiritual stupor. This is extremely important for the days ahead of us. We need to discern what God is doing in this hour.

The Holy Spirit Guides Us

The Holy Spirit was sent to guide us and to tell us about things we don't know or fully understand. God spoke to me very clearly one afternoon, as I was in prayer that it is essential for His people to learn how to hear His voice clearly. He said we must eliminate the word "*assume*" from our vocabulary. We are not only to go to Him for advice on the big decisions in our lives but also the little ones. We are not to assume that we know what the Lord would have us do. We need always to ask and be sensitive to His leading.

As we become more mature and walk step by step and moment by moment with our Lord, we find that the decisions are made almost instantaneously because we have learned how to operate with the mind of Christ. We have become so much like Him that our decisions are His because we know His heart.

Several years ago God was teaching me to listen to that still small voice and to be obedient at a moment's notice. He told me that someday, instant obedience would save my life. Shortly after God had spoken to me, something happened on the way home from work which made me realize the importance of what God was saying. It was two days after Christmas. We had been experiencing an unusually warm winter so there was no snow on the ground. The temperature that day reached around 55 degrees. But as soon as the sun went down, the temperature dropped quickly.

About two miles from my house I had a prompting in my spirit that I was in danger and should pull over to the side of the road. I reasoned I was only a couple of miles from the house and consequently did not obey the prompting. There was someone following close behind me, so I was afraid to pull over too quickly. Instead, I continued down the road at the same speed I had been traveling. As I was climbing the last hill before my driveway, I suddenly hit "*black ice*". All I could do was cry "*Jesus*" as the jeep I was driving headed straight for the ditch. It hit the ditch and went straight into the mountain, flipping completely over and onto its side. I was not wearing my seatbelt at the time.

I blacked out for a moment. When I regained consciousness, I realized the top had jarred loose from the body of the jeep. I crawled out through the opening. I had one small cut and a bruise, but the jeep was a total disaster. The lady who had been following me stopped and offered me a ride home.

For several days after this accident, I was very disturbed. I had prayed that day for God to protect me and to protect my vehicle just as I do every day. Why hadn't God answered that prayer? I did not understand. When I had calmed down enough to really listen to the Lord, He reminded me of what He had said a few days earlier. I needed to hear His voice and obey instantly. Sometimes there is just not time to ask why. We have to trust.

He had warned me and if I had been obedient no harm would have come to me or my vehicle. In all of this, God's mercy covered me. The deputy sheriff that arrived on the scene told me that the jeep should have naturally gone off the road on the other side which was a steep embankment. I could have been seriously injured or dead, but even in my disobedience God protected me. He was teaching me the importance of obedience. This had been a test and I had failed at the expense of that jeep. God had warned me of danger, but I had ignored those warnings, making excuses.

Obedience is one of the keys to overcoming. We must learn to trust His voice enough to obey for our own good. Obedience is not just important for individuals, but it is important for assemblies and organizations, if we want to be a part of what God is doing in this season of harvest on the earth.

One day, not too long ago, I was praying for the corporate body of Christ. I was calling out to God to do a work in His people all over the world to prepare them for the days ahead. I prayed that there would be a desire to make ourselves ready to be a part of the Bride of Christ and to be fit vessels to contain the glory of our God.

And as I was praying, God said, *"In this hour I am visiting every home, every group, every organization that names My Name, and," He said, "I'm bringing a broom with me. And I'm telling My people it's time to clean up this place. I'll be back in a little while and if it's not done, then I'll do it."*

There was such a sense of urgency. The Bible says in I Corinthians 11:31 that we are to judge ourselves so that God doesn't have to judge us. It also says in I Peter 4:17 that judgment will come to the house of God first. It has to come and indeed it has already begun. Apostles are the modern day judges. We must see their ministry restored to the Church and allow them to do the work God is calling them to do. This is not a license for apostles to be judgmental. They must have a clear understanding of God's version of judgment and justice.

Again we must understand that judgment is not a bad thing. When we judge something we are determining what is right or wrong with whatever situation it is we are judging. Judgment goes hand in hand with righteousness. Righteousness is to know what needs to be applied to a situation that you have just judged in order to make that situation right in the sight of God. If we do not open our eyes to see what is right in God's eyes and repent and adjust our walk, then God will do it for us.

Judgment is not punishment or discipline. It is the understanding of the heart and ways of God. It is the knowledge and wisdom of our Lord working in and through us to accomplish His purposes in the earth. If we do not judge situations ourselves according to the will of our God and then repent and adjust our direction, then God could very well come and punish or discipline us for refusing to repent.

Not only do apostles have the ability to judge according to the heart and will of God, they disciple and develop an apostolic people with knowledge and wisdom to judge as well. If we are going to make an impression on the world, there must be a difference in us that the world will recognize. Until that happens we are not going to see a harvest like we desire. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to turn His spotlight on our hearts. There are things in us that keep us from being fit vessels to contain the glory of God. Those things that have been hidden in the darkness need to come into the light so that we can deal with them.

In the beginning of the earth, it was dark and void. No light could be seen, but God called it forth out of darkness. Then He separated the light from the darkness. Next He started creating beauty in the earth and giving life to those things that had been in His heart already. He had a purpose in mind for all His creation, but the purpose couldn't be manifested in the earth until the darkness had been separated from the light.

God's purpose for each one of us was in His mind when we were created. His purpose for you was planted deep inside of you when you were created. He wants to bring the light of that purpose out of the darkness and separate it for His glory. He wants to raise you up and to begin to bring beauty and purpose to your life, but He has to separate the light from the darkness first.

God is calling forth an apostolic army in the earth that will call light out of darkness and cause a separation between the light and the darkness. This army loves righteousness and hates wickedness. The love of righteousness and the hatred of wickedness must begin in our own hearts before we can help others.

Romans 12:21(NIV) says **"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."** We must learn to love those who are living in sin, but hate the sin. We must come to recognize the sin in our own lives. We must come to the place where the Holy Spirit is so real to us that we can sense instantly when we have grieved Him. This apostolic army of God does not care about titles and fame. Its only desire is to serve the Commander-in-Chief, who is none other than our Lord and Savior, Jesus.

The more we see the face of our Savior, the less our attention will be focused on the glamour of the world. In Him we live and move and have our being. The closer we are to Him, the more alive we are. The opposite is also true. The further we are from Him, the deader we are. Sin brings death, destruction, and darkness.

We must turn from our evil ways and bring light to the earth. We are to be holy as our God is holy. We must realize the Holy Spirit as our constant companion who guides us every step of the way. By the power of the Holy Spirit operating in us, we overcome the darkness and become beacons of light. We overcome evil by doing what is good.

"There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, 'The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me.' John 16:12-15 (NLT)

Jesus spoke about the Holy Spirit before He died and returned to heaven. He told His disciples how much they would rely on the Holy Spirit to direct them into truth. The Holy Spirit would be in constant communications with the Father and the Son and would relay what He heard to God's people. But, He needs a people who can hear. He would guide us into knowing truth.

And Jesus Christ was revealed as God's Son by his baptism in water and by shedding his blood on the cross—not by water only, but by water and blood. And the Spirit, who is truth, confirms it with his testimony. I John 5:6 (NLT)

We cannot understand what being a Christian really means apart from the Holy Spirit revealing it to us. We cannot come to Jesus and believe that He is the Son of God unless the Spirit brings us. We cannot live our lives every day expressing the Kingdom of God without an understanding of what Kingdom life is all about and that is only revealed through the Holy Spirit. He is our companion and friend. We must not grieve Him. We cannot move into what God wants to do in and through us in this great time in history without walking minute by minute with the Spirit of God.

God's Watchmen

“Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. When I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet if you have warned the wicked and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself. Again, when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he will die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. However, if you have warned the righteous man that the righteous should not sin and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; and you have delivered yourself.” Ezekiel 3:17-21 (NASB)

Watchmen were very important in the Old Testament. They had to be alert, always scanning the horizon for whatever could be seen. Their responsibility was awesome. Even if a city had great walls around it, there was still a watchman to further protect the city from harm. If the watchman did not take his job seriously an enemy could sneak up on the city and destroy it. The watchman could be put to death if he failed to warn the city of impending danger.

God has appointed watchmen over His Church today just as he appointed Ezekiel. These appointed watchmen are the prophets of God and God's prophetic people. They are crying out against evil and anything that would hinder the advancement of the Kingdom of God in the earth. They must. God

demands it. The word of the living God burns in them so strong that they cannot hold it inside. They are sounding an alarm against Babylon.

Babylon represents religion and self-exaltation. Just like the Babylonian spirit did not like the prophets of old, the religious spirit today does not like the words of the modern day prophetic voice. This religious spirit is crying out through people who are in bondage to it, *"Leave us alone. God is pleased with us. God is not a God of judgment, but a God of love and we are under grace."* They go on living in sin ignoring the call of God to them. Oh, how serious this is! Let us heed the call of God to repent before it is too late.

God calls His people out of Babylon. He calls us out of religion into relationship and fellowship with Him. No longer can we compromise the truth. He calls out for a people who can separate the defiled from the pure, the gold and silver from the false bling. The world is tired of the hype and the false glory. They are looking for the real thing, something that is genuine, not fake. They want something that is truly born of God.

People must see the real Jesus in you. People influenced by the spirit of religion are in bondage and most of them do not realize it. They are in bondage to religion and tradition. Matthew 15:6, 7 tells us that Jesus called the religious leaders of His day hypocrites. He said that their traditions caused God's word to have no effect in their lives. God's people were in bondage to traditions because of the many manmade rules demanded by their leaders. They didn't have a clue how to break out of bondage and be set free. They did not want anyone messing with their traditions.

There is a remnant that is hearing today the call of God to become deliverers like Moses. Who will hear the heart cry of God to set His people free? There must be an army that arises in the earth to take its place behind their Commander-in-Chief. They must sound the alarm to wake up the sleeping giant that is the Church. They must call her forth out of slavery and show her the way to the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. This awesome place where God's presence permeates everything and His heart and will are known to all is the place God is taking us.

We desperately need the Holy Spirit's work of conviction in our lives. The Holy Spirit is preparing a Bride for the Master and she is not a harlot. Babylon must have no part of her. The Holy Spirit is working in us so we might overcome the things that hinder us in this process. One of these days, the bride and the Spirit will cry out in unison *"Come"*, and the Bridegroom will come to receive His bride. Will you be ready?

CHAPTER 11 - A DIET OF MILK AND HONEY

“These are the commands, decrees, and regulations that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you. You must obey them in the land you are about to enter and occupy, and you and your children and grandchildren must fear the LORD your God as long as you live. If you obey all his decrees and commands, you will enjoy a long life. Listen closely, Israel, and be careful to obey. Then all will go well with you, and you will have many children in the land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you. Deuteronomy 6:1-3 (NLT)

The land God promised to the Israelites was a land flowing with milk and honey. In order to possess that land, they would first have to cross the Jordan River. They had to leave the old things behind and travel into the new land. They could not stay where they were. They could not wait for God to just drop the promise into their lap. There were some things that God required of the people. The new land needed to be possessed. Moses instructed them if they truly wanted increase, they must be obedient to the word of the Lord. They must overcome the enemy. The enemy did not want them to possess the promises of God.

Overcomers acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus in their lives. They understand that obedience is a key to their success. What He commands they do. Their desire is to do only what they hear the Father do and to say only what they hear the Father say. They know His heart. Their will is subject to the will of the Commander-in-Chief.

Overcomers hunger for more of God. They seek His face. They are hungering and thirsting for Him. They don't care what man says or thinks. They are not interested in man's approval. Roadblocks will not hinder them. They have a promised land to possess. They will not let the enemy discourage them, or stop them from inheriting the promises they have received from their God.

Traditions and religion will not get in the way of accomplishing what the Lord has commanded them to do. No one can tell them they can't have what the Lord has promised them. Only a solid, loving relationship with Jesus will satisfy the hungry soul of the overcomer. They are not interested in earning God's favor. They know they already have it.

These overcoming ones spend so much time with Jesus that they know His voice. They know how to distinguish His voice above the noise because they have heard it in the quiet place. There are many voices clamoring for attention today, but overcomers will only listen and follow where they hear their master's voice and know His heart.

In the book of Psalms chapter 115, scripture says those who make idols become like them. The same is true with those who follow the one true God. Those who spend time with Him and worship Him, become like Him. They think like Him. They act like Him. When we have come to the place where we know God's heart, know His will and His ways, then we will be effective as ambassadors. We will judge situations accurately and be able to apply the righteousness of God to those situations. We can represent Jesus accurately to the world. We know the will and the way of the Kingdom that has sent us, and

we can truly represent the King who has sent us to do His bidding, because we have come to know Him so intimately.

God is love. Those who spend time in His presence will reflect that love in their own lives. As our love for Him grows, our love for the things of this world diminishes. We begin to trust Him more and more, and as our trust grows our faith will reach new heights. As our faith grows, our willingness to obey Him becomes stronger, because we know Him and we know we can trust Him.

Love, faith, and obedience are the keys to being an effective overcomer. But overcoming won't happen, to the fullest extent possible, apart from us having an intimate relationship with God. We must hunger and thirst for Him above all else.

Jesus is an Overcomer

Jesus is an overcomer. He said in John 16:33 that we are to have peace even in the middle of trials and sorrow because He has overcome the world. He lived by a different set of standards. He had a different reality that did not depend on worldly philosophies and methods. Sickness and demonic forces bowed their knee at the command of our great King and Overcomer.

He passed that power and authority to us as a part of our inheritance. He then returned to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father and intercede for us so we could accomplish the mission He left for us to do. Sadly, God's people for the most part do not understand that we have the power to overcome anything that lifts its evil, ugly head against the advancement of God's kingdom on earth. We do not yet know how to live by a different set of standards. We still believe that the majority rule, so we do nothing.

But the sleeping giant, the Church, is awakening and beginning to stand to her feet. As we continue to speak life to the body of Christ in the earth, this awesome bride will begin to take her place. She will effect change where none other has been able to change the events of human history. She will become the image of the great Overcomer in the earth.

This bride who is beautiful beyond measure, dressed in white, but wearing combat boots takes the land that she was meant to inherit. We must spend quality time with our Commander-in-Chief and let Him awaken our hearts to the reality of the Kingdom and our ability to overcome all that faces us. We do not retreat, but we advance the Kingdom of our Lord.

Awake, awake, Zion, clothe yourself with strength! Isaiah 52:1a (NIV)

The prophet Isaiah proclaims the words of God to Zion commanding her to awake from her slumber and clothe herself with strength. Hebrews 12 explains that Zion is a picture of the Church. In this hour the cry of the prophets is also for the Church to wake up and be clothed in strength.

Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the articles of the Lord's house. But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the Lord will go before

you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

Isaiah 52:11, 12 (NIV)

Isaiah says that we are to come out of Egypt. Egypt is a picture of the worldly systems. Those who carry the vessels of the Lord must be pure and undefiled by the world's standards. Under the old covenant the priests carried the vessels of the Lord. Under the new covenant we are the vessels of the Lord, as well as the priests of the Lord. Revelation 1:6 and Revelation 5:10 both declare that we have been made kings and priests to God to serve the Lord and to rule in the earth. A priest's job is two-fold. He is to minister to God for man and to minister to man in behalf of God.

God looks for intercessors. He searches the earth looking for those who will love their fellow man enough to stand in the gap for them. His desire is for pure and holy vessels so the glory of God might be contained in them and displayed to the world. It is the pure in heart that are able to see God. We are going to hear more and more in the days to come on the topic of holiness.

Egypt, or the world, represents the kingdom of darkness. The Kingdom of God is the kingdom of light. We choose which kingdom in which to live. If we have succumbed to living by the standards of the world instead of the standards of God's Kingdom, all we need to do is repent and God will deliver.

When the Israelites were in Egypt in Old Testament times, God heard their cries and He sent Moses, the deliverer, to rescue them. God began to judge the worldly system which had its grip on His people. He began to set them free. He sent intense darkness to the land as one of the judgments according to Exodus chapter ten. However, in the houses of God's people, there was light. We can live in the light of the Kingdom of God, even in the midst of a dark and evil world.

We must turn to God with a whole heart and leave the standards of Egypt behind. We must live by a different set of standards than what the world demands. The Kingdom of Heaven rules in the earth wherever we advance it. If we live by heaven's standards instead of earthly standards, the Lord will go before us and He will also be our rear guard. He goes before us and behind us when we are living for Him and in right relationship with Him. He provides light to our path for every step we take. If the Lord of creation is ahead of us leading and behind us protecting us, how can the enemy possibly touch us?

Light on our path and deliverance from darkness are both promises to us, God's people, found in His Word. The promises of God are available to all of us, but they have conditions. One condition highest on the list is obedience. When we obey what God has commanded, we can be sure that His promise to us will be fulfilled. Faith in His ability to do what He has promised is also another condition to see His promises manifested in our lives. Faith and obedience, two of the keys already mentioned in this book which are needed to be effective as an overcomer in the Kingdom of God.

God has made a covenant with us just as He did with Israel. Only this time, man's side of the covenant was fulfilled by Jesus who was all God and all man. It cannot be broken. Galatians 3:29 (NLT) says **"And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you."**

God's covenant with Israel began with Abram (later named Abraham) and is found in Genesis 15:18. The covenant would give to Abraham and his descendants all the land from the great river in Egypt to the river Euphrates. But, the promise was conditional based on their faith in God's word to them and their willingness to obey God by going in and possessing the land. They had their part in the covenant, which was to obey God and trust Him.

The promises of God given to Abraham belong to us today as well. God has given us a promised land and has told us to go in and possess it. We have to do our part to inherit the promises. We cannot live in sin on a continuing basis and expect God to protect us, and prosper us. The promises don't automatically happen either. We must appropriate them by faith, just like everything else we receive from God.

So the people left their camp to cross the Jordan, and the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant went ahead of them. It was the harvest season, and the Jordan was overflowing its banks. But as soon as the feet of the priests who were carrying the Ark touched the water at the river's edge, the water above that point began backing up a great distance away at a town called Adam, which is near Zarethan. And the water below that point flowed on to the Dead Sea until the riverbed was dry. Then all the people crossed over near the town of Jericho. Joshua 3: 14-16 (NLT)

We have camped along the Jordan. Our eyes see and know the land that God has promised to us. But, instead of stepping into the water, we sit on the bank waiting for God to make a way for us. However, it is through faith and obedience that we enter into the land to possess it. These two keys of overcoming are necessary for us to move past the obstacles that hold us back from possessing all that God desires to give us. He will not force His will on us. We must choose. Will you be a part of the remnant, the few, who are willing to trust God with everything? Will you put on your armor and step into the water? Will you cross over into the land of promise God has for you?

Judgment in the House of God

God is concerned about the condition of His Church. He wants His Church healthy and alive, pure without any blemish. His spotlight has been turned on to shed light on His body. But, before He can allow her to be seen by the world in all her beauty, He must find her flaws and correct them. He must find her sickness and heal her. He must find her weaknesses and build strength in her.

So, Father God uses the spotlight of His Word to expose the sin and shortcomings that are in the bride He desires to present to His Son. But, it is the bride who chooses to make herself beautiful for the husband. It is the wife-to-be who prepares herself for her bridegroom. God calls and reveals, but it is the bride who chooses.

Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Revelation 19:7

(NIV)

God desires to deal with an individual in private, so He calls and reveals to us where we have fallen short of His glory. If the individual refuses to set things right then the sin or shortcoming could be exposed so that it can be corrected. Remember, sin is not always a grave, horrendous thing; it is anything that falls short of God's will. Righteousness is doing what is right in the sight and mind of God. Wickedness is doing what is wrong in the sight and mind of God. Disobedience of any kind is a sin and falls short of what is best for us.

No one is an island to themselves. What we do affects others. God cannot allow our sin to affect others in His body for a long period of time. Just like one germ of disease, if allowed to run rampant in the body will increase and kill the body, so even sin if allowed to run rampant in the body of Christ will eventually kill. Our Lord, out of His abundance of grace and mercy, must bring discipline and correction to our lives.

There have been many sickening sins committed by the leadership of religious organizations and assemblies in recent days. The media loves to exploit these events. It is sad that it has to happen this way. But if we will not judge ourselves and repent, the Lord will discipline us and He often uses the world to do this. In Old Testament times, God often used heathen nations to deal with Israel when Israel was in rebellion against God.

We must be careful in our evaluations of these situations. It is not our place to condemn people, but to love them and hopefully restore them to walk righteously before their God. How would any of us know what we would do if we were on the front lines of battle and the devil was trying to destroy us? We are to be like our Lord who is full of grace and mercy, full of loving kindness and slow to get angry.

God knows the heart. David committed vulgar, ugly sins and yet he was called a man after God's heart by God Himself. Many of these ones who have been thrown on the ash heap by mankind will be restored by God and used mightily in this hour because God knows their heart. He, who has been forgiven much, loves much.

The spotlight of God is bringing our hidden sins into the open, not to hurt us but to make us whole for what He wants to do in and through us. He will have vessels of honor in His house. We must pray for our leaders as we have been commanded to do. The devil would love to destroy reputations so the messages we preach would go unheard and unheeded.

Not only is it important to get rid of the outward appearance of evil, but God is also dealing with issues of the heart in this hour. The inward sins of bitterness, anger, resentment, jealousy, rebellion, gossip, racism, elitism, and unbelief that are in the body of Christ today are unbelievable. And the main problem is these things are not often recognized as sin. Or if we do see them as sin, we see them as little sins that God overlooks. We think He is not overly concerned about them, so we ignore them. We rate these types of sin as mere irritations and think they are not worthy of mention compared to murder, adultery, abortion, homosexuality, and stealing.

The word of God teaches us differently. Sin is sin and God is dealing severely today with these sins of the heart in His people. It is what is inside of us that eventually comes out and produces the terrible acts that we all recognize as

sin. But, God has a way of going after the hidden part, the root of things so that it can be dealt with before it has a chance to grow and reproduce. There will not be a glorious church until we deal with these sin issues of the heart and we allow the Lord to purge us. He will have a glorious Bride to present to the world!

Scripture tells us in II Corinthians 4:4 that the person whose spirit has not yet been reborn, has eyes that have been blinded to the truth of the gospel by the devil. The devil is the god of this world. The blinders must be taken off before they can see the truth to get born again. These are people who have not yet understood who Jesus is. They do not know or understand their need for a Savior. However, there are other scriptures that indicate that God's people can be just as blind as those without Christ.

A Rebellious People

The word of the Lord came to me; 'Son of man, you are living among a rebellious people. They have eyes to see, but do not see, and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious people.' Ezekiel 12:1,2 (NIV)

How can this be? The devil is no longer our father once we are born again by the Spirit of God. Can the devil still blind our eyes? Yes he can, if we allow him to blind us. Ezekiel chapter 12 says that rebellion is what causes deaf ears and blind eyes in God's people. Many such scriptures may be found by using a concordance.

When we rebel against God's will for our lives, we open up our lives to allow the enemy to blind us to truth. I Samuel 15:23 tells us rebellion is like witchcraft. Just like witchcraft and divination open the ability of the powers of darkness to have influence in your life, so does rebelling against the will of God for you.

When we willfully take a different path than what the Lord desires for us we are rebelling against our God. In this verse, God also talks about stubbornness or arrogance in conjunction with rebellion. He likens stubbornness to idol worship. When we rebel against the Lord, we are arrogantly worshipping self and saying that we know better than God what is right for us. That is the Babylonian spirit and we must be released from it. Anytime we choose our own will over God's will, we are rebelling. Rebellion will blind us to truth if we continue in our folly. It will deafen our ears to the voice of the Spirit of God who daily guides us.

There is a difference between willful disobedience and the occasional failing to follow God because we have not heard His voice clearly. When we fail God looks on the heart and if we are trying to overcome an area in our life that we know is displeasing to God, He works with us. It is when God has been dealing with us and we know something is wrong in our lives, but we don't want to change or we make excuses that we end up walking in rebellion.

The greatest test of our love for God and our obedience is in the area of our love for mankind. When we are commanded to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, and yet we refuse to love because they seem so unlovable, we are walking on dangerous ground. Often we allow ourselves to be offended, which

produces irritation and anger. We justify our actions because, after all they are Christians, and they should know better than to behave that way.

We begin to think about our rights, and our hurts. If we are not careful, we will begin to blame God because we feel He should deal with the offender for wronging us. We get frustrated with God because it seems these people are getting away with doing wrong. But, as soon as we begin to dwell on these thoughts and we begin to disobey the Word of the Lord to us to love above all else, we begin to lose our sight and our hearing. The enemy is then free to steal from us, because we are in rebellion against the word of God.

Hear, you deaf, look, you blind, and see! Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to me, blind like the servant of the Lord? You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing. It pleased the Lord for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious. But this is a people plundered and looted, all of them trapped in pits or hidden away in prisons. They have become plunder with no one to rescue them they have been made loot, with no one to say, "send them back". Which of you will listen to this or pay close attention in time to come?

Isaiah 42:18-23 (NIV)

Isaiah could have been a modern day prophet with these words. This is a very vivid picture of God's people today. We are robbed of the power of God. We are robbed of His guidance and knowing His will. We are robbed of His blessings. We are robbed of His presence because we are blind and deaf. God is asking if there is anyone righteous out there with eyes to see and ears to hear who can see the condition of His people and weep.

Who will understand what has happened? Who will rescue this people? God is stirring up a people who know and understand His great heart of love for His people. He is preparing this remnant of overcomers to come against the spirit of Babylon (religion and self-righteousness) and the spirit of rebellion in the body of Christ. God is sending forth rescuers to set His people free. God is calling forth apostolic deliverers like Moses to bring His people out of slavery.

This is not a hopeless situation. It has a beautiful ending. Isaiah prophesies of a day when the blind will see and the deaf will hear again. Even those who have rebelled and gone their own way, those who have been troublemakers, will see and understand what they have done. This will happen because of God's great grace and mercy towards His people.

Romans 2:4 tells us it is God's kindness which leads us to repent from our wicked ways and turn towards Him. With repentance comes restoration. Let us be a prophetic people calling out for restoration. Let us go forth as God's army and cry out *"Release God's people. Set them free."* Let us go forth declaring the will of the Lord in the earth. Let us judge every situation according to God's will and decree a righteous solution so the Kingdom of God is advanced in the earth.

In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. When they see

among them their children, the work of my hands, they will keep my name holy; they will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction.” Isaiah 29:18, 23-24 (NIV)

A Glorious Church

God will absolutely have a glorious Church. Yes, He will have a Church, a people, filled with His glory. He said it. It is in His plan. We just need to decide if we are willing to pay the price to be a part of it. Are we ready to submit to the fire of His presence and let Him purge the wood, hay, and stubble from our lives?

Many years ago, I was weeping and interceding for a particular assembly I was attending at the time. It was very close to a split over a relatively minor issue. I hurt because I saw people who had been friends for years angry with each other and not on speaking terms. A few of us within the congregation refused to take sides. We saw and understood the issues on both sides. As a consequence, neither side accepted us. I loved this place. It was my family and it hurt so much to see it being torn apart.

As I was praying God gave me a vision of a place. It seemed familiar and yet it wasn't. In my vision as I approached the meeting place in my car I saw it move. The sides of the building were moving in and out as if it were breathing. The building had arms that reached out into the community and picked up students from the schools and set them down in front of the door. These arms collected farmers sitting on their tractors in the fields. They lifted men and women sitting on bar stools in the local bars. They picked up grandmothers and grandfathers. They picked up people in factories and businesses. The arms lovingly grasped children playing in parks and on school play grounds.

As I watched the arms of this building collecting people from all walks of life, young and old, I was amazed. The building seemed to be a living, breathing organism and its sides bulged and pulsated even more as all these people entered it. There were dozens of them and I wondered how all these people fit inside this relatively small building.

I parked the car and walked to the door. As I approached I could see piles of shoes outside the entrance. I took off my shoes and added them to one of the piles. I sensed that I did not care if I found those shoes again, that when I left this building I would not need them anymore. The presence of the Lord was so strong. I knew I was standing on holy ground. As I entered the building, I could not see because of the blinding light and I knew Jesus was standing before me. I fell immediately to the floor, feeling an overwhelming awareness of my unworthiness. I cried, "Lord".

He reached out and touched my eyes and gently lifted me to my feet. As I opened my eyes I was aware that the blinding light had changed into the most awesome bluish light I had ever seen. I looked into His face. He had the gentlest eyes that I had ever seen, but they were also very intense. I knew there was nothing in me that was hidden from His view and yet I felt secure.

Suddenly after some time had passed, I was aware that I could see no one else in the place, and I asked Him, "Where are all the people I saw entering

this building?" He said, "These people have become so much like me that you can't see them anymore, all you see is Me."

I asked Him, "Is this my assembly?" He did not answer me. He smiled at me and then the vision ended. He was gone. Although He did not answer my question at that time, I sensed in my spirit that there would be a time when I would understand and know more concerning this vision. It would all happen in God's timing. I also knew He was taking care of the situation in the assembly I loved so much.

My assembly did not split and eventually the problem was dealt with and relationships were mended. I have come to realize in the last few years that the vision the Lord gave me at that time was not a particular church building or group, but was a vision of His Church at the end of the age, His glorious mature bride. He was responding to the deep love and hurt in my heart for my assembly by showing me what was in His heart, His deep love and desire for His Church.

Oh, if we would only listen to Jesus, seek His face, and submit to His Lordship as head of the Church, how quickly He would build us into the Church He desires. How quickly we would mature. The bride would understand that she must make herself ready for the coming wedding.

Stubborn Hearts and Listening to God

"I, the LORD, am your God, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. "But My people did not listen to My voice, And Israel did not obey Me. "So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own devices. "Oh that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways! "I would quickly subdue their enemies and turn My hand against their adversaries. "Those who hate the LORD would pretend obedience to Him, And their time of punishment would be forever. "But I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, And with honey from the rock I would satisfy you." Psalm 81:10-16 (NASB)

What happens when we do not listen to God, when we do not submit ourselves to Him? This scripture indicates there is a point when we consistently do not listen to God He then lets our own hearts rule our lives. He lets us follow our own devices. When we are left to do our own thing, it allows our enemies, our foes, to subdue us. Maybe when it seems like we are under constant attack in our lives, we should evaluate whether we have been listening to God or not. Our Father, who knows best what is good for us, says if we would listen to him He would subdue our enemies and turn His hand against our foes.

The word translated as subdue in this passage means "*overcome*". *"If only My people would listen to me"*. That is the cry of God's heart. If we would listen to His voice and follow His ways how quickly He would come to our rescue. But God is a gentleman and He will never force us to come to Him.

We must come of our own free will. Scripture tells us in II Chronicles 16:9 that the Lord is searching to and fro in the earth, looking for those to whom He can show Himself strong in their behalf, those who are loyal and committed to Him. If we are satisfied with our relationship with God, we're in trouble. We need so much more of Him, and there is so much more of Him that He wants to give

to us.

The days ahead will not be easy. The Lord's Day is upon us. Many people today are just satisfied to survive. Many have the attitude of whatever will be, will be. Remember that old song published in the 1950's? The lyrics say that the future is not ours to see. But, that is not what God teaches us. We can see what God has for us. Our future is bright even when it looks like everything around us is going to hell in a hand-basket. If we continue to carry this attitude of whatever will be, will be into the future, we will not survive.

God desires so much more for us than for us just to survive. He wants us to live life to the fullest. He wants to have an abundant life in every area of our existence. He wants us to be an overcoming people. In order to survive and be an overcoming people, we will need to become a prophetic and revelatory people.

Moses was overwhelmed with the responsibility for the huge group of people that he had led out of Egypt at God's direction. The call to leadership God placed on Moses was stretching him to his limits. He went before the Lord and asked Him for help with the Israelites. God told him to gather seventy of the elders together. Moses listened and did as God had instructed. God then placed the spirit which was on Moses, also upon the elders. Two of the elders were still in the camp and yet all of them, including the two, began to prophecy as the spirit came.

Someone who thought Moses should be the only one to talk for God ran and told Moses that these men were prophesying. How many assemblies do we have today that think only their beloved leader can have God talk through them to the people? Joshua, concerned for Moses and his leadership authority, thought Moses should stop them.

Moses' response is found in Numbers 11:29 (NIV). He said, **"Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit on them."** Moses, although he probably didn't know it when he said it, was prophesying about a day in the future. That day is our day, a day when the Lord would put His Spirit on all those who followed Him and they would be able to prophecy and bring forth the pure word of the Lord.

Paul says in I Corinthians 14:1 (NIV), **"Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy."** We are to desire to prophecy. Why? Verse three tells us that prophecy is for strengthening or edifying, encouragement and comfort. Aren't these things that the Church needs today? They are also things that the people we come in contact with on a daily basis need. Paul reiterates this in the 39th verse of the same chapter (NIV) by saying, **"Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophecy."** Then in I Thessalonians 5:20 (NIV), he says **"Do not treat prophecies with contempt."**

Five-fold ministry gifts are given by Jesus to the Church. According to Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV), these gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are **"to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."**

The five-fold ministry gift of the prophet will prepare God's people to be a prophetic people, just as an evangelist not only wins lost souls, but trains God's

people to lead the lost to Jesus. This is why we desperately need five-fold ministry gifts today. The prophet's responsibility is not to draw great crowds to hear him or her tell the latest greatest thing that the Lord is speaking. Their calling is to teach God's children how to hear the voice of the Lord themselves. Then each individual, hearing the instructions of the Lord can go forth and be productive in their daily life, influencing those they come in contact with daily for the Kingdom of God.

As God's people hear their Lord moment by moment every day and are obedient to His specific word to them, they can walk the earth as He did and the world will see Jesus in them. This is the work that advances the Kingdom of God in the earth, one saint at a time doing what they are called to do every day of their abundantly rich lives.

Each five-fold ministry gift has a specific gifting and area of responsibility and we will not be complete in the knowledge of Jesus nor reach complete maturity without them. Scripture teaches us their purpose and responsibility is to see individuals in the Kingdom come into maturity concerning the things of God. God's desire is to see a people of maturity full of revelation and knowledge, walking in the gifts of the Spirit as well as the fruit of the Spirit, whose greatest desire is to see the Kingdom of God advance in the earth.

The Significance of Wheat

Let's go back to Psalms chapter 81. There are some additional treasures we need to see in this scripture passage as to how we mature. We know in the natural to grow strong, we need to eat healthy food. God not only says if we would desire Him then He would subdue or overcome our enemies, but He also says He would feed us with the finest of wheat and with honey from the rock. Wheat and honey represent two very important spiritual foods meant to mature us as Christians.

One early morning I awoke singing a song about honey from the rock. As I was singing, I heard God speak to my heart, "*Do you want to know what this means?*" Instantly I was fully awake saying, "*Yes, Lord. Please tell me.*" Normally it is I, like a three year old, asking God all kinds of questions. Now He was offering me information on a question I had never thought to ask.

Suddenly I wondered why I had never thought about honey coming from a rock. I contemplated why I had never questioned what that could possibly mean. Seriously, have you ever picked up a rock and squeezed it, expecting honey to drip from it? Not me. It seems extremely absurd, yet we sing the songs and read the scriptures all the time. Why is it we rarely pause to let the Holy Spirit make sense of what we are singing or reading?

So much of what we read in the scriptures, we think we already know so we don't ask God for understanding. If what we read doesn't make sense, we skip over it and go on to the next verse. God so delights in us asking questions, but we rarely do. Many times we assume we know everything that is important. There are so many treasures hidden deep in God's Word that God is just waiting for us to find.

Excited that God was about to speak to me, I went into the dining room and sat down at the table with my Bible. I turned to Psalms 81 and, as I began

to read, God began to give me the revelation of this word. When the Israelites were in the wilderness, they needed water. Moses struck the rock and water came gushing forth. We know that the rock was symbolic of Jesus, our rock of salvation and that He pours forth living water. So, when this scripture says that honey comes from the rock, we know that it is Jesus who is the rock. It is Jesus who brings us the honey and that honey satisfies us.

Before we can thoroughly understand the meaning of honey we need to contemplate the meaning of bread in scripture. When we think of wheat, we most often think of bread, for bread is made from wheat. In this scripture in Psalms, God tells us that He will feed us with the finest of wheat, or the finest of bread. Jesus is also the Bread of Life. He feeds us with Himself and that is the best nourishment we could possibly get. Bread is important. It is sometimes called the 'staple of life.'

Without Jesus there is no life. **"For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world", John 6:33 (NIV).** Jesus likened His body to bread when He told His disciples to take His body and eat it. The feast of unleavened bread celebrated in the Old Testament was a type of Christ. Unleavened means it was made without yeast and signified being without sin.

Scripture challenges us not to live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God, which is the true bread. The Word is Jesus, and Jesus is the Bread of Life. So in one sense, bread represents the Word of God. When God told the Israelites that He would pursue or overcome their enemies and then feed them with the finest of wheat, He was talking about Himself and the essence of who He really is.

Through the written word we come to know about Him. As we walk and talk with Him daily, feeding on His spoken word to us, we develop a relationship with Him. We come to know Him, not just know about Him. He feeds our spiritual lives daily with Himself. What a glorious experience!

When people live in sin and out of communion with God, there is a famine of the word. God was promising His people that if they would love Him and long for Him he would satisfy them with an abundance of His word, an abundance of His presence, which brings life and health and everything we need. There would be no more famine.

Honey and Revelation

Now, we are ready to examine the meaning of honey in this scripture. We know from the medical profession of our time that honey helps our digestive process. It helps us to digest bread. We realize that spiritual honey comes from Jesus, the Rock. So, therefore we can deduce that honey is needed to help us digest or understand the Word of God. It helps us understand who Jesus really is. Therefore, honey in the spiritual realm represents revelation.

We can read God's word (eating bread) and not understand a word of what we are reading. Or we can read it and think we understand it because we interpret it by our own thoughts and experiences. But, there is a level of digesting the Word of God that the Father intends for us that requires revelation

(eating honey). Only through revelation can we understand what the author, the Holy Spirit, really meant when those words on that page were penned.

“For the LORD’s portion is His people; Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance. “He found him in a desert land, And in the howling waste of a wilderness; He encircled him, He cared for him, He guarded him as the pupil of His eye. “Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, That hovers over its young, He spread His wings and caught them, He carried them on His pinions. “The LORD alone guided him, And there was no foreign god with him. “He made him ride on the high places of the earth, And he ate the produce of the field; And He made him suck honey from the rock, And oil from the flinty rock, Curds of cows, and milk of the flock, With fat of lambs, And rams, the breed of Bashan, and goats, With the finest of the wheat— And of the blood of grapes you drank wine. Deut. 32:9-14 (NASB)

In this scripture God indicates there was a time when God's people, did not follow after a foreign God. There was a time in the history of Israel when they were following God with a whole heart. During this period God caused them to ride on the high places. They ate the produce and sucked honey from the rock. He led them and they followed Him. He fed them milk and curds, meat and bread and wine. He fed them with the best that He had. What does all this mean?

God provided nourishment for them through oil and wine. Oil and wine represent the Holy Spirit. We can and do eat a lot of junk food in our nation which provides very little nourishment, but when God feeds us, what we eat brings growth and maturity. Milk, meat, and bread are all symbolic of the Word of God, or Jesus. God was revealing to His people when they sought no other gods, when they followed the one true God wherever He led them, then He satisfied them with Himself! What an awesome thought!

Oh, I pray the Church of the Living God will get a revelation of this. There is nothing that will satisfy us more than God. There is nothing that will bring nourishment to our souls and our minds more than God. There is nothing that will bring us to maturity more than feeding on God and His word. If you have never experienced the pure joy of revelation being dropped into your spirit, you are in for a real treat!

David says in Psalm 19 that the Word of God is sweeter than fresh honey from the honeycomb. Have you ever been reading the Bible and had a verse jump off the page at you? You knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God had just spoken to you through that word and it was just for you. How sweet it is! You can almost feel the sweetness, the warmth of it down deep inside of you. A fresh revelatory word of God is sweeter than fresh honey. Psalm 119:103 (NIV) says, **"How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth."**

Ezekiel lived about 600 years before the birth of Christ and was called as a prophet of God to Israel. He was exiled with the Jews into Babylon when he was young. He lived and prophesied at the same time as the prophet Jeremiah did. Both of them prophesied of the destruction of Jerusalem and lived to see the sacking of that city.

Ezekiel had many encounters with God. At one point in time, God told Ezekiel to eat a scroll that had words written on it that God Himself had spoken. God then told Ezekiel to go and speak those words to Israel.

And he said to me, 'Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel.' So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, 'Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.' So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey to my mouth. He then said to me, 'Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them. Ezekiel 3:1-4 (NIV)

So why did God not just tell Ezekiel to go read the words of the scroll to the people? Surely, if he read the words, the people would understand what God was saying to them. But, God very specifically told Ezekiel to eat the scroll first and then go speak the words. Why was it important that the prophet obey this word from his God?

When Ezekiel ate the scroll it tasted like honey. In other words, as he ate the words, digested the words on that scroll, God gave Ezekiel the revelation of that word. As the Holy Spirit brought revelation, Ezekiel could fully understand what was in the heart of God for His people and could deliver it with accuracy and conviction as though God Himself were speaking it. That is what revelation does.

Another example of this is found in Revelation chapter 10. John the revelator, who had been exiled to the island of Patmos, saw an angel. He was told to go to the angel and ask for the scroll which the angel held in his hands. John was then instructed to eat the scroll. The scroll would be sweet like honey to his mouth, but would be sour to his stomach. Sound familiar?

Once John had eaten the scroll he was told he must prophecy to many peoples, nations, languages and kings. He could only prophesy after eating the scroll as symbolic of receiving revelation from the heart of God. He would then be able through revelation to bring the pure word of God to many people.

Revelation Must be Spoken and Heard

Pastors can stand in the pulpit and read the word of God to the people. But if these pastors have not digested the word with honey to receive a revelation of the word, they will not deliver a message directly from the heart of God to the people. It is the revealed word of God that brings power.

We desperately need men and women of God who have tasted the honey of the Word who can impart God-given revelation needed for the very hour in which we live. If we are to touch nations and kings, we need to have a fresh word from the Lord. If we are to walk the Kingdom walk moment by moment, we need fresh revelation.

Not only do the leaders who feed the word to the people need to have revelation to deliver the word accurately, but the ones who hear must be able to take the word delivered and eat it. They must be able to digest it and apply it to their lives through revelation of what God is saying to them individually. Have you ever wondered how so many people can come out of the same meeting

and each of them hears something different? Many times, it is because they have digested that word with honey and have a revelation of what God was speaking directly to them concerning their own lives and the lives they touch daily.

This is the definition of a prophetic people. If we are to advance the kingdom of God in the earth, we must be able to hear the word of God, digest it through revelation and be able to do whatever God is instructing us to do. When His word brings revelation, it brings also a power to accomplish that which has been revealed. It also gives us the ability to pass that word on to others with understanding.

Bread in scripture represents the Word of God and honey represents the revelation of that Word. It is not a coincidence that Jesus was born in Bethlehem which means "House of Bread". In John chapter 1 we read that Jesus was and is the Word.

I grew up memorizing scripture and won many Sunday school contests. I could repeat the books of the Bible both frontward and backward. But when I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, I found out how much I didn't know. The Spirit began to reveal to me, truths I had never seen before in passages I knew by heart. We need bread and honey, the word AND revelation.

Jesus once asked Peter, *"Who do you say that I am?"* Peter's response came from his spirit man and was based on revelation given by the Holy Spirit. Out of his heart, Peter declared Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus told Peter, that His Church would be founded on the revelation of who Jesus is. That revelation was pictured as a rock. The honey of revelation comes from the rock, Jesus.

Take time to read the scriptures on honey found in the Bible. There are many references to wine, oil and honey, together in the same verses. There are also many references to milk and honey together. In I Peter 2:2 we are told to desire the milk of the Word. So milk also represents the Word. Once again, the Word, in order to be digested properly, needs to also have revelation.

When God told the Israelites he was giving them a land to possess flowing with milk and honey, He was not only talking about the beauty and the riches of the land. These things are by-products of a God-enriched life. His promise to them was a never-ending flow of the Word of God and the revelation of that Word if they would follow on to know Him. God was promising them a land filled with Him. The ever living Word of God and the revelation and understanding of what He spoke to them would cause them to live in freedom, in abundance, in peace having everything that they needed and more.

God promises us the same, if we will love Him with all our hearts and seek His face, if we will have no foreign gods, if we will not let anything in our lives be more important than our relationship with Him, then He will satisfy us with the finest wheat (His Word) and honey (revelation) from the Rock (Jesus). There will be a never-ending supply. This is our Promised Land, our covenant inheritance and it is available to us now! Glory!

THE MOUNTAIN BELONGS TO THE REMNANT

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain. Stay there, and I will give you the tablets of stone on which I have inscribed the instructions and commands so you can teach the people." So Moses and his assistant Joshua set out, and Moses climbed up the mountain of God. Moses told the elders, "Stay here and wait for us until we come back. Aaron and Hur are here with you. If anyone has a dispute while I am gone, consult with them." Then Moses climbed up the mountain, and the cloud covered it. And the glory of the LORD settled down on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from inside the cloud. To the Israelites at the foot of the mountain, the glory of the LORD appeared at the summit like a consuming fire. Then Moses disappeared into the cloud as he climbed higher up the mountain. He remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights. Exodus 24:12-18 (NLT)

There is a mountain that belongs to God. He dwells on that mountain. Psalms 43:3 says that God's light and truth will lead us to His holy mountain, the place where He dwells. Because God dwells there, His glory can be seen from the mountain. In the Old Testament, God came down to a physical mountain to meet with Moses. During this period of time, it was a dangerous thing to approach the mountain of God. Preparation was necessary.

God told Moses to set limits around the mountain, for if the people touched the mountain they would surely be put to death. They weren't prepared to handle the glory of God. Aaron, the brother of Moses, was allowed to go up the mountain, at least part way. At one time Joshua and 70 of the elders of Israel were also allowed on the mountain. Exodus chapter 24 describes this event. They all saw God. But, it was only Moses who was allowed to go into the cloud of His glory.

Moses had a desire to know God's ways. Moses had a hunger to know God's heart. God honored that desire when He called Moses to the mountain. God shared His heart with Moses on the mountain. When there is a hunger and a desire in our hearts for more of God, He will call us further up the mountain. As our desire to know God's ways grows stronger within us, we feel the tug of our heart to the mountain.

We come to that place where we are no longer satisfied with just seeing His acts or knowing about Him. Our hearts long to see His face. We no longer look to His hand for supply, but to His heart. On the mountain we come to meet Him knowing that it is because of His great love for us that He reaches out His hands to give us what is in His heart. We will no longer be satisfied with receiving from Him, we must receive Him.

We must have Him, nothing else will do. The eternal fire is on the mountain. The consuming fire of God's presence is awesome and it is frightening, but we must not allow fear to keep us away. We must have Him, be consumed by Him, enter into His heart. We must pursue Him, no matter what the cost, and believe me, dear one, it will cost you everything. But it is worth it!

One day I was wandering through a local shopping mall barely aware that country music was playing in the background. The music was playing so

softly the words were not easily discernable. I was not paying close attention so I did not even know what song was playing. Suddenly, the volume seemed extremely loud and the words at that very moment pierced my heart. God was speaking to me through that song. *"All I want to know, girl, is can I trust you with my heart?"*

I felt like Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones. As he looked upon those dead, dried bones, God asked him if he thought life could come back into those bones. *"Oh, Lord, only you know for sure,"* was Ezekiel's response. I am sure as he looked at those bones, he thought there is no way they could ever live, but he also knew the power of his God and if it was the will of God for them to live, then God would do the impossible.

I had to truthfully say to God in that moment, *"I don't know, Lord, but I want You to be able to trust me. Work in me until You can trust me with the things of Your heart. Let me see the world as you see it. Let me rejoice at the things that you rejoice in, Let me weep at the things that bring you sadness"*.

I knew that if God had to ask me that question, then He could not trust me. That hurt. Oh, how God is looking for a people who He can trust with His heart. Will you climb the mountain into His presence to learn His ways? Will you let Him break your heart with the things that break His heart?

Each one of us has a choice of how far up the mountain we want to go. Many people are content to stay at the foot of the mountain and hear God speak through other men and women. Getting close to God brings fear to their hearts. Some are willing to go part way up the mountain and even will meet with God and talk with Him. But, it is on top of the mountain where the glory of God is seen.

The Glory

It is on the mountain where we are changed into His likeness from glory to glory. Today God calls His mighty ones to come up the mountain and meet with Him. He is preparing a people to contain His glory. Isaiah looked ahead to a day when the glory of the Lord would be revealed.

And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Isaiah 40:5 (NLT)

Isaiah chapter 60 is a prophetic word for Zion. Again, Zion is a picture of the Church according to Hebrews, chapter 12. Therefore, this passage does apply to the Church, the corporate body of Christ. It belongs to the remnant, the bride, being prepared for her husband. She will be clothed in glory.

Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth And deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you And His glory will appear upon you. Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising. Isaiah 60:1-3 (NASB)

This is what God is preparing to do. His glory will be seen in every nation and every ethnic group. Yes, there is enormous darkness and sin covering the earth in our time. We already see the darkness of sin all around us, increasing in intensity every day. For those without hope, it seems to be too much to bear. As the darkness increases, the light of our Lord's glory becomes brighter. Light dispels darkness and people will be drawn to the light of our Lord's glory.

Let's look at another scripture in Isaiah that talks about a new day for Zion.

In that day seven women will take hold of one man and say, 'We will eat our own food and provide our own clothes; only let us be called by your name. Take away our disgrace.' In that day the Branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel. Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem. The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire. Then the Lord will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy. It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.

Isaiah 4:1-6 (NIV)

Could it be the seven women here represent the seven churches listed in Revelation? The churches addressed in Revelation represented the Body of Christ at that time in history, the days of John the Revelator. Could it be that there is a day coming when those who are left in Zion (the seven women) will come to the place where nothing else matters to them, but one man and that man is Jesus?

There is such disgrace on the Church today that the world looks at us in disgust and ridicules everything we do. Divorce among Christians is as high as those in the world. Sexual sins abound in those who say they follow Christ. This has got to turn around. The Church must come out of Babylon. It must be purged and set free from its slavery to rituals and religious activity. It must be purged of exaltation of self. Paul talked to the Church in Ephesus about a glorious Church without spot or wrinkle. It will happen.

But notice how this disgrace is removed from Zion. It is removed through the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning. When judgment comes, we see clearly what is right in the sight of God and we repent and turn toward Him. He purges us and it is only after this purging that the glory is seen on Mount Zion. So, too, it will be with this end-time Church. Judgment must come to the house of God first. There is a separation taking place even now. No longer can we claim to be on Jesus' side and live like we are on the devil's side.

Distinguishing Between the Holy and the Common

In Leviticus chapter 10 and verses 10 and 11, God told Aaron that one

responsibility of the priesthood was to teach God's people to distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean. God was clear that this responsibility of the priesthood was to be carried down through the generations. This is the true definition of judgment.

When we judge things correctly, we are able to distinguish what is holy from the common, what is clean from the unclean. It is to know what is in the heart and mind of God for He is holy. It is then that we know how to apply a righteous and godly solution to that which has been judged by God.

Ezekiel tells about a vision he experienced in chapters 40-44 of the book that bears his name. In the vision God measured the temple. Everything that could be measured was measured including the foundation. One of the first chambers measured was the place where the priests and the singers lived.

God is using His tape measure to measure the Church today. He is examining the foundation. Ephesian 2:20 explains the apostles and prophets are part of the foundation with Jesus as the cornerstone. Paul was an apostle, called of God. In I Corinthians 3:10 Paul said that as an expert builder he laid a foundation and then someone else built on it. Then in verse 11 he goes on to say that no one can lay a foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus. There is no other foundation other than Jesus.

Jesus established apostles and prophets as foundational gifts to ensure the foundation of Jesus was the only foundation for the Church. If leadership tries to establish any other foundation other than Jesus, they are not building according to God's design. Jesus, through His gifts to the Church, the apostles and prophets, are able to judge correctly and to apply righteousness to bring Kingdom principles into play to tear down what the Lord would tear down and to build what the Lord would desire to build.

We were never mandated to build more than one house. There is only one house, and that is the house that Jesus is building. There is only one foundation with Jesus as the cornerstone. If we attempt to build on any other foundation, it cannot stand.

Jesus is examining leadership. One of the things that God found wrong in the day of Ezekiel was the uncircumcised of heart were in the sanctuary. There was no fear of God. Their worship was an act only and did not come from the heart. This sounds very much like what is happening in our assemblies today.

People are promoted into leadership by man's standards rather than by God's standards. All leadership is being examined and measured. We are all going through the fire. We are all being challenged to determine on which foundation we are building. What is of God will stand, but what isn't of God is going to fall or be rearranged.

Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever.

Psalms 125:1 (NIV)

God calls to His people today to come up the mountain into His presence. It is on this mountain where we live in His presence, doing His will and understanding His heart, that we can escape the shaking that is taking place. If we are unwilling to let go of things that are displeasing to God, if we

want our own way instead of His, there is no other choice, we will go through the shaking.

They are to teach my people the difference between the holy and the common and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean.

Ezekiel 44:23 (NIV)

God's people need to understand what is holy and clean and what is unclean in God's eyes. The world doesn't have a real definitive definition of what is right and wrong. Situational ethics is taught in our schools and violates the standards set in the Word of God. It is no wonder that our children are so confused on this issue. Birth control is issued to children. Homosexuality is accepted as normal behavior. They are taught that the Bible is out-of-date and cannot be trusted. No wonder Jesus asked the question, "*Will I find faith at all on the earth when I return?*" He was asking the question about His own people. Our hearts should break at that question and what we see today in the Church.

When my son was in junior high school, I was talking to a worldly psychologist, and he asked me if my son had a clear definition of what was right and wrong. I said a definite "yes". This man told me that I would be surprised at how many parents that he counsels couldn't answer that question. Later he had the opportunity to ask my son that question and my son told him that yes, he had a clear definition of right and wrong.

How sad, that most people don't have a standard to live by. Even in the Church, most people know what the Bible teaches, but many think its rules and regulations just don't work in a modern world, so they set their standards by whatever the world says is the standard and that could change moment by moment. To many people, freedom means being free to live by their own standard of what is right and wrong.

There is no other standard other than the word of God and God's people must understand and follow it or we will not see the glory of the Lord. He will only use holy and undefiled vessels to contain His glory. We must climb the mountain. We must be committed to truth. Truth is not a concept, but a person. Jesus is truth. There is none else.

We must seek our God and in seeking we find truth. Mountains are important in scripture and are often mentioned in relationship to finding God. Many times the Word mentions the prophets going to the mountain of God. Psalms 68:16 says that He dwells on the mountain.

God Gives Instructions from the Mountain

Moses was called up to the mountaintop. There God gave him all the instructions concerning the tabernacle and concerning the law. Up to this time Israel had traveled as one group. It was on the mountain that each tribe learned of their responsibilities and callings. It was on the mountain that Moses encountered the burning bush, and was given His commission to deliver Israel

from the hands of their Egyptian taskmasters.

The mountain is a place of instruction. In chapter 65 verse 11, Isaiah talks about those who forgot about the mountain of God and started seeking direction by fortune and destiny. It is a very serious thing to seek instruction and knowledge from any other source other than God.

We too, must climb the mountain of God and enter into His presence to see what His instructions to us would be. The plan He has for our lives can be known by us. But it will cost us. We must be willing to climb the mountain. The mountain is a place of holiness and we must be ready to remove our shoes and stand before our God on holy ground, waiting for Him to speak to us and show us His ways. Our shoes represent our own walk. Shoes collect the dust of the earth. We need a heavenly perspective so we must remove our earthly mindset and set our sights on the face of our God and understanding through His eyes.

Elijah was on the mountain when he received instructions from God to anoint Elisha as the prophet who would take his place. Jesus was on the mountain praying, when he received instructions as to who His twelve disciples were to be. Many are called, but few are chosen. The chosen ones are the ones, who against all odds and all circumstances and hindrances, will climb the mountain to meet with their God. The remnant desires to receive instruction from the Lord and they are only satisfied when they climb the mountain to enter His glory, knowing it is there in His presence they learn His will and come to know His heart.

Vision is sharpened on the mountain. Moses was called up to the mountain to see into the Promised Land. Abraham was shown the land that was to belong to his family and the generations to come, from the mountain. If we want clarity of vision in our day, we must climb the mountain. Do you hear the voice of the Lord calling you? Will you heed that call?

Exchanging Pride for Humility

The lesson of humility is learned on the mountain. God had given Abraham a promise that he was to be the father of many nations. Finally he received his son of promise, and everything seemed to be right on track for his life. But, then God asked him to do the unthinkable. He wanted Abraham to give up the one thing that meant everything to him, his son. Abraham knew God had promised him a son and he had trusted God. Now he had this son of promise and God required him to humbly give his son back to the Lord.

On our path toward our dream, we too, will come to a fork in the road where we must decide to take the path marked '*Pride*', or the path marked '*Humility*'. If we take the path of pride, we will be more interested in building monuments to our name instead of seeing our Lord exalted. This will eventually lead to discipline from the Lord, for He alone will be exalted in this day. However if we choose the path of humility, scripture declares that he who humbles himself God will exalt in due season. Psalm 25:9, 10 (NLT) says **"He leads the humble in doing right, teaching them his way. The LORD leads with unfailing love and faithfulness all who keep his covenant and obey his demands."**

There is an interesting event described in Ezekiel, chapter 17 concerning the Lord breaking off a piece of a very large cedar and planting it on the

mountain. He says all the trees of the field will know that it is God who brings down the tall tree and makes the low tree grow tall. He dries up the green tree and makes the dry tree flourish. Not always is the largest, the most well-known, the most polished group the ones who have climbed the mountain to be with their God.

The test comes to us all sooner or later. There will be temptation to exalt and make a name for ourselves. Lucifer declared that his desire was to sit enthroned on the mountain. Satan tempted Jesus by taking him up on a mountain and showing him the kingdoms of the world.

Temptation will come, but the mountain is also the place to gain victory over temptation. When the Jews sought to make Jesus their king, he escaped to the mountains. We need to do likewise, when men seek to make us something special.

In the days ahead, more revelation will come as to what true humility really is. We do not understand it today, so therefore we do not like it. True humility, however, will bring true peace and power beyond anything we have yet experienced. The mountain represents authority. Many desire that authority, but few are willing to pay the price to possess it. There is no authority without humility. Those who walk humbly with their God will possess the authority of God.

The Mountain Graveyard

There is an interesting account of an event found in I Kings 12-13 and continues in II Kings 23. A man of God had traveled a great distance to talk to the King of Israel who was a very wicked king. This man of God prophesied in days to come there would be born a man named Josiah who would become king. This king Josiah would destroy the high places where the current king was worshipping false gods. He also prophesied that men's bones would be burned on those altars. He said that as a sign all he had spoken would come to pass, the altar standing before him would split in two.

This made the king so angry that he called for his guards to seize this man of God, but as a result, the hand of the king withered. The altar split in two and the ashes were scattered according to the word the man of God had just spoken. The king then asked the man of God to pray for his hand and he was healed.

The account then resumes in II Kings. The new king prophesied years before by the prophet had been born. This new king obtained a copy of the Word of God which had been lost for many years. He probably even read this prophecy about himself. In any case, King Josiah set out to destroy the high places and to set Israel back on the right track of worshipping the only true and living God, just as the prophet had foretold.

Josiah went to the mountain and as he turned he saw the tombs on the mountain. He asked about them and found that they were the graves of the high priests who had offered sacrifices to false gods on the high places. He had their bones dug up and burned on the altar, exactly as God had proclaimed. The bones of the prophets were also buried on the mountain, but they were not disturbed.

We must all face the mountain graveyard. This is the place where we allow self to die, so we can advance up the mountain to meet with our God. It is a place of destroying every idol, everything that we have allowed in our lives to be more important than our relationship with the Lord. The mountain is a place of decision. It is a hard place. It is a place of sacrifice. It is a place where we lay aside all pride and are clothed in humility. It is a place of laying our lives on the altar. It is where we die, if we truly desire to live!

Mountains - Place of Confrontation

The mountain is also a place of confrontation. There are enemies who do not want you to become what God desires. When David fought Goliath, the Israelites were lined up on one mountain and the Philistines on another mountain. When God gave Moses the law, He commanded Moses to have some of the tribes proclaim the curses from one mountain and the blessings from another mountain.

Mountains in scripture sometimes represent kingdoms or nations. Isaiah, chapter two, gives us insight about the mountain of God. Isaiah, a true prophet of God, desired to have his mouth touched by the Lord in order to bring forth a pure word. Isaiah saw the mountain of God higher than all the other mountains around. These other mountains operating in pride seek to be exalted above the mountain of God. There will always be confrontation on the mountain. Pride seeks to take the mountain, but pride will be destroyed.

God's mountain will be exalted in the earth. This is the place where the remnant of God lives. They do not visit it occasionally, but they stay continually in God's presence. There is great glory that will be visible to the people of the earth and they will flock to this mountain to be taught by the Lord.

Before this happens the high places must be destroyed. Nothing can take precedence over the Lord in our lives. Ezekiel as a prophet was commanded to speak to the mountains of Israel. In chapter 6 Ezekiel was told by God to tell the mountains that God was about to bring a sword against them to destroy their high places. There will always be confrontation on the mountain between those things that are godly and those things that are not.

Did you ever play the game, king of the mountain when you were a child? One child would be stationed at the top of a hill as the king, and others would try to knock everyone from the hill so they could be the new king. Satan knows the importance of the mountain and he wants to be in control and rule from there. But, the sword of the Lord is being released against the things that exalt themselves above the Lord.

Watchmen in the church are prophesying and having visions concerning the sword of the Lord. It has been taken down from its resting place and is going throughout the land. According to Ephesians 6:17, the sword of the Spirit is the word of God. In Hebrews 4:12 the word is likened to a two-edged sword that divides the soul from the spirit, and is able to discern the thoughts and motives of the heart. God is separating the works of the flesh from the works of the Spirit. He is separating that which is dead from that which is alive. He is calling us out of Babylon. He is separating the wheat from the tares.

That is what is happening in our day. That is why there is so much

shaking and revealing of sin in the body of Christ. God takes no pleasure in hurting us. He would rather reveal sin to you personally and deal with it, but He warns that those things hidden in the dark will be brought into the light. God gives all His people ample opportunity to repent and turn things around before he openly reveals sin. But if repentance does not come, then He will deal with it, for He will have a holy bride.

"Is not my word like fire," declares the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"

Jeremiah 23:29 (NIV)

God is using His sword, the word, today to examine rocks or foundations. The fire is being applied and any work that is not founded on the Rock, Christ Jesus will be broken in pieces.

God is visiting every household, every assembly or gathering place, every organization that is called by His name and He is revealing what is based on self-will in the soul realm and what is based on Kingdom principles operating from the spirit realm. Not everything that seems good and right is of God. It can be based on man's need and desire for recognition. However, Isaiah declares several times that there is a day coming when *"the Lord alone will be exalted"*. This is that day. If a work is based on man's efforts and abilities, it will fall. If it a work based on God's call and anointing it will flourish and draw men to Jesus. This is the work of the sword of the Lord.

The word of the Lord came to me, 'Son of man, speak to your people and say to them: When I bring a sword against a land, and the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman, and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people, then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not heed the warning and the sword comes and takes their life, their blood will be on their own head. Since they heard the sound of the trumpet but did not heed the warning, their blood will be on their own head. If they had heeded the warning, they would have saved themselves. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes someone's life, that person's life will be taken because of their sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for their blood.' Ezekiel 33:1-6 (NIV)

Watchmen in the church are declaring the sounding of the trumpet and they are warning God's people of what is ahead. But many are not listening. Unfortunately, there are too many Christians who don't believe that prophets exist today, so they don't receive their words as a message from God. Secondly, most Christians believe we are under a day of grace and that judgment is not for today. They do not have a clue to the biblical definition of judgment and righteousness.

They believe God doesn't discipline like He did in the Old Testament. Do you remember Ananias and Sapphira mentioned in scripture? They were New Testament saints and under the day of grace, too. They lay dead at the feet of

the apostles because they lied to the Holy Spirit. What a rude awakening is coming to the Church! The incident is recorded in Acts, chapter 5.

The Mature Church, the Beautiful Bride

For those who believe the sword of the Lord is Old Testament they need to read Revelation 1:16 and Revelation 2:12-17.

In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

Revelation 1:16 (NIV)

The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. They represent the body of Christ. In this prophetic vision given to John, the Church is in one hand of Jesus and the sword is in the other hand. In the vision the Church has been purified and made holy through the spirit of purging and is now ready to take her place in executing judgment to the nations. This is why judgment must come to the house of the Lord first. In that judgment the bride is purified and ready to take her place beside her Lord.

To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. I know where you live - where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city - where Satan lives. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.'

Revelation 2:12-16 (NIV)

In His letter to the Church at Pergamum, Jesus warned of the sword coming to them. Let us, too, awaken and hear what the Spirit of the Lord is saying. Once God has dealt with us using the sword, He can then place us in His hands to be used and not before. We would be like Peter who cut off the soldier's ear, only we would have probably cut off his head instead of his ear. Using the sword is serious business, but it is also the glory and honor of the saints.

Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds. May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, to carry out the sentence written against them, THIS IS THE GLORY OF ALL HIS SAINTS. Praise the Lord.

Psalm 149:6-9 (NIV)

The sword has been awakened in the land, and there is a remnant that is submitting to God's discipline. They are allowing themselves to be purged and the wood, hay, and stubble to be burned in the fire of His presence. These ones are coming through the fire, refined and purified and God says, "*They will be My people and I will be their God*". This is the remnant. These are the overcomers! The call is to all, who will respond?

"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!" declares the Lord Almighty. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones. In the whole land," declares the Lord, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third I will bring in to the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say 'They are my people' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'"

Zechariah 13:7-9 (NIV)

The Bride, oh what beauty she displays! She shines with the glory of God, like a beautiful precious jewel. She has finally reached the place, the destination God has planned for her from the beginning. It awaits all who are not faint of heart, all who will go on to overcome everything that stands in the way of arriving at this final destination. Will you pay the price? Will you go through the purifying fire? God bless you, I believe you will!

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.' And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

Revelation 21:9-11 (NIV)

Jesus dictated to John on the island of Patmos letters to the seven churches. The number seven represents maturity and completeness. To each city assembly of believers, He mentioned "overcoming". We must come to the place where He is our first love. Out of that love for our Lord, we hear His voice clearly and we obey Him. Our spiritual eyes and ears have become so attuned to Him that our faith is in Him alone, knowing that He is faithful. We have matured.

Ephesus: He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. Revelation 2:7 (NIV)

Smyrna: He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

Revelation 2:11 (NIV)

Pergamum: He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it. Revelation 2:17 (NIV)

Thyatira: To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations - he will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery - just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Revelation 2:26-29 (NIV)

Sardis: He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his own name before my Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Revelation 3:5-6 (NIV)

Philadelphia: Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Revelation 3:12-13 (NIV)

Laodicea: To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Revelation 3:21-22 (NIV)

HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR!