

# The Prophetic Call

By

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## Introduction

There are two great words that I guard with a fierce jealousy, namely, *prophetic* and *apostolic*. The church is "...built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets...(Eph. 2:20b)", and if those two words are ruined, cheapened, made merchandise of, lose their meaning or are made to stand for something that God did not intend, then we have lost our foundation. If there is something flaky about our apostles and prophets, then what will the superstructure be if it is based on *that* foundation? The superstructure cannot exceed the foundation, and therefore the foundation deserves the most exceeding attention. This has been my long-standing passion and jealousy, and in a certain sense, a kind of a watchdog over these words, that they should not be used indiscriminately nor lightly, which in fact is exactly what is happening today.

Even if we cannot articulate or explain them, we need to intuit what they represent and the *importance* of what they represent, or we will indeed lose them. I would go further to say that the greatest threat of our contemporary, charismatic and evangelical Christianity is the cheap and light allusions to, and use of, these words. We throw them about with great carelessness and there are ministers taking for themselves their title, or allowing themselves to be so described, who are not in that office or may be false expressions of it.

There is a present phenomenon taking place worldwide of a sudden attention to the prophetic calling. One of the interesting things to note is the popularity now of that calling, with people gleefully tripping off to pack out churches in order to hear men who are being called 'prophets' and 'oracles'. It is a phenomenon that we need to attend with great care. We are told that in the last days that there *will* be false prophets, false apostles and false anointings. In the book of Revelation, the church in Ephesus is congratulated by the Lord for discerning the false apostles, "*those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false* (Rev 2:2b)."

I am continually amazed at the naiveté and the ignorance with which these great words are being used. It has become so bad that people cannot even distinguish between the *gift* of prophecy and the *office* of prophet. I cannot think of a more fundamental confusion that would destroy the foundation of the church than this one thing alone. It is like a brush that is painting everything in the same color. The *office* of prophet is so holy, "*the holy prophets of old.*" The gift of prophecy is something else and can be exercised through any believer as the Spirit wills. *That* does not make them a prophet and we need to make that distinction.

The most formidable character of deception in the last days is not going to be something so bizarre that it can be instantly identified as being out of the bowels of Hell, but rather it is going to be couched in the most conventional, orthodox and biblical language. The persecution of the remnant church of the last days is not so much the threat that comes to us from the world, but from a religious dimension that think that they are doing *God* a service. It will be more difficult to discern the good than the evil. Evil is apparent, but good is subtle. Good has much going for it and much to commend it, but if the good is not from God and just emanates from a kind of altruistic, humanistic personality, then good will be just as destructive to

the interests of God as evil. That which appears as good will keep us from the particular and perfect will of God, and it is, therefore, more deadly than evil as it is not recognized as evil, because it purports to be good.

How, therefore, will we discern? We have got to hate that which is good—the false good; that which purports to be good; that which appears to be good; that which will appeal humanistically to us as being nice, pleasant or right. We need to hate good in *that* sense, to hate sentimentality and to hate that which gives a nice feeling. The false prophet is the one who says, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace." He 'makes nice', and which of us does not like 'nice' and to be 'made nice'. There is something that yearns for it, and therefore they have a ready market, large audiences, great responses and mass mailing lists, because we want that which is nice, good and pleasant to the ear.

There are two parallel tracks, the fictitious and assumed, presumptuous nonsense of men and the authentic thing, now in process of restoration from God. One will flatter you and make nice with entreaties to your flesh and the other will call you to the cross, and by that you can know who are the true prophets and the false.

The false prophets of Baal with whom Elijah was in contest actually thought that there would be a god to answer. They thought that there was going to be a fire from heaven. They were not cynical men who were religiously posturing because they were connivers, but they really thought that God was going to see them dancing and jumping and cutting themselves in the frenzy. They were deluded and deceived *themselves*. The false prophets of the last days are well-meaning men with sincere intentions, fully persuaded that they are right and that the other man is the person who is in error. What distinguishes, therefore, the one from the other? This question is not only valid for those who call themselves prophets but also for each and every individual in the church. *This issue of true or false is a critical issue and it is the issue of the cross in authentic appropriation and not just in credal acknowledgment. Merely to credally acknowledge something as true is itself the heart of deception and apostasy.* We have been seduced and induced to think that if we just passively acknowledge something as being doctrinally true, then that is the statement of its truth. It falls short, however, of the existential reality that God is after.

If we ourselves are satisfied with mere credal affirmations of the truth of the faith, and have not pressed in and *wrestled* to get the existential power of it, then we will not be able to communicate it to anyone. What we are seeing in the new crop of 'prophets' is a testimony of a failed Christianity that has not pressed in, has not wrestled, but has been satisfied with mere credal affirmation, sufficient for *us* to get by, but insufficient for His glory. *Everything rests in the existential appropriation of the faith.*

There is something about the seductive power of the approval and acceptance of man that works in us as a leaven for disaster. There is something that men covet to be approved by their fellows, to receive their appreciation and to be honored by them. To be indifferent to that honor and approval and to speak the necessary word however much you will bring painful rejection can only be borne by someone who has no life unto himself. It is all the same to him as to whether he is accepted or rejected, misunderstood or approved, all of that is to say, that the issue between the true prophet and the false is the issue of the cross. Flattery is an antichrist mode of winning and influencing men. It is so beguiling, for who does not love to be flattered or to be acknowledged and recognized?

We need, therefore, to grow up in the ability to discern and sense the truth in general, and especially truth about this calling. It may well be that certain practitioners are so artful and so appearing to be prophetic that crowds will run after them, and the true man, who does not cut any impression and is a 'wallflower', so to speak, is altogether ignored, and yet *he* is the bearer of God's word. Thus is there a premium on the

church to come of age, and the very coming of age is, in fact, also at the same time, part of the prophetic process. That is to say, we come of age because we hear the word of God, the prophetic word, that requires of us to grow up, and in growing up we are able to discern the realities of the last days.

## Chapter 1 - What is Prophetic?

### **What is a Prophet Historically and Presently?**

What rises in your own thought and in your own heart when the word 'prophet' is evoked? What image, what sense of things comes to your own understanding? We need to remember that the false prophets were those who wore rough garments to deceive, and that the only reason they could succeed was because the people whom they deceived had an anticipation or a stereotyped view of prophet that their false depiction represented. Does a prophet have to be some long-haired wilderness guy in a rough garment, who acts strange and peculiar, and who looks with great intensity in his eyes? How would you define what a prophet is? How is he different from an apostle, or a teacher, or an evangelist? Are prophets still existent or are they strictly an Old Testament phenomenon? Is there such a thing as a New Testament prophet, as being something very different from the Old?

There is a tremendous amount of difference and controversy that broods over this subject. The church has really suffered from a kind of dichotomy between the Old and the New, as if the New has displaced or rendered the Old null and void. That is not the way that God sees it. That is the terminology that men have employed, but not the terminology that God Himself has given, and we have suffered for that. Jews have also suffered for that because it leaves them secure within the framework of their own Judaistic understanding: "You have your Book; we have our Book." It is implying that: "You have your God, and we have our God". It is an impression that God never intended, but that we have allowed Judaism to luxuriate in and find safety in. We need, therefore, to fight for the one faith, the one unbroken, continuous faith, given from the beginning, and that is climaxed, concluded and consummated at the end by the same God who gave it in the beginning. He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

If that is the way we see the faith, then can we expect and will we need prophetic men of the Old Testament kind in our own generation, and especially at the end? Is there a conjunction between beginnings and endings? As it was in the beginning, so also at the end? The issues of the beginning do not change, but are even brought into more intensive focus and significance at the end, but it is not different or other than what was at the beginning.

I am astonished at the novelty and fascination with prophetic things for our charismatic generation. What trails we break in order to pursue after the 'prophet of the hour' without a comparable fascination or interest in the prophets of the Book! I cannot understand this kind of schizophrenia. We are fascinated by the contemporary 'prophets', who are so infinitely shallow and who themselves have bypassed completely any interest in the great Hebrew prophets of old through whom God spoke, not only in addressing the Israel of their own generation, but the Israel that is yet future. We need to be constantly reminded that the prophets are the prophets of Israel. They are the spokesmen of God to that nation. It is not unfair to say that nothing more reveals God as God as is seen in His dealings and judgments with Israel. To put ourselves, therefore, in a dysjuncture from Israel and the prophets of Israel, is to put us away from the hearing of God's prophets, and thereby affect our whole consideration of what we mean by prophetic. This will condemn us to a kind of shallowness about the very things of which we are already victim.

We need to ask what the essential differences are in, for example, Ezekiel or Jeremiah's message? If we can come to some understanding there, then we are cutting right into the truth of what the prophetic call is. Is it the soothing and benign comforting of a false kind, which is generally what people want? Their souls cry out for it, particularly in time of distress and consternation. The true prophet, however, is rubbing salt into their wounds. He deepens the dilemma and makes more clear the painful contradictions of the age, and he says, "There is no peace." He is bringing the dilemma into yet a deeper focus and saying, "You are not going to find peace until there is a judgment for this." He brings an unwelcome message that the flesh wants to shrink from, and the most common way to nullify the message is to kill or render null and void the man who brings it.

That is why we are probing what the classic, timeless elements are that have constituted prophets in every generation, whether or not it is Elijah, Isaiah, or Jeremiah. What in fact, is the difference between Isaiah and Jeremiah, or Samuel, or any of the minor prophets? However diverse these men are, is there anything central that runs through them all, that is intrinsic to being prophetic? Whatever the differences, what are the things that are the same? What is the heart, the quintessence of that which is prophetic? The quality of the man rarely comes through in his speaking or writing, but they all share the same label 'prophet'. We are trying to get at the heart of what that prophetic definition is, because if we have not as yet seen it in New Testament times, do we have a reasonable right to anticipate that we will? I cannot imagine that the age is going to close, with all of the great tumult and controversy of last day's collision between kingdoms of darkness and light, in that final warfare that eventuates in the victory of one and defeat of the other, without again men of this kind speaking. What does restoration mean, at least in part, if it is not the restoration of these offices that we have not seen in modern times. We even sense the need for the restoration, but we are so quick to grasp at anything that appears to be it, without critically examining what is being offered as 'prophet,' and in that might lie one of our deepest mistakes.

This is an hour of restoration, but one that requires our jealousy and watch-care. I know of one late pastor in New Zealand who saw as his prime function to instruct the church on how to identify, recognize, and honor the prophetic office when it comes. He was preparing his fellowship to be able to perceive, to recognize and to give honor to the true thing when it comes. I really appreciated that man. I think that I can say with a certain confidence that when I am speaking before a congregation, the blessing is the greater when a pastor or a leader in the congregation acknowledges the man in his prophetic call. When they are unwilling to make that acknowledgment, they still get something, but they do not get as much. There is, therefore, a blessing in the receiving of the man whom the Lord sends.

If we were to examine the callings of all of the prophets and their responses, we would see how often these men cry out, "But I am a child and cannot speak." After all of our examining we would have a portrait, and it would be a composite portrait of the prophetic genius. However much these men differ in their calling and personalities, there is some central thing that runs through them all that is designated 'prophetic', and that is what we are wanting to identify, because certainly the cry for that particular thing is with us in our final generation and in these last days. We cannot even conceive of the church independent of the restoration of prophets. Somehow and all of the sudden, this subject has broken upon the consciousness of the church, and now there is a sudden flush of excitement and men seem to be running everywhere to hear prophets. These prophets seem to have come to an instantaneous popularity. They were not on the scene before and all the sudden they are here. They are also being heralded in very lavish ways, not just as prophets, but as 'the oracles of the hour'. This is, therefore, a phenomenon that we need to examine to see how legitimate it is, and whether indeed it is the Lord or some kind of counterfeit. We should be well along enough in the Lord to know that whenever the authentic thing is about to come, it is often preceded by something fictitious or counterfeit. I want to say that I am watching this present prophetic phenomenon very carefully and have an extreme sense of caution in my own spirit—if for nothing more than the

suddenness and the popularity—both of which have not been my experience. There is nothing sudden, but rather there is a growth, and there is nothing popular, but quite the contrary, there is reproach.

### **The Office of Prophet and the Gift of Prophecy**

An important distinction to make that I think is being blurred is the gift of prophecy as opposed to the office of being a prophet. In fact, that may be the gravest mistake now being made, of calling a man 'prophet' who is only moving in the gift of prophecy, but is not called to the office. I cannot think of anyone in the New Testament that exhibits the office of prophet, but to me that is not a problem. The fault lies with us in thinking that this is a New Testament dispensation that therefore requires another definition. If there is only one definition, however, and it is and has been in existence for all time, though we have not seen it in recent times, then it is no reason to look for a new kind.

The difference between the gift of prophecy and the office of prophet is a very important point. We would be wrong to say that anyone who prophesies is a prophet. The Spirit of God is dividing severally His gifts, which God can give in a moment as He wills. That should not, however, be a permanent and abiding distinction or designation. The Spirit of God can fall on any one of us and we can prophesy. We are operating by the Spirit in the gift of prophecy. The gift is something that the Spirit exercises at His will, and it can come from a man or a woman. It has nothing to do with their calling, their training, their preparation or their qualification. It may be informational, directive or a word of encouragement, but the office of the prophet is altogether something else and other.

The office of prophet differs from the gift of prophecy in that it is permanent. It is given with the man. It is a calling, and it may well be that men, who have the office of prophet, can go an entire lifetime in their service and never once speak out of the gift of prophecy, and yet still be functioning in their office. The church today is suffering from the ignorance of blurring these two categories. We are calling men prophets who have not the office, but who are operating in the gift of prophecy, and in many instances not even the gift of prophecy, but the gift of knowledge of a rather deceitful clairvoyance. We really need to be clear, therefore, on what we are saying.

The office of prophet is the ultimate thing and carries an enormous responsibility. Such a one brings the oracles of God. He is standing for very God and speaking from God with the authority of God in a troubled and final generation. His statements are the statements of God's heart to His people that have to do with His purposes in an understanding of the present time in view of the things that are future and eternal. It is the prophet who is alerted. He interprets the event and communicates that interpretation to a church that would otherwise have passed it over. That is his function and that is his call for which he is not necessarily going to be understood nor heard. The word is more often than not going to be rejected and his life is going to be threatened.

### **The Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy**

For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10b).

There is a powerful and irrevocable identification between the Lord, His own distinctive Person, and this prophetic thing. I can only intuit that there is some kind of inextricable and intimate bonding between things prophetic and Jesus Himself; that the issue of the thing prophetic is the issue of Jesus, and the issue of Jesus is the issue of the thing prophetic. To miss the meaning of prophetic is to miss Him. To abuse, therefore, the prophetic or to reject it, is to reject Him. In fact, the coming of the prophet is the day of decision. The receiving or the rejecting of him is making a statement to God. It is a fateful decision, one

way or another, that will determine the future of that work, that church and that fellowship. Regrettably, most Christians, even of a charismatic kind, are so naive and so uninstructed that they do not even recognize how fateful a situation it is in the day that God brings such a one to them. It sounds extraordinarily presumptuous, as if somehow it has to do with your ego, "You have received me", but it really is the issue of the Lord in His own prophetic constituency.

Jesus Himself was a prophet, and more than any other calling, it is what the man is in himself. That what Jesus is in Himself, is what the prophetic thing is in itself. It is that intricate and that joined, and yet we have a lot of presumers and a lot of pretenders. The office of prophet, therefore, is not a ministerial thing that can be obtained through certification, that if you submit to a course of study and fulfill certain academic and other requirements, then you receive a diploma and you are it. It has another kind of formation and everything that has to do with that formation has to do with suffering, as we shall see later.

Classically a prophet communicates the sense of God as He in fact is. This is the foundation upon which the church is built. The church is "...built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20)." It is not only the teaching or the ministry that apostles and prophets bring, but primarily the sense of God as He in fact is. They communicate something in the bringing of the word that is intrinsic to their own persons. There is a reason why people fear prophets, or they will tell you, "There is something about you that intimidates me." It is not some conscious design by which prophetic men want to hold others at arm's length. There is rather something of a resonance of God that men of foundational callings carry. The communication of this sense of God is foundational to the church, or the church would be given over inevitably to a view of God that contains a certain lightness and shallowness and that is not God. Prophets therefore correct the church from a faulty sense of God. I am often crying out, "Lord, the sense of You, like the fear of You, has been lost and we are asking for that communication!!" That is why the man must be the thing in himself.

God has a deep identification with that which is prophetic, and to somehow touch that is to touch Him, and to abuse that is to abuse Him. It may well be that the greatest enmity of the world against God is visited on prophets for exactly that reason, namely, that to assault a prophet is to assault God. The world is at enmity with God, but the prophet is the visible, corporeal manifestation of elements central to God's own being and therefore the world has the opportunity both to identify, to hate, to despise and to do in. The testimony of the prophet is the statement of God, not only when he is speaking, but often even when he is silent. His very presence is an abomination and an offense to a world that despises God. The prophetic man is in himself the offense, as well as his message. In fact, if he is not his message, then we may well suspect that what we have is not a true prophet, but a false. That is why we need to watch with a jealous urgency anything that purports to be prophetic and is not, because it destroys the validity of that calling for the church in putting before it a false model.

There is a great accountability for that gift of God to men, and if it is mistreated, ignored or rejected, then the end result will be judgment. We pay a great price when we lightly regard or disregard, let alone violently reject, him whom God sends in that prophetic mantle, because it is so much the essence of God Himself in His own being. Israel repeatedly stoned the prophets that were sent to her, and in so doing, invited and made necessary the devastating judgments that have followed.

### **The Validity of the Accuracy of Predictions**

I would suspect that any man who calls himself prophet and talks statistically (for example, 70 or 80 percent accuracy), is not in keeping with the timbre, the make-up and the knit of a truly prophetic man. To determine whether a prophet is true or false should not immediately lie on whether their predictions are

accurate. The issue of the moment is not the accuracy of prediction in assessing the validity of prophets. It is a false criterion because the issue of what is ultimately true or false is and has always been the issue of the word, namely, the prophetic word. Even to think statistically is to put ourselves on a false basis to determine true and false among prophets if it has moved us from heart discernment to mathematical discernment in terms of "what is the average". It is not that these men do not bring biblical messages, but it is the kind of biblical message that is a routine commonplace, that is to say, which anyone can bring. There is nothing in it that can be faulted in terms of doctrine, but it is not oracular. It is not a message that bears prophetic weight or intensity or seriousness or requirement. Oracular speaking, or the oracles of God, can be distinguished by the way it brings with it a manner of perceiving things that were not there before that word came. It opens up things as God sees them, which is altogether not as we see. That is a prophetic function.

If we allow the word 'prophet' to be given to anyone who is giving predictive prophecy or even the gift of knowledge or what seems to be more likely, fortune telling, and call that oracular prophecy, then we are well on the way to deception! These men speak messages, but they are only a preliminary that one has to wait through in order to get to the 'action' for which we have really come, namely, for their predictive prophecies that so excite and titillate an audience. The greater issue is not so much as to whether these prophets are accurate most of the time so much as whether they are prophets at all! To confirm the church in its present lightness by their own example is analogous to the false prophets of Old Testament time who confirmed Israel in its sin. All in all, one must ask, what is their revelation? How oracular is it? What is it more or other than the general preaching of others who make no profession of being prophetic? Is their distinctive not much more than the sensationalism or excitement of their gifts or the anticipation derived from the hero status generated largely by their affirmation of each other?

## **The Prophetic Function**

The quintessential definition of the prophetic call is given to Jeremiah at the inception of his ministry:

Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." (Jer. 1:9-10).

The first expression of the prophetic calling is judgment. Unless we have a stomach for that, we will not be allowed the privilege of the word that builds and plants. Note the order of the words: the hardest thing first. Everything that is painful to the flesh and that will earn for us the displeasure of men must first be addressed. The prophet is called to pluck up and break down the things that are dear to men, namely, their religious tradition, the false things that they have celebrated for generations, the things that they want to cling to because it has to do with their identity and their dignity and the way in which they even see themselves. Men will kill for this and yet the prophet has got to tear down and destroy. The things that are false will be contended for fiercely! He has got therefore to be painful and a destroyer. His word then is destructive before it is benevolent. Unless we are willing to speak the destructive word, we will never be used for benevolence. Only the prophets who were faithful to speak the word of exile and judgment were also the prophets who spoke the word of restoration and return. They were given the privilege of speaking the creative word of restoration. It would be a much simpler task if we just had to establish fresh principles where it falls on virginal consciousness. When you first have to deal with and penetrate a whole existent medley of opinions and traditions that have become dear (if not sacrosanct), you will ironically be accused of being opposed to God!

A prophet not only identifies falsity, but he ruthlessly destroys it. There is something about his word that is like a fire. It is plucking up, rooting out and destroying before it is planting and rebuilding. Who wants to hear men like that? They not only just bring things into question, but they absolutely reduce it to rubble before your eyes. For you to pick it up after that is to touch the unclean thing. They have identified it and now you are stuck with that word. It is little wonder that such men are not welcome in places where people want to continue their lifestyle unchallenged.

A prophet critiques and unsparingly lays bare, without fear and regard of man, the lie or even 'conventional' truth, that is to say, the assumed, mindless, uncontested premises that constitute death in the midst of life. It is to reveal the lie, to expose it and to 'blow the whistle.' That lie may well be the lies of the false prophets. The whole world is predicated on lies, but how shall it know unless a word of truth comes. If that word is to come, then it is to come from one who is totally without fear of man. We all know that the fear of man is the most powerful and crippling factor that works in the lives of God's ministers. To be free of that and to speak without regard to the fear of man is an ultimate statement that implies such a history of dealing with that servant. We are all born with the fear of man. We live for the regard of man, for their acknowledgment and for their applause. Men love the acknowledgments of men, particularly prestigious men, but we have got to be weaned away from that necessity. It is a process; it does not take place in a day. Every time that God brings us to that place of weaning, we have got to submit to it, until we come to the place where we do not need it. We need to come to the place where we are not only indifferent to the applause of men, but also to their criticisms and reproaches. A prophet requires, therefore, an extraordinary discernment to critique and an analytical ability honed by the Spirit. It is not a 'taking of pot shots', but an apprehending of God's own view of something, and expressing that.

The prophet's own lifestyle must itself, therefore, be a repudiation of the lie. We cannot 'blow the whistle' on false values if we ourselves are subscribing to them. There is something about poverty that is more than an accident or happenstance. It is appropriate to the authenticity of our union with God. Camel's hair garments and the eating of locusts are symbolically intrinsic to the prophetic life. There is a reason why John the Baptist was in the wilderness and not in Jerusalem, though he was the son of a priest. He could not be where the Establishment was. He could not enjoy its benefits and at the same time 'blow the whistle' on the falsity of it. We cannot in our own lifestyle indulge in the very thing that we are condemning before others. Lifestyle is, therefore, remarkably important with regard to the word that is to be proclaimed and probably nothing more betrays whether you are a true or false prophet than this. The false prophets ate from Jezebel's table. Elijah had to be fed by ravens and live by the side of a brook. It is not that one seeks to wear a camel's hair garment because it is romantic or that you have to dress in such a way that marks you as being distinctive and different. The values that are false cannot have a place in us. A prophet is called to reveal the lie, the underlying premises that need to be examined in the light of God about value, about life and its purposes, and therefore your own lifestyle must be a repudiation of that lie, however much society and even the church legitimates it. A prophet's speaking not only reveals the lie but condemns and judges it. His word as is his life itself is a divine destruct.

When Elijah said, "There shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word (1 Kings 17:1b)," it was not just saying that there will be a little difference in your weather pattern. It meant that they were not going to have crops. They were not going to eat. They were going to experience a famine. It was going to be a judgment from God and it was to come through the speaking of Elijah's word. His word was not just a piece of information or an interpretation, however much it may be that, but rather it was a statement of judgment. It would actually affect the whole nation. That kind of word needs to be revived and restored. It is a trembling proposition to bear, and I can think of a few minor instances in my own experience where

my word was a word of judgment, and God acted according to what I spoke. The church to whom it was spoken no longer exists because that was the word of judgment itself.

The prophet's task is to establish an alternative, powerful and valid enough to utterly displace the lie. He presents a view of reality not yet existent and that is contrary in most points and particulars to that which is thought to be 'real' and for which there is no precedent or model in the experience of the hearer. He brings a heavenly and an eternal sense that obliterates the kind of validation and endorsement that the world's values have had upon his hearers up to that time. If he had not come, they would have thought that what they were celebrating was real. When the prophet comes, however, he is not only blowing the whistle on what is false, but he brings a sense of what is true and what is eternally true. He brings the sense of eternity itself and inducts the hearer into it. By his speaking, he sets in motion and brings his audience to a place where the false becomes true. The word becomes creative and establishes the resonance of something not understood before—something that is ultimate and eternal. To pierce through the false and raise another kind of a standard and make that the foundation of life is, and must be, an extraordinary kind of speaking.

Those who embrace this model that the prophet is setting forth as the alternative to the lie, and that is a heavenly alternative, condemn themselves to being pilgrims and sojourners in the earth, and therefore able to die 'not having received the promise.' If they are going to receive a prophetic word like this that calls them to the heavenly vision in which Abraham walked, then this is going to be the consequence for their life. The word, therefore, that comes to the hearers has got to come with such a power, authority and credibility that the person who hears says, "If I say 'Yes' to this, then I am signing my death warrant." No one is going to sign that lightly who has not been persuaded by the word that invites that kind of consecration. Only a prophet, a foundational man, can bring a word of that kind. He calls for something of ultimate consecration on the part of the hearer—unto death. That is why false prophets are more invited and listened to than the true. The false prophet affirms the hearer in his present condition and tells him that in that he is already 'well-pleasing'.

The prophet's purpose is singly and jealously the Father's will. He restores lost vision of a kind that energizes the people of God, especially in crisis times when despair needs to be turned to hope—having initially been stripped of false hopes by the prophet himself. He does not balk at having to be cruel before he can be kind. A man who can bring the necessary but painful, cruel word that must come in order to build is not unloving but very love itself. In a word the prophet brings the 'moment of truth'. Standing in the counsel of the Lord he is able to perceive error and state boldly and unequivocally the requisite truth though it be utterly at variance with the consensus being demonstrated.

The prophetic task is to restore to men who have lost it, the biblical mentality and the biblical view of things that are unchanging in God's sight. He conveys the view of God particularly to a people who are unwilling to hear it. If the prophetic word is critical to bringing an alignment of God's people with His own view, then the kind of word that is brought by the prophets is the ultimate issue. Where there are authentic prophets who are willing to bring the unwelcome word, so will there also be a plenitude of popular false prophets who bring the false word of comfort and who say, "Peace, peace" when there is no peace.

A prophet does not major in minors. Out of a consummate jealousy for the glory of God, he sets forth the ultimate purposes of God in such a way as to obtain the sacrifices of his hearers to fulfill it. It is not enough just to set forth what God's program is, but to set it forth in such a way that he has won the willingness of the hearers to be participant in obtaining the ultimate and eternal purposes of God— as sacrifice. That is where the prophetic word is more than the word of explanation. It does not just explain what the eternal purposes of God are, but he communicates it in such a way as to win the commitment of his hearers to the sacrifice necessary to fulfill them. That takes more than explanation. The prophet

epitomizes the suffering that such an adherence evokes. In other words, those who are going to embrace the view that he is presenting are opening themselves to suffering. The prophet, therefore, who is inviting them to that suffering has himself in some sense to exhibit it and give the evidence that this is God's way and that the cross is central to the faith. He makes clear to his hearers that persecution, if not martyrdom, is intrinsic to a faith of this kind—and wins their willingness. It is one thing to establish that the cross, persecution and martyrdom are intrinsic to the faith, but to win the hearer's consecration to that call is an extraordinary stroke that requires the authority and anointing of those who bear His word. That is the prophetic task. We are not bringing information, but rather calling men to ultimate, sacrificial things and that is why that kind of a word will always be resisted.

The prophet announces and projects the impending end of this world in apocalyptic fury and judgment, sufficient to birth the longing for a new heaven and a new earth in which there is righteousness. He not only brings to the awareness of the hearer that the world that they have celebrated is under judgment and is intended for destruction, which means it will destroy a lot of where their own heart is, but he also births a longing for the thing that comes down from above and which will replace this present age.

A prophet is a man of the word who abhors lightness while deeply respecting and guarding the sanctity of language and its meaning from abuse and cheapening. He is not, therefore, always your enjoyable household guest and is not good for easy conversation and small talk. He guards his mouth because he knows the sanctity of words and will not, therefore, give himself to frequent speaking as it debases the currency of words. There is with him a history of waiting and silences.

A prophet shuns the distinctions and honors that men confer. These things bring a certain aura of prestige and eminence and weight, but the prophetic man, in order to be true to God is the 'wilderness' prophet. Wilderness does not just mean physical isolation, but a conscious and willful separation from the kinds of things that are calculated to compromise. He does not effect any kind of prophetic outward 'appearance' to indicate his office. He is unprepossessing in appearance and demeanor and despises what is showy, sensational or bizarre. A prophet is intent on turning men to God and not to himself.

This calling is given and is not something that we ourselves summon or take for ourselves, but if we have it, then we need to know that God is going to work us over, again and again, in order to ensure that it is His word that comes forth and not our own.

## Chapter 2 - What is Prophetic Proclamation or Speaking?

### **The Prophetic Continuum**

There is, I believe, a prophetic continuum that is the same in every generation. I know that there are New Testament prophets like Agabus, but the kind of prophet that I think is a continuum in the redemption history of the faith is the oracular kind. His word distinguishes his calling. The prophetic word is weighty and we know it when we hear it. It makes a particular demand upon our attention and likewise a requirement in our obedience. That kind of word can only come out of the council of God. My concern is the debasing of the church, a decline in the value and the valuing of the word, when that which is not out of His council is being announced as the prophetic word.

As I have mentioned, Isaiah and Jeremiah are distinctly different men. There is a similarity of burden; there is the jealousy for the glory of God; there is the seeing of the ultimate purposes of God; there is a calling of Israel back to fidelity to the God of its fathers, and yet they are so different. They are both writing prophets, both men of proclamation, stately men, oracular men, but there is a difference. Jeremiah was known to "pluck up, and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow (Jer. 1:10b)," which was never said to Isaiah, although Isaiah's word did bring judgment on Israel:

And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.' Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed (Isaiah 6:9-10).

Jeremiah's task from the beginning was a rooting up and a plucking out. He was with Israel right to its final judgment in the destruction of Jerusalem, which he had warned about. Here is a man lowered into pits where he suffered terrible indignities. He was a man of lamentation and crying, a man rending his heart trying to persuade Israel of her terrible, imminent judgments. I see Isaiah more as a man of warning. He begins his book (chapter 1):

Sons I have reared and brought up, but they have revolted against Me (v.2b). An ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master's manger, but Israel does not know, My people do not understand (v.3). From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it, only bruises, welts, and raw wounds, not pressed out or bandaged, nor softened with oil (v.6). How the faithful city has become a harlot, she who was full of justice! Righteousness once lodged in her, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross, your drink diluted with water (vs. 21-22).

It is a whole lament and accusation, an indictment to the nation long before the nation is even aware of its condition. The prophet is a seer, that is, one who sees as God sees. He is already anticipating what will come, but he sees it so vividly, that though it is future, for him it is already present and he speaks of it as if it is present. The reality that he communicates by that speaking is calculated, if the people will receive it, to save them from the thing that is being described, namely, the impending judgment. If they refuse that word, however, then they must inevitably suffer the experience.

### **The Distinctive of Prophetic Proclamation**

What an importance, therefore, that puts on true prophetic proclamation. The prophet is not just coming to bring a piece of information or to foretell something, but he is speaking with an urgency. If you can hear

God in that speaking, however much the man is an abomination in your sight, and you want to discredit him—and you find every reason for doing so—if you will only hear God's cry in it and take it to heart and repent, then you will be saved from the very thing of which he is forewarning. That gives, therefore, an urgency to the message of the prophet that makes prophetic proclamation distinctively different from teaching, evangelism or pastoral preaching. Jesus said about Himself:

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin (John 15:22).

In other words, "My appearing and My speaking have removed from you all pretense. The truth has come in Myself, and now you are responsible. Before I came you had an excuse for your superficiality and for your religious carryings on, that you thought was the real thing, but now that I have come, now that I have spoken, you have no excuse. The divine standard has fallen. The reality of God, the revelation of His purposes has been presented, and now you are responsible for that. You cannot go on as you were before."

I am increasingly experiencing the audacity to say to congregations, "You are going to be sorry that you invited me, because after I will have spoken, you will now be responsible—and that eternally. If you choose to reject what comes, then be assured that you cannot go on as you were before. You will either fall back to something much less even than you had before, or you go on to a qualitatively new thing." The prophetic word is an 'event', a revelatory event, for the fellowship or individual, coming from one who is sent, who bears the word of God and to whom has been given the Spirit without measure.

The truly prophetic man not only embraces both the past and the future, but he himself is both. He is living in the eternal future. He is already in the apocalyptic future. There is something about his whole manner and being that shows in the way he bears himself. He is not in this world. I do not mean by that, that he is a vain kind of flighty creature. He already hears a resonance of the things which are coming to pass. His anticipation, awareness and appropriation of that reality are so real for him, that even when he does not explicitly speak it as a subject matter, he already expresses the aura of it. He brings something of the sense of the invisible cloud of witnesses. He brings a sense of the continuum of the faith. He is in the Son, the eternal and changeless One. He comes to a people who are locked in time, locked in culture and products of their age. He comes to break in, to splatter and to let that go flying in every direction. He shows the one, timeless and eternal, irrevocable statement of God, the truth and reality throughout all ages and the ages to come. The prophet stands more than any other beyond the conventional categories of time. He sees the eternal thing toward which everything is tending and he brings the significance of that into the present moment for those who are hearing him.

To sense 'the mind of God' or 'the heart of God' and to be able to articulate that is inherent in the prophetic calling. There is always going to be a tension of opposition between the mind of the world and the mind of God, between our own thoughts and His thoughts. Prophets are always, therefore, going to run into a wall, into a place of opposition, a resistance, because God's thoughts are not only pure, but they are contrary to our own and invariably make a requirement. You cannot hear God without being required of. We came to that conclusion in our weekly Bible studies: "If we are not hearing some requirement from God every time we assemble in the examination of His Word, then we are not hearing God. We are only using His Word as a text to have a study."

When God speaks, however, something has got to give. If we are not wanting to give that something, then there is going to be a tension of resistance and rejection of the word. If people cannot find their opportunity to oppose the word by virtue of rejecting the word, they will find their point of opposition in rejecting the man. God will always give them something to fasten on to as well. There will always be

something if men want to find a way to absolve themselves from the implications and the requirements of God's word. Yet at the same time, for the man who is bringing it, he is not to employ it as an excuse, where if he has defect he says, "Well, that is what God uses". He needs to be grieved over the fact that there is any defect and seek in every way to rectify and make right, and to be impeccable and without offense before God and man. However earnest he will be in that, men will still find offense. They found it in Jesus, and they will find it in us, but "...blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me (Luke 7:23b)."—or "him whom I send, which is the very expression of Myself."

### **The Voice of the Prophet**

God puts a great premium on the voice of the prophets. It is not just their words, but their voice carries the urgency of God, the divine seriousness. If you change that and yet retain the technical word, you have lost the message. There is the resonance of God in his speaking that conveys not only the content and the meaning, but the disposition of God's own heart and how He feels about what is being said. I often pray, "Lord, so possess me that Your word will have full expression and also the mood of the speaking." The mood has nothing to do with the prophet's choosing. There are times when he is like a piece of cardboard or a straight monotone and he cannot alter it. He is uncomfortable speaking like that and wishes that he had the liberty to give the word the flourish that it needs. He is, however, as much bound in God in the manner of the speaking as the content of the speaking. Other times the same man is beside himself. He cannot be contained. He is falling off the edge of the platform in the intensity of the moment. In both cases, it is not the man who makes that determination, but God.

There is something about the resonance of a voice that bespeaks the history and the quality of the person's relationship with God. I know that our voices are as distinctive as our personalities and our appearances, but all of these things are tempered by our relationship with God. When I look at certain faces, I know that they do not reveal the grace of God, nor do they reveal the evidence of a relationship of a continuing or deep kind. There is something lacking in the face. In other faces, however, they are not even conscious of a radiance emanating from themselves. When you are in God's presence and are a seeker after God, and there is a life of communion, devotion and pouring your heart out, then it cannot be otherwise than that that will be reflected both in the face and the voice of the believer. A voice is like a signature. Someone said that by the time we are forty we are responsible for our faces. We are also responsible for our voices. God held Israel responsible for failing both to heed His words and the voice of His speaking as it came to them through the prophets.

### **The Mood of the Prophet**

When the prophet, whom God has raised up early and sent often, is not heard and the word is rejected, then the next and last thing is judgment. It is, therefore no wonder that there is an urgency in the speaking and that his words are designed to shock rather than edify. The prophet is, therefore, often seen as being horrid, slashing and shocking. The most common accusation is 'unloving', which he just has to bear. That is the way it sounds and appears, but how many of us can see that the harsh word is uttermost love? For a prophet not to have spoken it would have been unloving—if that is what the urgency of the moment required. That is not a justification to be in that mode continually. In the moment that God calls for it, then it must not be withheld. I would say that other than the Lord's prophetic use, such a man at other times would just be in neutral. He is not required to perform and to be in that mode, and that is what is surprising. He looks so unimpressive except for the time of use.

The prophet's mood is often in violent opposition to the mood that has already been established in the congregation, especially by the 'worship team'. I have had more conflict with worship teams and worship

leaders than I can tell you. They seem to have an independent purpose for their own being, no matter what, and establish some kind of mood, however contrary to God it is. Instead of working in conjunction with the word that is to come, or sensing the mood and heart of God, they have already got their choruses numbered and what they are going to sing and do. They have their musical virtuoso, talent and amplifiers and they are going to 'do their thing', and leave you to make the best of it afterwards as well as you can. I have had many messages dulled and the power of it lost, because of that unspoken opposition and tension where worship ministry is celebrated as a thing in itself. If I could, I would pull the plug out of every overhead projector and every amplifier. Let us rather just splutter and choke along, and miss a word here and there, and come into the spirit of God's worship, than that we should be led with choruses and more choruses. What they are really often trying to do is to effect an atmosphere for a service, rather than touch the heart of God, let alone prepare for the receiving of a holy word for those assembled.

There is a struggle going on right within the church and no man feels it more acutely than the 'freak' who is bearing a strange word with a strange mood and that is contrary to and other than that which prevails, where everybody wants to go home feeling good, and nobody wants to go home in tension. A prophet will often send people home jarred and unhappy with many unanswered questions. He has not that mentality that wants everything to be wrapped up in one package with a ribbon on it, in one service, and send people home happy. He will let the people go home jarred, pained, and even agonizing. He will raise questions that he himself has not adequately answered, and they themselves have got to wrestle and fight their way through to a place in God. There are very few pastors, maybe one in a hundred, who would be willing to allow his congregation to suffer that kind of stress and tension. "Send them home happy" is the unspoken premise of contemporary religion to which we as prophets do not subscribe. We are not in the mood of sending people home happy. We are of a kind to send them home agitated with questions that they are compelled to consider and that cannot be answered in one service. If we were given three days, we might be able to bring the listeners all the way through. How many churches, however, are willing to submit to such a man for that length of time? One service at best and, "Get him away!"

My suspicions are alerted if there is any bombast or 'hype', any exaggeration or sensationalism that conjures up a manner or a mode of excitement that the ear loves to hear, that would draw out those who are bored and want some kind of alternative to their boredom. Those who speak of coming judgment should not invest it with anything more than the word itself. He does not have to bring to it an additional quality so as to make it compelling to the hearer. The word itself speaks for itself. Anyone who would seek to bring an extraneous element through his own personality or manner of speaking is likely false. The prophet, therefore, does not have great latitude in how he deports himself. If we are highly individualistic and want to cut a swath for ourselves or do our own thing in our own way, then we are disqualified. "I will put My word in your mouth and that is what you will speak and you will speak it in the manner that I want it spoken." For as much as the prophet's life is wholly given over to God, there is not a surrender of identity, but in fact it establishes it. He loses his life but he has found it. Prophets are distinct, flesh and blood men with formidable personalities. They are not automatons that bear the word of God as a mechanical contrivance. They are formed in the womb, and that forming is Gods.

### **Proclaiming the Word that is 'Given'**

The prophet is not at liberty to address everything he sees. He can only address what God would have him to see. He does not proceed by his own seeing, nor by his own hearing, his own subjectivity or his own impressions. He is the Lord's and maybe that is why God is more jealous over the prophetic man than any other. More than any other, the prophet's life is not his own. A teacher is a teacher, but he is still himself

teaching. The prophet is one who is the communicator of God's own word. It is not the prophet's word; it is not even his mood. The prophet is dead. He has no life until God gives it, and God gives it for His purpose and glory only. Even when you see those who are being addressed falling like flies and going down on their faces under the power and the impact of that word, he experiences often absolutely nothing in that moment. He is absolutely impervious and totally unaffected by what has brought others down on their faces. He is simply out of it because it is not his word. He cannot exalt in it. It is not his work. It is the strangest of feelings to be somehow detached from the power and the effect of your own word, nor are you allowed in any way even to touch it or to draw forth any satisfaction for yourself.

I will enter a congregation and they are having a ball and worshipping up a storm—and everything seems to be right—yet I am grieving. I am almost doubled over and knotted in the inner man. I am anguishing in my soul, while everybody else is having a good time. How many people have been in such functions where they are the only freak? Everyone else seems to be 'moved by God', and there is all kinds of talk about 'the presence of God', yet you feel no presence at all. You are not conscious of any anointing. You do not see any blessing. All you see is a sea of carnality and self-deluded people priming and pumping themselves up, and your one presence in that room is a disjuncture with and a contradiction to all that is going on. To top it all, you are not there as an observer, but now you are going to speak. What will you speak? Will you speak so as to confirm what people think is the spiritual reality that they are celebrating, or do you take your whistle out of your pocket and blow it, and cry out, "Phony! Pretense! False! Self-effected! Hyped up production! Emotional! Sensual!"?

The prophet is required to speak on the basis of one of two things: either what his natural eye sees as being impressively spiritual, or what his inner man is groaning about that is contrary. When you speak on that basis, you are challenging everything to which men have given their endorsement. Either your word is God's, or you are some wild freak who is "doing damage to the Body of Christ." That tension is with you always. The Lord will even allow an occasion here and there where it will not be Him, and you have acted in a way in which you thought it was the Lord, but it was in fact yourself. God wants merely to keep you honest; that you must not presume that on every occasion, impeccably, you can be confident that it is God, because that will remove the tension and the dependency. God will allow a humiliation and a failure, all the more to charge your heart anew with the enormous gravity of what you are about, and the requirement to be cleaving to Him and dependent upon Him for your every word.

There are situations where you are not sure what to say or what to do. It is a remarkable kind of suffering to be in that kind of predicament, and then even after the moment passes, we are still assaulted by the thought of perhaps having missed the moment when we should have done something and we did not. That is a suffering, but I want to say that that suffering is at the heart of the church. There is a suffering that remains to be filled up in the Body. This kind of suffering is inevitable, frequent and we have long borne it. Many of us have agonized over the condition of the church, and the Lord knows it, and there is a certain inevitability about it, a certain tension of not knowing. We will always wonder if we did rightly. We need to bear that suffering and the Lord honors that. When the redemptive answer comes, it will come out of that willingness to bear that suffering as being part of the faith.

### **The Seriousness of the Word Spoken**

There is a weight of responsibility on God's people to correctly identify whom God has set before them, and there is a choosing. In making that decision and choice, something is struck that will profoundly affect that believing life for the rest of its days. Just the presence of the man, let alone the radicalness of his word, puts a premium of requirement upon the hearer like no other requirement that perhaps the church has got to face. What do you do with this man and this word? In fact, I almost invariably tell churches,

"You have a responsibility in my coming and the hearing of this word more than you know. You will either go on in a qualitatively new way from this point forth, but one thing I will assure you, you will not go on as you were before. Something has come in moment of time that requires something from you, and if you will not recognize it and give it, then you are not just going to go on, you are going to fall back. Something incisive has come and your response to that will affect your whole continuance and future in God."

I believe that, and if that is true, how much greater our responsibility to be that authentic thing that compels God's people to choose with an earnestness that was never theirs before? How much more seriously do we need to consider ourselves and our own walk, and for that reason, how dare we give ourselves over to a casual lifestyle ourselves? There is a seriousness of God now coming to their fellowship that is making a requirement like nothing that it has ever known. All of a sudden they are having a guest speaker and the moment he opens his mouth something is struck and something is required that was never required before and that will be full of portent for all of their future.

The prophet's word is a work and is distinguished from teaching. Teaching is instructive and can be inspirational, but the prophet's word is an 'event' and causes something to happen in the hearing of which something is set in motion that affects things and brings a consequence for time and eternity. It is a creative and life-giving word. The mouth that God will allow for that use has got to be prepared in very particular ways. The prophet, therefore, is going to be winnowed and sifted more than the other callings.

The prophet's function is so absolutely life and death, more than can be said for other callings. If it is a false word, then it could be death. If it does not bring a warning, then it could also be death—literal, physical death. If it does not indicate the issues that are eternal, then it could be robbing the hearer. It is not an exaggeration to say that the rejection of the prophets was the death of Israel. How can one say more for something that is life or death for a people, and yet God invests that in flesh and blood, in mere man, who is subject to every frailty and weakness of humanity! It is an enormous weight of responsibility that he can say, "Thus says the Lord", or even if he does not intone that inscription, it is implied, and that the weight of that has to borne on the faintness and weakness of his mere humanity.

When God calls the prophet, "Son of man", He is not just mouthing a few words. It is as if the prophet needs to be reminded of his humanity. Why does God choose a frail piece of humanity for so ponderous a task? I believe that it is because it is a statement against the mystery of the principalities and the powers of the air. The prophet himself in his own person, what he is in himself, in the election of God, is itself a statement against the principalities and the powers of the air. One would think that God would reserve such elect speaking for Himself. He alone is qualified and has the authority, and yet to invest it in flesh, the very mystery of incarnation, runs smack dab into the face of the wisdom of the powers of the air. They would never have done a thing like that, but would have chosen something appropriate to the task, for example, something weighty, monumental, dignified and carrying all the credentials. God, however, takes a man out of the field like Amos. The men themselves are extremely conscious of their humanity, not only at the inception of their call but throughout the whole longevity of their use. "I am just a child. I cannot speak," said Jeremiah. He probably was called as a mature man but he felt himself to be a child in the light of the calling and that feeling never subsided. That consciousness of being a child in proportion to the task was always in the consciousness of the man. Paul's continual cry that he reiterates again and again is, "Who is sufficient for these things!?"

## Prophetic obedience

Prophetic obedience would be one of the classic elements to be found exclusively in prophets. It is the fearlessness to bring the word of God knowing that it is calculated to offend the hearer, and not only to suffer rejection, but even the loss of one's life in the bringing of it. Jesus said of Himself:

Nevertheless I must journey on today and tomorrow and the next day; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! (Luke 13:33-34a).

It is the inevitability of their fate. They have got to perish, and they have got to perish in the most significant of all places, where the action really is, namely, Jerusalem. That is where their end must be. In fact, one of the last episodes of Revelation are the two prophets, or the two witnesses, who lie in the streets of Jerusalem, then called Sodom and Gomorrah, and the people celebrate and exchange gifts because of the death of the two, who "...tormented those who dwell on the earth (Rev. 11:10b)." Their words were a torment, and the earthquake that follows their ascension is a judgment of a severe kind that God reserves for the mistreatment of His prophets. He takes very seriously the way in which His prophetic men are treated, because once again we come back to the theme: that to touch His prophets is to touch Him.

In 1 Samuel 3, we are given the calling of Samuel as a child through to sonship and onto maturity. The Lord called him and we have Samuel's reply, "Here I am", and he ran to the old priest Eli, thinking it was Eli who had called. He did that also a second time until Eli, however dull he was, recognized that it was the Lord calling this boy. Eli then told the boy what to do: "Go lie down, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for Thy servant is listening.' (v9b)." Samuel did exactly that. The first act that brought a boy into the place of prophetic responsibility was just merely saying what someone said he should say. How many of us being American or western would balk at that?—"I will speak my own words, thank you. Don't you think that I know how to respond to God if He calls me? I do not have to be cued. What do you think I am, a child?" That kind of an attitude will leave us outside of the faith; it will leave us on the shelf. There is something so pleasing to the heart of God of a rightly submitted spirit to the authority to which God has subscribed us.

Samuel then hears a powerful indictment against the priest Eli himself, and against his whole house forever. God is going to bring a fierce judgment. Can you imagine a boy getting an earful of that? What an induction into the prophetic ministry! Should God not begin with something light like, "The Lord says that He still loves you, but He is not altogether pleased. Please take this to heart"? Instead Samuel is given a word of severity, of judgment and of finality. It was probably one of the harshest statements ever recorded of God's indictment against a man or a nation, and it was subsequently fulfilled to the letter. Samuel stayed up all night, and when Eli awakens, he calls the boy to tell him everything that the Lord said. Samuel then faithfully gives every word that God gave him, not allowing a syllable to fall to the ground. When we read later that God honored Samuel and did not allow any of his words to fall to the ground that he spoke to Israel, it was because Samuel was faithful not to allow any of God's words to fall to the ground.

Obedience is the name of the game, and many of us need to go back and pick up at some point where we have missed it. If we find that the well has dried and the revelation is not coming, and we are fixated at some place and we just cannot break out of it, then probably what has happened is that we have failed in some critical point of obedience. God is not going to let us go further until we go back and pick up at that place and perform the obedience that is wanting—and go on from obedience to obedience

## Chapter 3 - The Anatomy of False Prophet

We need to be jealous for the truth of the prophetic calling, for if the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, then we cannot be careful enough in the consideration of this subject. Do our present-day prophets speak out of their own hearts and spirits? Do they draw from each other, or do they come to us out of the secret place of God? Out of what formative relationships in the Body have these prophets come? Has there been an appropriate nurturing, not only of the gift, but of the character of the men before they were visited on the church? How long and how rightly have they been part of a local fellowship? Have they been sent out by the same in a sending that is more than a ceremonial thing? Do we even know what a true sending is? False prophets validate each other, where the one applauds, affirms and establishes the other, but it is not a fellowship that has validated them. They have not risen up out of the organic work of God itself, like the church in Antioch. Instead they pay tribute to each other and compliment each other, especially those who are flowing in much the same thing. What is the source of their prophetic speaking? Where does the prophet get his word? If it is not out of the council of God, the secret place, then how is it God's word? If men do claim to be commissioned, we have a right to look for evidence that they have indeed stood in that place.

### **God's Indictment of Israel's Prophets**

In Jeremiah chapter 23, God gives us a powerful statement about true and false prophets. Talk about an indictment! It is one thing to have an indictment against Israel, but when you begin to indict the prophets of Israel, when the loftiest and the best and the noblest thing has become the most profane, then that must be a symbol or a statement of the low condition of a nation prior to its judgment.

In verse 9, it is Jeremiah himself speaking about himself in his own prophetic condition:

As for the prophets: My heart is broken within me, all my bones tremble; I have become like a drunken man, even like a man overcome with wine, because of the LORD and because of His holy words.

That is not a light word. That is a word that has churned the prophet up himself.

For the land is full of adulterers; for the land mourns because of the curse. The pastures of the wilderness have dried up. Their course also is evil, and their might is not right (v.10).

The word 'adulterer' does not only mean moral infidelity, where you have a sexual union with someone other than one's spouse, but when you adulterate something, you water it down or you mix it with something other than what it is in itself. You change, therefore, the quality, the character and the integrity of that thing. It probably is a gradual process, little by little, until finally what you have is colored water and it is no longer wine at all.

For both prophet and priest are polluted; even in My house I have found wickedness," declares the LORD (v.11).

There is a conjunction between prophet and priest:

The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it so!

(Jer.5:31a).

It is remarkable how self-serving this reciprocal thing is between heads of movements or fellowships and the false prophets, and how comfortable they are with one another and how they affirm one another. The people are in an unspoken agreement with their ministers: "You present a biblical message. We will pay the bill and have a Sunday service that will leave our lives free from any kind of demand that would really touch our true vested interest and value. We don't want a message that is going to challenge where our heart really is. We want to be able to say, 'Amen' and 'We've been to church'"—and that kind of thing. As the priest, so also the people. As the pastor/preacher, so also the congregation. Into that situation we have to come prophetically—and likely be stoned!

Therefore their way will be like slippery paths to them, they will be driven away into the gloom and fall in it; for I shall bring calamity upon them, the year of their punishment," declares the LORD (v. 12).

It implies that there is not an immediate judgment, but that there is an appointed time in which God judges those that profane His house—those who originally had authentic and holy callings. That may well be why the Lord is allowing to continue that which is presently being called prophetic and is so popular, but for them, as with the priests and prophets of old, there will be a year of visitation or a time when God calls a halt.

Moreover, among the prophets of Samaria I saw an offensive thing: they prophesied by Baal and led My people Israel astray (v.13).

There is a consequence for false prophecy. It will affect the entire nation and therefore the entire church by the same principle.

Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: the committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; and they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one has turned back from his wickedness. All of them have become to Me like Sodom, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah. (v. 14).

This verse deserves a lot of attention. Their view of the truth, of the word of God and of doctrine is corrupted by their sensual and ungodly living. Here also, the walking in lies and the committing adultery go hand-in-hand. If you are going to commit adultery, then there is a way in which you have to inwardly justify yourself, and you can only do that at the expense of the truth of God. There is also a consequence in that it strengthens also the hands of evildoers. There is nothing about their proclamation that causes repentance and return, but rather a condoning of those who are in a place opposed to God. It is something like judges today who cannot bring sentence upon transgressors. The modern court system is a calamity because of judges who cannot and will not judge. They cannot bring the severity of the law against the lawbreaker, because their own life personally is itself a transgression. You cannot bring the severity of the law to others when you yourself deserve it.

Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets, 'Behold, I am going to feed them wormwood and make them drink poisonous water, for from the prophets of Jerusalem pollution has gone forth into all the land.' Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you...' (vs. 15-16a).

Notice that God still calls them prophets. It is maybe because the gifts and callings of God are irrevocable. They still retain their official title, but what they are performing under that title is in God's sight an abomination. There is nothing more profane than when the sacred is no longer authentically sacred. When

we take the sacred phrase, 'Thus says the Lord' and merely employ it as a device to win the attention of our hearers, then we are desecrating the sacred. We are making the sacred profane and once we have done that, what else can be hoped for? If we are not as a priestly people setting forth the distinction between the profane and the sacred, what can be hoped for in the world? The ramifications of what we are talking about are beyond any full grasp.

They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the LORD. They keep saying to those who despise Me, 'The LORD has said, 'You will have peace'; and as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, they say, 'Calamity will not come upon you.' (v.16b-17).

This must be the very quintessence of what a false prophet is, namely, the giving of a false comfort and a false assurance of peace that does not regard the truth of the conditions that need to be faced. It is an unwillingness to bring a hard word. The things that are prophesied are normally flattering and encouraging to the flesh, rather than challenging or threatening. False prophets have historically prophesied peace when there is no peace. 'Calamity will not come upon you' is unhappily the kind of prophetic statement that is coming forth even today, especially in Israel. They are giving a false comfort to those who are not even properly aligned to God. Humanly speaking, we would not see these people as those who despise God. God sees them, however, as despising Him and we need to see it as He sees it. The false prophets are actually bringing a kind of encouragement to those people who are already out of right relationship with **God and give them an assurance that their relationship with God is in order.**

But who has stood in the council of the LORD, that he should see and hear His word? Who has given heed to His word and listened? (v.18).

Here is the key verse. You almost want to put that verse in a box, as if the Lord is saying, "Of all those who not only profess to be prophets, but even those who have been called to be prophets, how many are speaking the word that can only be obtained in the council of the Lord?" Is it not remarkable how everything in God, in the last analysis, comes down to the issue of relationship? He will never give anything independent of relationship. When He called Moses up to the Mount to receive the tablets of the law in order that he might teach them, Moses was first to come up and be there. How dare we say, "Thus says the Lord", who have not stood in the council of the Lord and heard His word? I think it is impossible for a flamboyant, gainsaying, gain-seeking minister to even be in that place. To be in the council of the Lord requires a certain humility, a certain brokenness, a certain utter dependency upon God, a certain capacity to wait and a certain separation from self-interest, fame, fortune and recognition. Men attenuated to those things cannot be in the council of the Lord, and yet they are the first ones to so readily say, "Thus says the Lord."

The characteristic of modern day ministries worldwide is the separation of ministry from relationship. We have made ministry a thing in itself. It is not that we do not talk about worship and the Lord, but somehow we are able to perform it out of a virtuoso ability or maybe even out of the gift, but not out of the depth of relationship. Relationship is not only key to the bestowing of the gift or the tablets of the Law, but the ongoing ability to rightly teach them. Once you sever relationship from ministry, you are on exceedingly dangerous ground. The ministry flows out of the life and the life out of the relationships, and if we break that connection and have a ministry independent of that, then it is not going to be a ministry that God recognizes.

But who has stood in the council of the LORD...?

That phrase implies a closeness to God. How is it, then, that these prophets who were speaking prolifically and influencing the nation toward evil were not in this place? Why did they not get the word of the Lord out of His council and out of His presence? That there should even be a moment's hesitation about answering this question is a real statement about us! They were adulterers and walking in lies, and therefore, how can such men be in the council of God? This God is holy and you cannot come into that presence in that condition. You do not even desire to come into that place in that condition! That is why you get your words from others, or out of your own skull, because this requires a sanctification. This requires something about your own condition that permits that kind of relationship, particularly if it is an abiding.

We can even become utilitarian in this thing where we say in our minds, "Well, if that is what the Lord says, I guess I have to find my way into His council and into His presence in order to get the word". That is not the way it works. It is being in the council of God and being in the Presence of God that the word may come, but if you make the word and the attainment of it the condition for entering the presence, then you have already stepped off holy ground. You are coming in the spirit of utility and not in the spirit of devotion to God for His own sake. Moses was told to come up the Mount to God and be there, not for the benefit that was going to accrue to him for coming, even the ministerial benefit, but simply because God is God. He is the Creator and we are the creation. We are simply to be there, and if no word comes, then no word comes. If we come looking for a word in that expedient, utilitarian sense that we have, then it is no longer the holy ground. We are ruled by the spirit of utility much more than we know. It is the spirit of the world which has the underlying premise that one must do this in order to obtain that. We are paying for this if we can get that.

We simply do not know what it means 'to do' or 'to be' for its own sake. If we have never come to that place first with God, then how shall we come to it with men? There is, therefore, a warp in all that we do and say that does not have its true place out of the presence of God, which place cannot be entered in the spirit of utility.

Moses, who wrote the five books of Moses, could say of himself that he was the humblest man on the face of the earth. That is true humility, where we are devoid of any sense of spiritual self-consciousness. We can merely state the fact of something without any effect upon ourselves, because the humility is not a statement to our honor. Humility is not something that man can work up by himself on the earth and develop as a character trait. Humility is what God is in Himself, and the only one who will display and exhibit it, is that one who has been consistently in the presence of God. It is humbling to be there and that is why Moses could state it not as a credit to himself, but to God, out of whose presence that humility was established. God requires still that His prophetic men be in His presence.

I want to say that there is nothing more difficult for anyone than this requirement. Everything contends against it—the dinner bell, the faucet is dripping, the light bulb needs to be changed, the dogs need to be fed—a thousand things continually nipping at you that require attention. Even if that were not so, there is something about the pulse of the flesh itself that is inimical and opposed to seeking the Lord. Seeking the Lord is an extraordinarily difficult thing and few have sufficient incentive. It is a suffering, and in fact, just to be more ruthlessly honest, it is a dying. Living on the earth, in the flesh, in the world and in time, and to confide and to commune with God, is an extraordinary and ultimate attainment. If you attain it, then maintain it, because you do not want to have to do it all over again. Can you maintain it and still go to last night's birthday party, and dancing, and hooting, and singing, and stomping and not lose it or be jarred from your sensitive spiritual place by what seems to be just a time of fun? We are talking about something

very critical. I would not expect in the earth today many men who are in this place. What then shall we say for the whole rash of prophets that have arisen in recent years for there are many men professing to be prophets, but are we hearing the council of God? God's judgment about the failure to obtain His word in that place is severe:

Behold, the storm of the LORD has gone forth in wrath, even a whirling tempest; it will swirl down on the head of the wicked (v. 19).

The word 'wicked' is almost exclusively used for those who should know better. It is those who profess or should have every reason to know God and are yet, by intent, acting wrongly. That is wickedness.

The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has performed and carried out the purposes of His heart; in the last days you will clearly understand it (v. 20).

Notice that the judgment is deferred. It is not immediate, but it will come later for something now that is an offense to God, namely, the whole compromise of His prophets and the way it has affected the nation.

I did not send these prophets, but they ran; I did not speak to them, but they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, then they would have announced My words to My people, and would have turned them back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds (vs. 21-22).

We can know when the word is out of the council of God because it has this salutary effect. It will affect the nation or fellowship in turning it toward God, rather than away from Him and from their evil ways and their practices. I can remember a full gospel breakfast where the speaker was from Sweden, a leading evangelical personality, but it could have been anywhere. He was wearing a Gucci shirt and tie and a silk-type suit, and he began by saying, "The Lord has spoken to me this morning and given me a word for you." I leaned forward to catch every syllable that had come from the heart of God. As I heard it, however, there was nothing from God at all, but clichés, evangelical phrases and full gospel hogwash. The men who were hearing that word that morning, and nodding their heads, and "amening", applauding and affirming, need to know that there are consequences when we allow that kind of monumental lie to be expressed and not to be contradicted. It will deaden and dull our sensitivity so that the next time we will be an even greater candidate for deception for anything that comes down the pike.

There needed to be someone in that audience that morning to get up and say, "I am sorry for whatever pain and dislocation I am going to cause, but I cannot allow that phrase and that statement to be made in our hearing without being contested. That was not the word of God and we dare not allow that kind of terminology to be employed merely to sanctify or to give a kind of credibility to what is otherwise just an ordinary statement." How often is that being done and to what extent has our failure to do so had a negative effect on the church today? We have paid much for cheap, casual references to God, as if we could invoke Him at pleasure or say, "God gave", when He did not give.

I attended a conference where the theme was, 'How to invoke the presence of God by our worship.' We were told that if our song liturgy was of a sufficient kind and quality, then we could actually make manifest His presence. I did speak up that time and you can be assured that I have not been invited back since. I touched a holy cow. I said, "You would be doing far better to teach people how to continue in faithfulness with God without the sensing of His presence, which is more likely to be our end-time reality, than to think that we can calculate, engineer, or evoke God's presence at our will." It was a manipulation of God, as if He is going to give Himself to the devices of men.

Generally speaking, when men will invoke the phrase, "Thus says the Lord", it is almost a testimony to the fact that the Lord is not saying. If He is saying, then we do not have to embellish the statement by authorizing it. The statement itself will ring with the truth of God and the sense of God. Is it a rhema, a quickened statement of God of an original kind that we need to hear in the crisis place that we are, or is it just some kind of an embellishment to give a charismatic aura to our proceeding? It will have the effect of cheapening the whole integrity of the prophetic thing and make it a light kind of thing that anyone almost at will can offer. I would much prefer fewer such statements, but when they come you know that God has spoken.

When Israel's prophets said, "Thus says the Lord", then you know that what is following is going to be a judgment that is so horrific that God validates even the words that bear His resonance, because they are words of an ultimate kind of judgment. It must, therefore, be clear from the inception that this is not the prophet speaking out of himself. We have it passed down to us as written prophecy of a kind that has affected the history of Israel, but in spoken prophecy we need to discern whether it is the Lord speaking by the weight of what is being said in terms of the anointing and the authority, rather than in having it labeled for us.

The same ones who will dismiss God rudely are the same ones who will invoke Him lightly. Prophets are called to come into that whole scenario, and bring the sword of the Lord, and bring the fear of the Lord, and the truth of the Lord to people who have been long spoiled by such cheap things as I am now describing, and as every one of us at one time or another, more than we would like, have experienced. This is why we have anguished and God is calling a halt.

That is why there are false prophets. That is why, if I can say it, the Charismatic and kindred movements themselves are kind of false movements, wanting the effulgence of the Spirit and the excitement and the activity, but evading the cross and the necessity for suffering out of which the Spirit of God is given as solace, comfort and power. We come back again and again to the cross. The false prophet speaks words of comfort when God would not have His people to be comforted, but to be agitated. True prophets can bear the reprisal, the rejection and the mortification of that word coming back into their own teeth. They can bear giving the word and then someone cueing the piano player to drown it out. Prophetic anguish is to bring the word of God and then to have it refused and come right back into your teeth. It is mortifying and the antithesis of the joy and the gratification that comes when the word of God flows out of you, and through, and into the people who are receiving it. That is like tonic for your soul. We have to be as willing for the one as the other, or we will not speak the other. The call to the prophet is the call to the cross. It is a frequent, if not continual form of suffering of an exquisite and ultimate kind. Can we say, "Thus says the Lord" without actually articulating those words or implying those words in your statement, except that your word has come through the cross? It is out of a death. It is not your own word, but His, which can only come from that cross-centered place. That was true for the prophets before the advent of the cross. Elijah preceded the cross, but he knew the death of it when he said, "...there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." Jesus knew the cross before He knew the cross. The cross only exemplified and made visible the thing to which His life was all along submitted.

'Can a man hide himself in hiding places, so I do not see him?' declares the LORD. 'Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?' declares the Lord. I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsely in My name, saying, 'I had a dream, I had a dream!' (vs.24-25).

The heart of the offense in being false before God is that all of this takes place as if He is not seeing and does not understand and is not aware of what is being done. It is an enormous presumption that God takes note of, though we do not. It is a complete absence of the fear of God or the reverence for God as God.

They really believe that they are hearing from God and what they are communicating is the council of God. They have reached such a place of deceit, that they have persuaded themselves that when they say, "Thus says the Lord", it is the Lord saying. We can come to that condition by a gradual erosion, a little day-by-day, slight kind of a thing, that when the process is finished, one is not only false, but one thinks that one is still true. There is a daily vigilance required over the issues of the heart in order that deception does not have its ultimate work, where the man deceived thinks that he is in the right and leading many to their doom. That is why God urges us to exhort one another daily while it is still day, because tomorrow is already too late.

...who intend to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they relate to one another...(v.27a).

That is to say, to communicate a sense of God that is not God and allow those listening to think that it is God because they have fastened the name of Jesus to it. False prophetic things and things that are deceitful will affect how people perceive and understand God, especially if they are affirmed in their shallowness, or if a certain lightness and frivolity is communicated. God cannot help but suffer loss. They are prophesying in the name of the Lord, but because it is false, the effect of it is to get people to forget His name, which is to say, to lose the sense of God as God, and the character of God intrinsic to His name.

How do we know that it is God's word and God's council? It is because it is likely to be the word that is expressed in verse 29:

'Is not My word like fire?' declares the LORD; 'and like a hammer which shatters a rock?'

In other words, "My word is not some soulish 'making nice'. My word breaks up the deeps; it demolishes and it burns." That is how you can tell whether it is a false word or a true word. If you want to distinguish between a prophetic word that is God's word and a prophetic word that is assumed by man, conjured out of his own mind and imagination and that is false, then here is the distinction: God's word is like a fire. His word burns and is like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. It is devastating and brings an effect and contains a power that breaks in or burns through. It will never be some innocuous, syrupy thing that confirms us in what we are doing, especially when our lives are slovenly and slack. His word should burn in our heart and reveal the true condition of it and not as we thought it to be.

Every true word requires, and if we do not respond, then it means that we have not really heard. "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts (Heb. 4:7b)." If we have heard, then it should evoke a response in us. Not to respond is to harden. There is no such thing as neutrality. The word of God when it is the word of God has to have consequence for ill or good. We can never ignore it or allow it to pass and nod our heads by saying, "Yes, that was a good and interesting word. I enjoyed that." It requires or we harden, and that is why we find so many people in a hardened condition and then God's last appeals would be a prophetic cry, but it has got to be like a hammer upon a rock that breaks through until the necessary repentance and release.

A prophet has got to speak what is true. Men who are man-pleasers and will not risk the consequences are those who become false prophets. We will be continually searched and tested in this. It is not established for all time and you are the one or the other. There is always a continual tension of standing before men, and if there is anything that yet craves recognition, acceptance and approval, then we will likely find ourselves compromised and yielding to the enormous pressure of 'going along'.

"Therefore behold, I am against the prophets," declares the LORD, "who steal My words from each other. Behold, I am against the prophets," declares the LORD, "who use their tongues and declare, 'The LORD declares.' Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams," declares the LORD, "and related them, and led My people astray by their falsehoods and their reckless boasting ('and by their lightness'- King James Version); yet I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit," declares the LORD (vs. 30-32).

One thing that this text reveals is the lightness that is intrinsic to false prophets. There is a certain levity, a certain kind of air of casualness, that seems to prevail in conferences and sessions where men who have not been sent of God have had opportunity to speak as if they had been sent of God. I have observed that very same levity prevailing in the very place where the man who was introduced to the congregation was introduced as the 'oracle of God' and the 'prophet of God for the hour'; and yet not only was his own speaking disappointing, though biblical, there was a levity and a kind of lightness, a kind of a joking spirit, that even when it was over that same spirit prevailed in the audience.

The unhappy thing is that great numbers of Christians in the world have never heard a true prophetic word spoken in the authority of God, and all they have ever heard they assume is normative, and think that this is what the prophetic word is. They have no basis for comparison. To hear such a word once, however, is to be ruined forever for anything less. There is, therefore, a great cry and need for that word and that authority to come into the earth, that the church might be rightly ruined and made candidates for the truth.

False prophets steal God's words from each other and often speak the same kind of word. I have been around now over thirty years as a believer, and I have to say, that what I have seen is a succession of fads, panaceas, gimmicks and things that we latch onto. There is a way in which we can put our finger up: "Which way is the wind blowing? What is current? What is now popular? I know that if I speak on faith, the people will love it; or prayer, or worship, or church growth, or power evangelism." We seem to go through periods where certain themes have found a place of acceptance and then you just move in that, and you pick up what others are saying, and then you say it. You know you are going to find an acceptance because it has been proven.

There is a difference between speaking about, for example, the 'Mystery of Israel' because it is in vogue and because you can learn it as anyone else, as opposed to waiting for the revelation when it is given. The speaking will employ unavoidably very much the same words, and yet for the hearer, the hearing of the one and the hearing of the other is a profoundly different experience. One communicates information while the other communicates revelation and life, and in so doing it becomes an 'event'.

There is a place for simplicity of lifestyle and dependency upon God that has very much to do with integrity and the quality of the word that is issued. There is something about poverty that is more than accidental. I know that religiously we can perform at it and make a cheap kind of thing as Catholicism has done. I would suspect, however, that the men who are saying, "Peace, peace..." and are bringing comforting messages, are somehow not living in that poverty. In fact, the very popularity that comes with speaking messages that are approved and that men want to hear will assure you of response both in admiration, applause and in giving. I am not demeaning the motives of men to say they are choosing a wrong message in order that their lifestyles might be maintained and subscribed, but somewhere in the realm of the labyrinthine corridors of the soul, somewhere someone must know that to be accepted, to be

popular and to be approved, is also to prosper. To speak a word that is unpleasant and contradictory is somehow to ensure that you are going to cut yourself off from the kinds of things that would have maintained a lifestyle that you would have thought appropriate.

God knows and sees through it all, and there is nothing that He will judge more severely than men who say, "Thus says the Lord", when God has not said. I wish that we could come to a place of real brokenheartedness over this, that somehow our travail over what has already so saturated the Body of Christ through cheap utterances and pseudo-prophecies could somehow be removed from the mind and the memory of God's people in order that they would be made virginal again; and that they would be brought to a place of appreciation, and expectation, and willingness to wait for a true word when it comes. For when it comes, that word alone brings life-changing power. There is a waiting that requires as much a dying in the church as the dying in the man who is sent. As I have said, to fight your way through to the secret council of God, and to be in His presence—not just on the hit-and-miss basis to obtain the word, but as a communing that is consistent, out of which the word will come when God chooses to give it—is so rare, so painful and so difficult, that the flesh shrinks from it. It is easier to hear the word from other men and to imitate and repeat that, knowing that it is already popular and has found approval. We desperately need to hear what is on God's heart now, and the only one who can communicate that is he who is close to His heart. Everything conspires against it, including your own flesh and the things that are legitimate—your family, the light bulbs, the dogs. There is a dying to find your way into the place of the secret council of God, but it is in that place that the word of the Lord will come—and no other.

## Chapter 4 - What is Prophetic Formation and Integrity?

Prophets are foundations for the church, holy stones, as it were, able to bear the weight of all that they support and all that is put upon them. What an investment, therefore, from God's point of view, in the attention to the details of their lives, in the preparation, shaping and making of them. That formation does not lend itself to nice, clean, systematical principles on how to become a prophet. It is full of blood and vomit, sweat and agony, humiliation and failing. For if a prophet is anything, he is a 'sent' one. God will not send anything that does not authentically represent Himself. Jesus said that if you receive a prophet, you receive Him. There is an unbroken continuum between the sent one and God himself. When someone, therefore, purports to be that which is 'sent' and is not, it is a statement about God that is false. We need deeply to recognize that. We are not talking about some fluky phenomenon, but the very foundation of the faith, which is God as God.

### **The Prophet Is His Message**

It is an ultimate calling and that points us again to the premium not of the office as some abstraction, but that it rests and inheres with the man himself. The man is the thing in itself. He is the prophetic man. His message is not some kind of an addendum. He is not a disembodied spirit who just brings a word and says, "Thus says the Lord." He is bound up with the word. If you reject him, then you are rejecting the word with him, which is to say, rejecting the Word made flesh. Those who cannot directly assault the word, because they sense that that would be doing violence to God, find it easier to deal with the man. In dealing with the man, however, you have thus dealt with the word. We need to see the inseparability of the office and the man, and that is why prophets are not born in a day. That is why they are not going to be produced in a three-month school, or any kind of thing. It is a work whereby God invests Himself. That is why it is so integral to God, that when you touch the prophet, you are touching Him. This is what He Himself is in His own essential Person. He is Prophet, Priest and King rolled up in one, and He is forming a man whom He has chosen in that image, a man who has not chosen himself. No man can presume to be a prophet or desire it because he has a romantic fancy to be prophetic and he likes the aura. It is either called, given, made of God or not at all.

The whole world commends itself, but the prophet sees it as a sham, a pretense and a phony thing. His seeing is another kind of seeing, namely, God's. How, therefore, does he come to that seeing? Prophets are not full-born; they do not come with one fell swoop; you do not pluck them off trees. How does a man come to a place where he sees as God sees, especially since God's way is not our way and His thoughts are not our thoughts? What men esteem is an abomination in God's sight. In a word, it is a controverting, a turning upside down of all values. Can you imagine what a painful thing a prophet is? The whole world is having a ball and here is this guy who sees it as a sham.

A prophet does not come to the seeing of God in a day, but by a process. There is a process of experiences. There are heart-rending and heart-aching disappointments, setbacks, castings away and things that you just live with as being inherent with your call and you bear it. He grew up in the world, and the values of the world as a man. He is recruited and called in, and brought out of the world, its values and seeing, and brought increasingly into the place of God's seeing, by a painful process for himself. If the prophet's word is going to devastate others, then he himself must first experience devastation. He has first to come out of his own false alignments and come increasingly into the place of God's seeing, and then in coming to that place, a courage to bear the reaction against him. You wonder why anybody would want to be one! The first definition of a false prophet is somebody who wants to be a prophet. It has nothing to do with what

you want to be, rather it has only to do with the God who calls. It is nevertheless remarkable how many people are attracted to becoming a prophet because their definition and view of prophet are not what we are describing. Their view is of something much more honorific, romantic and dramatic where people look up at them with stunned astonishment.

This raises the question as to whether someone could reject their calling or go the wrong way with it. One biblical example might be Jonah. He ran the opposite direction and had to be swallowed up by a great sea animal and vomited out on the beach to fulfill God's role. Even then he complained and resisted the call. I would probably be more sympathetic to a man who is chafing and fighting or struggling against the calling, sensing what it is going to require, than someone who thinks it is a blast and is so giddy in it.

### **The Body - The Place of Formation**

I want to suggest that the issue of isolation from a fellowship would make a true prophet become false. If he is not organically joined to an expression of the Body of Christ; if he is some kind of floating phenomenon, a phantasm, who is in and out and does his thing, and flits off to the next meeting; if he has no organic rootage with the people of God; if he likes isolation and to be by himself, then he puts himself in jeopardy. He needs daily surveillance because there is no one more subject to error and becoming false than a prophet. A teacher is not in such a place of jeopardy because he is more balanced. The prophet is an intuitive kind of personality and open for impressions of a kind that a teacher would never permit, and therefore opens himself to greater jeopardy for that very reason. The very nature, however, of the prophetic thing, the high tension of it and the character of it, can easily lead to warp, distraction and becoming false.

It is not to be imagined that God is going to send men like that out into the world and into the nations who have not first been sharpened and made acute within their own fellowship. They need to bring the word into the band of souls to whom they are daily joined. If the fellowship will not bear the word and be supportive of it, and of their prophets, there will not be men to be sent. He must be sent from a body who understands these things and recognizes the significance and the fatefulness of his speaking and acting, and that he is sent with the laying on of hands, which means, "We not only identify with you, but we sustain you by our own intercessions, because we are going to suffer the consequence of what you are doing. We are in this with you." That is the 'Antioch' that we are waiting for, that men could be sent out of such a context, with such an alignment.

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: ...And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said,...(Acts 13:1a and 2a).

In other words, when men of those two callings were found 'together', that is to say, something more than sitting in the same room, "the Holy Spirit said, ..." Anybody who knows anything about this knows the painful tension between a teacher and a prophet. It is not because they are wanting to act contrary, but both of them, acting out of the integrity of their call, of necessity rub the other guy raw. The teacher wants it to be according to the Word, line upon line, precept upon precept. If there was not, however, the press that comes of visionary things to get the teacher beyond the safe, prescribed place according to the Word, the teacher himself would be limited. There is, therefore, an interplay, with both men acting out of the integrity of their call, and yet chafing one another. That is where love comes in, namely, to bear the strain and the tension of that, and to receive therefore the benefit of it, and not to flee from it because there is a painful or irritating quality.

The Spirit of God called out of the congregation at Antioch, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Paul for the work to which I have called them (Acts 13:2b)." It was in the fellowship that they were they separated from their own ambitions and defects. The Body of Christ, the prophetic body, the supportive body, is an enormously crucial thing in the shaping, the perfecting and the sending of the prophetic voice into the earth. That is what we are talking about as a prophetic community. They do not all have that call, but they all have the awareness. They all understand the primacy and importance of the prophetic word. Institutional situations will never produce a prophet. There are not many 'Antiochal' sending bodies, but there will never be any unless we desire them and are willing for the cost of them.

There is nothing more aggravating to a body of believers than someone in the process of growth in the prophetic calling. If the prophet is the thing in himself, then we are not to think that he is instantly formed, but rather it is a lifetime in the making. His growth is often painful, annoying and nettlesome. They speak at the wrong time. Some of it is from God and some of it is out of their own flesh. He is always finding something to seize upon. He might interrupt the service and you never know how he is going to sound off. He is unpredictable, and part of the maturity of the church is its ability to provide an environment of love that is conducive to the bringing forth of such a one in its midst. You have to chew the meat and spit out the bones. You have got to be patient and forbearing. There is a process. They do not come full-blown. If we are impatient with that and do not provide the loving context, then the Lord will lose the prophetic man because they have got to come up and out of such an environment. That gives us a clue of Old Testament times when the Scriptures speak about the school of the prophets. It is a school in the sense of a kind of collegium, a community of a supportive kind around the prophetic man, sharing the burdens, sympathizing, understanding and contributing to the process of such a one.

Do we have the ability to recognize those who give evidence of the call? We are not to dampen them but encourage them, but yet at the same time to clip their wings and to show them the admixture of flesh and Spirit. By such a process of gentle and loving admonition and exhortation the Body can be a help them. The prophet needs to be separated even from the consciousness of his own calling, let alone any subtlety of ambition that needs for him to be seen, applauded and recognized. He needs to be able to bear the reproach and rejection of what will invariably be the consequence of his ministry. Indeed, the prophet's whole life and history in God is calculated toward that end. He is not a guy with 'a little house surrounded by a white picket fence and a sweet, little wife with an apron on, and they lived happily ever after'. It is aggravation, consternation and every kind of thing that you can think of, because that is how the prophetic is formed. There is no cheap way to incubate it. He has got to pass through the essence of the issues in order one day to address them with penetration and authority.

While his most radical obediences will most likely be performed alone, the prophet is a man both communal and corporate, not in an idealized sense, but as one himself frequently critiqued of others and desiring it. The moment of obedience may come as one standing alone before Ahab, but the thing that makes that powerful and confrontational is that which preceded it, that is to say, in the man coming out of a corporate life. That corporate life is not some idealized or romantic community out in the boondocks. It is rather a situation where that man is more subject to review and examination than any other that make up that community. If the community is not rendering that service, then I cannot think of anyone in greater danger than a prophet. The prophet must make himself accessible. A prophet who prefers privacy and who is unattended by others or is surrounded by a self-affirming, paid and mutually congratulatory staff is likely false or will become so. There is a difference between living in community and being surrounded by a staff of paid employees. The latter more often than not, and even unconsciously, affirm that personality and what he does—because he butters their bread. It is another situation when you are living in proximity and relationship and where others have every freedom to critique you and speak into your life. The true prophet knows, that unless he is receiving that kind of input and examination, then he will move into

deception and that without even knowing it. Just because one has an anointing from God, it does not mean that one is invincible. The presence of an anointing does not necessarily mean that God's statement of approval is on the individual's life in its entirety. That misunderstanding has been the formula for disaster and falling of many great men of God. You can be anointed in the place of ministry, but the defects and contradictions in your life, personally and privately, need to be both attended and seen to.

Prophets are not to go out before they are threshed. They should be welcoming the threshing and expect it, because there are subtleties of soul in all of us—little insinuations of ambition, little presumptions of pride, little romantic notions of what we think prophetic service is—that God has got ruthlessly to deal with. This is necessary so that when the prophet speaks, it is His word not only in its content, but also in the mood of its delivery.

A prophet is not without honor except in his own home and country. He will be praised away from home. That is not a statement of condemnation but a statement of something intrinsic to the prophetic calling in the wisdom of God, namely, that a man's frailty cannot bear to be exalted both away and at home. There has got to be that breathing in and that breathing out, that alternate thing of exaltation and humbling, and the humbling is reserved for when he gets home.

The prophet needs to come to the place that Paul came, where he seems to have a confidence to say, "For to me, to live is Christ...(Phil. 1:21a)." Even when Paul offers as an opinion, "But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God (1Cor 7:14)."—and then he goes on to talk about marriage and practical things. Those statements are, however, in the Holy Writ and are looked upon as definitive and as much the word of God as when Paul does speak by commandment. In a word, what Paul gave as his opinion was indeed God's own word. He is so much in God that his opinion is as much the word as the declarative commandments that God gave him to communicate. We have, therefore, to be true to the witness in the inner man and keep that inner man clear and free before God. Let nothing obtrude upon it.

### **Meekness - The Key to Revelation**

The key to apostolic or prophetic seeing and the receiving of the revelation of the mysteries of God is found in Ephesians 3:8,

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ.

In other words, all true seeing is given to men like Paul, who see themselves as the 'very least of all saints'. Paul is not being deferential and polite and making the kind of statement that a chamber of commerce speaker would make. He actually saw himself as this. He was the apostle to whom was afforded such visions, that God had to give him a thorn in his side, lest he be exalted beyond measure for the magnitude of the revelations that were given him. We must not, however, pass by apostolic character, which is to say, the deep humility, the authentic meekness and the Christ-likeness of the apostolic or the prophetic man.

We know that one of the deceptions of the last days are false apostles and false prophets. Even now it is becoming popular where everybody seems to be a prophet today, or even an apostle. They are also quite clever as they have studied and know how to appropriate Paul's council and advice and when to apply it, and mediate over church issues, etc. Is that, however, the foundational man upon whom the church is built? If the man is the thing in himself, then it is more than his knowledge. It is his very life; it is his character; it is his knowledge of God; it is what he communicates as one who comes to us out of God's

own presence. This statement, 'the very least of all saints' is not Paul being self-deferring. It is Paul's actual, stricken, heartfelt consciousness of how he sees himself before God, having been in that presence.

It is a remarkable irony that the deeper you come in the knowledge of God, the more you see yourself as less. Instead of becoming more exalted by the increase of your knowledge of God, the further down you go in seeing how abased and pitiful you really are. It is a contradiction and a paradox, and it is a paradox to be found only in the church. Authentic meekness or humility is not something that one can learn, or pick up at school, or take to yourself. It is the work of God out of a relationship with Him. It is the revelation of God as He is and the depths of God that bring a man to this kind of awareness of himself. The revelation of what we are is altogether related to the revelation of who He is. The two things always go together.

Then I (Isaiah) said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts' (Isaiah 6:5).

This is the prince of prophets, Isaiah, speaking here. The foundation of the church is the revelation of God as He in fact is. That is the foundation. It is not as we think Him to be, which is more often than not a projection of the way we would like Him to be, especially when we have chosen to celebrate one attribute of God and ignore another. The key knowledge is the knowledge of God as He is, and the foundational men to the church are those who can communicate God in that knowledge. Paul had this knowledge because he saw himself as the 'least of all saints'.

It is an interesting question about the issue of humility, because the prophet is so singular, so single-eyed, so adamant and so utterly persuaded about the rightness of his word, that he speaks it with a seeming arrogance. I suspect that the false prophet is self-defacing; that he will appear 'humble'. It is something like a 'salesman's humility' that is effected and self-effacing in order to sell the product. If we are going to be a discerning church, which is to say, a prophetic church, then the issue of authentic humility needs to come into our consciousness. The quality of true meekness, which Paul had despite his uncompromising references to himself, seems to be so arrogant, and yet there is the true meekness.

The Lord Himself was absolute. He used language in such a fierce way, as well as overthrowing moneychanger's tables. Would you say that in an instance like that, where the Lord was violent either in speech or deed, that for that moment at least, He laid aside His meekness and was acting now in another character? Was He meek even while He was violent and offensive? This act set in motion the things that eventuated in His death. How do you reconcile the act of violence that Jesus performed and the meekness of God? When we think of meek, we think of lamb-like, quiet and deferring. This is an aggressive act, a violent act and yet we are saying it is meek. Meekness is total obedience to God. All the more in an act or a word that would give an impression to the contrary, and lay the obedient servant open to the charge of a reproach for being violent, or being angry, or being too zealous, or whatever it is.

There are instances where God will call us to obediences that seem to contradict meekness, and it would be arrogant not to obey, even by employing the excuse, "It is not my personality. It is not the way that I like to be because I want the favor and the approval of men to see me as a nice guy, and therefore, I want always to be reasonable and quiet and diplomatic." Yes, you will be applauded for that, but not in Heaven. In Heaven it is clear rebellion. If God wanted you to be violent and you withheld it because it contradicts your personality or anything like that, then you are putting something above and before God, namely, your own self-consideration.

A true prophet will not relent nor refrain. He cannot be bought or enticed into being 'one of the boys', and he shuns the distinctions and honors that men accord men. He necessarily has to or there would be a

compromising of what he is in God. He is scrupulous in character and will never use his position to obtain personal advantage. He is naturally unaffected, normal and unprepossessing in appearance and demeanor, despising what is showy, sensational or bizarre. He is not necessarily the man that is going to be wearing the hairy garment. He may be wearing a three-piece suit. He will not call any attention to himself by externalities. He is the thing in himself, in the depth and the pit and the marrow of his being because of his communion with God and his history in God.

On the basis of this, a false prophet or a false bearer of God's word can be identified as one who gives the impression of being self-sufficient, always in his dignity, or he effects something like wearing a garment, or being bizarre and let his hair grow long to make sure that you have noticed him for his distinctiveness. The thing that will be absent in that which is false is the lack of meekness, and meekness is not something one can buy or obtain or learn. It is the indistinguishable sign of the authentic prophet as it is the quintessential character of God - and obtained and formed in the prophet in the place of prayer as communion.

## Chapter 5 - What is Prophetic Perception or Interpretation?

There are two key words inherent to the prophetic calling and they are: revelation and interpretation. If you remove these two things from that which is prophetic, then it no longer is. We have more need than ever of revelation and the interpretation. It is not just the interpretation of the Scripture alone, but also events like natural disasters. Are they just a geophysical accident or are they a statement from a God who is seeking the attention of men? Prophetic interpretation, therefore, is going to be diametrically opposed to the way in which men would ordinarily construe natural events.

It (Prophetic ministry) is a ministry of spiritual interpretation. It is an interpretation of everything from a spiritual standpoint, the bringing of the spiritual implication of things past, present, and future before the people of God. (T. Austin-Sparks).

If that was the full calling of a prophet, then it would be enough right there. It is an exhausting task to restore the meaning of the past. History has a way of dissolving in time, particularly when it has to do with the history of the faith. We lose something very precious, all the more if we have not gleaned from the past all that we should. It will cripple us for the present and certainly hinder our future. Believers are a peculiar people whose reality and meaning somehow is established between the poles of the things past, the things present and the things future. Anything that makes us significant in the present is altogether related to the past and to the future. It is our past that makes us peculiar. Abraham is our inheritance, and we have a future of a glorious King and the hope of a coming kingdom. Between the things of the past and the things that pertain to the future is our present. We need to dig out the meanings in the things that are lost, especially in what has happened to the crucifixion of Jesus. It was the greatest, single, apocalyptic event in the history of mankind that set in motion the things that will bring the second greatest thing, namely, His return. Its meaning historically is essentially lost, sentimentalized and trivialized, because there has not been a church careful to keep alive and to root out the meanings of all that is implied in that act. Part of the prophetic task is just that, namely, to call the attention of God's people both to their past and to their future, because such a one cherishes and esteems these things, and God gives him an anointing to project them.

### **God is the God of History**

The prophet sees the God of Creation as also being sovereignly the God of history, and he is unwilling to consider Him exempt from any event, however catastrophic or devastating. God is participant in history. He is a God who intervenes. The prophet does not see things as being accidental or that things just happen, but it is God operating through events, for example, the Holocaust. The very place where men say, "Where was God?" as being the testimony of God's absence, the prophet would say, "That is the place where He is most present." It is in the catastrophe and the things that shock us, that numb us and that defy our categories, that the prophet sees the hand of God. It is not that God is impartial or an unfeeling Deity, for we know that He is afflicted in all our afflictions. He is, however, still the God of the 'burning bush' who waits for those who would turn aside and see why the bush burns and is not consumed.

Things can be interpreted from natural standpoints and make a very compelling case, for example, a geophysical accident. We can say, "It's just the way nature is. Mother Nature is having a rampage." That is an interpretation, but it is not prophetic. Can you see why a prophetic statement is required? Which of the two will be easier for the public to receive? Which makes less demand on the hearer? 'Mother Nature' is some vacuous and ambiguous entity. She just does her thing and there is nothing that you can do about it. But if it is God who is rampaging; if it is God ventilating in anger; if it is God trying to arrest the attention of an unbelieving and blasphemous mankind and calling men by these disasters to a place of repentance, then that is another thing altogether. The prophetic word of interpretation is not just interesting curiosity—

it brings requirement. His interpretation brings the man to a requirement of an inconvenient kind, and for that reason the prophets are stoned. It is much nicer if you would say, 'Mother Nature'. It makes no requirement.

Everything is subject to one interpretation or another, so not only does a prophet bring an interpretation which is spiritual, which is to say, as God sees it, and the requirement of that seeing, but he has got to contend with the other interpretations, that is to say, those that are in opposition to his view. It is not a gentlemanly opposition, but fierce and unto death. The prophetic thing is not a picnic, particularly if the Elijah task is the last-day's ministry of restoration. Just as then, the spirit of Jezebel is again coming forth in such power, in such subtlety and in such prolific manifestation and form, even within the church itself. They are carrying that spirit or giving ventilation to it and not even aware that they are vessels through which that thing passes. The struggle to give a spiritual interpretation from the point of view of God is not merely just to offer another opinion alongside of others, but to offer a view that the world hates and even segments of the church hate and wants to silence, if not by any other means than to threaten and intimidate the mouth from which it issues. We need to gird our loins if this is our calling.

### **Prophetic Significance**

The bringing of spiritual implications of things past, present and future before the people of God, giving them to understand the significance of things in their spiritual value and meaning (T. Austin-Sparks).

We need to constantly ask: "What is the significance of this or that?" It is not a phrase that the world has taught us to employ. I have been around the academic world and it is nothing more than a form of brainwashing. It is being enrolled in a certain curriculum that credentializes you, so that you can have a certain employment as a teacher, a lawyer or whatever it is. The significance of something, however, is rare to be emphasized in the world. It should, however, be so with believers, whether they are prophetically called or not. In fact, it should be at the heart of their distinctiveness. Do we ask what is the significance of the things that constitute our life, of the ordinary things that constitute our life? This is what the 'burning bush' means, and the God who was in the midst of it is waited to see if Moses or us would turn aside to see, and not only to see but to ask, "Why does this bush burn, but is not consumed?" That is to say, "What is the significance of this burning bush?"—in order to know the ultimate meaning. If we do not know the ultimate meaning to life, then we are not prophetic.

A prophet sees such dimensions where others see only the act. He has a way of reading into something and seeing multiple significances in a heightened way, both in men and in nations. For example, the Intifada or the Palestinian uprising, which started with the kids throwing stones at Israeli troops, but in my spirit I knew for Israel that it was the beginning of the end. I knew that it would never find resolution. They would never find a political answer and that it could not be suppressed by military power. It would set in motion the kinds of things that would eventuate in Israel's final ruin and devastation. That is going to be true, and increasingly more true today than when I saw it at the beginning of the Intifada in 1988. This whole alliance with the P.L.O. and with Arafat has grown out of the inability of the State of Israel to suppress this indigenous and unplanned uprising that came through children, but which has grown to such proportions, that it is a continual drain on the nation Israel in manpower, time and attention. It has set in motion the things that will bring about Israel's destruction. The prophetic man apprehends the implications of a small event and is called to communicate the significance of it.

I would say that that is the kind of thing that distinguishes life as against existence. Most of mankind merely exists. It is life as a mere succession of days, and so many tens of thousands of meals and acts of defecation and copulation, hardly above the animal level, even though they may be intellectual. That

which distinguishes human existence in the intention of the God, who made us in His image, is the significance of what life means and what it is about. One of my greatest complaints of my Jewish people is not that they do not believe in their Messiah, but that they could care less. They are simply not serious enough about life. If they were serious about life, then there would be a handle to take hold of and to begin to raise questions and to fathom truth, but there is just not that seriousness.

A prophet, therefore, is one who interprets the Scripture in the light of present and future events, or brings the application of the Scripture into the interpretation of events. He has a way of perceiving events in the light of Scripture that is uniquely prophetic and interprets them for the church and for the nation. This is seeing as God sees, for a prophet is a 'seer'. What he sees is the condition of mankind as it in fact actually is. He sees right through the ostensible, outward, external disguise to the reality of the thing as it is—the dry bones. In a word, he sees as God sees, and his function is to communicate that seeing to people who have no awareness of it at all, and in likely will resist it.

The prophetic function is to bring mankind into an awareness of what life is and how it ought to be lived. That will not be easily attained. It requires that people turn aside to see, as for example, the Holocaust. Was it just a systematic, genocidal annihilation of six million Jews? Is there some greater significance in that the systematic annihilation of a people was performed not by some savage, primitive race in darkest Africa as is said, but the epitome of civilization? How is it that mankind has not wrestled with that? How is it that Germany has not wrestled with that? The fact that neither Jew nor German has probed the meaning of the Holocaust from God's point of view, virtually invites the judgment of God afresh.

### **Revelation - The Reality of God**

The key to the source of prophetic understanding is revelation, which is to say, God's viewpoint or the direct impartation of God's reality, which is always at variance with man's. That is why it needs to be revealed and the Spirit of God is the medium of revelation. If we are averse to the Spirit, closed to the Spirit, fearful of the Spirit, unfamiliar with the Spirit, then we forfeit by necessity the revelation. There is a world of difference in knowing something that is true by credal and intellectual assent, as opposed to knowing it by revelation. If it comes mentally, however correct it is, it has no capacity to bring a corresponding life change. Revelation has the power to change. It gasps like Isaiah, "Woe is me, I am undone. I am a man of unclean lips." This is the prince of prophets speaking, and he did not see it before because every in God waits upon revelation, that which is given from God and must come down from above.

What is the condition by which revelation is given and why is God not more generous? Why does it wait for a moment of time where Isaiah saw the Lord, "high and lifted up," and you cry out, "I am undone. I am a man of unclean lips"? Why does He give that to Isaiah in the sixth chapter? Should He not have given it to him in the first chapter? Revelation is dependent upon humility, for God gives grace to the humble, and what a grace revelation is. It is the source of truth and of the deepest understanding of the reality of God that cannot be obtained in any other way. It is not just an alternative way, but rather it is a singular way. It is given to those who see themselves as the least of the saints. That is the key to prophetic seeing, to revelation of the mysteries of God. Paul actually saw himself as this, which seeing is more or less absent from contemporary Christianity. In other words, you can pound your brains all you want; you can have a stack of concordances, biblical commentaries and books, but you will never come to the definition of the truth and the reality of God except through the process of revelation. The same book can be just an intellectual operation where you get information, but when the process of God is working by the Spirit through that book, then the same statement is quickened and made alive. Something has come in a point of

time that has to be given.

True humility is the awareness that we are powerless until it comes. We are as dead men and we cannot force God's hand. We cannot twist His arm. We cannot coerce Him to reveal. It is something freely given, just like the God who will have mercy upon whom He will have mercy. How would you like to go an entire lifetime without ever once having been privileged to receive revelation from God? That means that your whole 'faith' is constituted entirely on a human, mental and cerebral level, which must eventuate in a pathetic kind of Christian life. I would almost say that you would be better off being an atheist than to think that you are a believer. It is like having your nose pressed against the glass looking in, but unable to enter.

The prophet is required to communicate things as God sees them to a people who not only have a different way of seeing things, but who do not want to see it from God's point of view. That requires, therefore, an unction and an anointing of such a kind as to make the truth of that seeing to penetrate the unwilling heart to the point of repentance, and bringing into conformity that life to God's own seeing. That is a supreme task.

## Chapter 6 - What is Prophetic Offense?

There is a prophetic 'offense' that God allows, or even builds in, either something in the man that men can reject or find offense in, or in the message itself. Why would that be, that there is some defect, some weakness or some imperfection in the man or in the message that seems to be invariably part of the prophetic manner? The Scriptures speak of 'the holy prophets of old', that though they were holy and need now also to be, it would seem that they carry some kind of defect, some kind of flaw, either in their own person, their own history or even in their own speaking. If that is so, and that constitutes the prophetic offense, then why does God allow that and even require that?

I can think that everything about John the Baptist was an offense, namely, the way he dressed, the way he was outside of Jerusalem, his diet, his celibacy. If you heard him, you had to leave Jerusalem and come to some waste place, to some slimy bank of a river, where this untoward looking character was carrying on. I mean, if you ever want to find offense, you can go down a whole list of things that would rub people the wrong way. It is interesting that I should seize him as an example of a man laden with offense by the very nature of what he is in himself. Elijah is in the spirit of John the Baptist, and John the Baptist in Elijah, and the prophet 'Elijah' is yet to come as the forerunner of the Lord in the last days also.

We need, therefore, of all the prophetic models, to examine more the Elijah model and the wilderness prophet than any other as being the clear form that God will employ that precedes His coming. The very fact of being in the wilderness means outside the establishment. To the Scribes and Pharisees, who were being sent from Jerusalem to see what was taking place at the banks of the Jordan, the offense would be that how could anything of significance be happening outside of Jerusalem, outside of their establishment and outside of their priestly class. I cannot say that I can find a verse where it says that there is an inherent flaw or a structured offense that God installs in His prophets, but it seems that they have almost invariably been offensive to men. It is interesting that Jesus was accused of being a wine bibber and a glutton, so here would be an assault on His character. Whether imagined or real, the opponents of the prophetic man will find it, and God allows it to be found.

The prophetic word is different from the words that are spoken by other ministers of God. There is also a greater propensity for the hearer to be resistant to the prophetic word, where he might be more readily yielded to a word of teaching. A prophet's speaking will bring him into a disjuncture with things as they are, especially religious things, because the prophet is vehemently anti-religious and because he knows better than anyone that it was the religious world that crucified the Lord of glory. There is something in his make-up and his jealousy for God and God's glory, that allows him to perceive things as they really are, even something which seems ostensibly to be from God, and is called God, and is employed in the realm of things about God, but it is yet inimical and opposed to God. It is the religious thing that is always the greatest obstruction and the greatest obstacle to the prophetic witness.

He speaks a radical word that always calls you to a disjuncture and to a degree of obedience that will be sacrificial and painful, and that will bring the prophet into some degree of reproach and misunderstanding, even by those who are ostensibly good Christians. It is a word that is painful both to hear, to consider and to receive. Men absolve themselves from such a word and avoid its implications by finding a way to discredit the word through finding a defect in the man. I would suspect that there is not a prophet that has ever been sent of God who does not provide that opportunity to his hearers.

Why would God allow an offense? Why should the prophet not be impeccable and above any criticism so

that people would of necessity have to receive his word? Why would God allow either the manner of the man, his mode of being, his life, his character, imagined or real, to be something that people could seize upon, if they want to find offense and a point of rejection? I believe that it is in order to recognize the word of God as the word of God, despite the vehicle. I see it in my own experience. Sometimes I am embarrassed when something comes out of me that slips into the message that I myself would not have chosen, and if I could have edited it out, then I would have. I say to myself, "How did that happen?" I then find later that people fasten onto that thing so as to reject not only that error, but the entire word that went with it. I pondered that because it is painful to embarrassingly bring a defect, but what I am sensing is, that God gives men opportunity, if they want to seize upon it, to reject both the man and the message, and they can justify it by saying, "Look, he said this," or "He did this," or "He is this." It is part of the humiliation of being prophetic and that the flaw or defect has got to issue through you. At the same time, however, I want to say that it is not to be used to absolve the prophetic man from responsibility; that he must strive for impeccability, purity, holiness and not justify himself in places where he is responsible and say, "Well, that's the prophetic flaw." It works to give people a way to avoid the implications, but it does not absolve the prophet from his own responsibility before God for it. The prophet cannot throw it off, and yet he is responsible for it. It might even be in a certain sense sinful, or humiliating or embarrassing, and you are crying out for the deliverance from it, and yet you have got to bear it because it serves that function. Both things are true at the same time. We are still responsible and yet at the same time it is something that God can and will employ to give men an escape if they want to seize it—and they will.

Even within the fivefold ministries, there is built-in antagonism and offense. A prophet operates often from an intuitive place, rather than the kind of emphasis a teacher would give to the Word. That is not to say that he is indifferent to the Word, because he is eminently the bearer of the Word of God, but in his calling more than any other there is a place for intuition and apprehension of something by the Spirit that does not necessarily first come to him by Scripture. That one thing is very offensive to teachers. We have to understand that, and not condemn, as if somehow the intuitive man is Word-rejecting, and is a freelancer, and will just take anything off-the-wall. He needs to be under the observation of men who are careful in the Word, but the men who are careful in the Word need to make some latitude for the intuitive faculty that God Himself has given.

We need not think that because there is an intrinsic offense to prophetic obedience and faithfulness that we are under obligation to be offensive. There are a lot of amateurs who are acting like prophets; that is to say, creating offense and who are loudmouthed, insensitive and acting like 'bulls in a china shop'. That is an insult to the true thing. We are not to think that we have to create offense and that that authenticates our prophetic credentials. The offense will come in and of itself without even our consciousness, but if we think that this is a form, "I am a prophetic person and I am going to shake these people up", then we are amateurs and doing God a disfavor. We would do well to keep our mouth shut, and be silent, and come under the disciplines of God before there will ever be a release. We may well have a legitimate calling, but we are going out into it prematurely. We have not been in the wilderness of God. We have not been dealt with in the deepest entrails of our heart and life, and we are just prematurely ejaculating a lot of nonsense and a lot of unnecessary controversy, that does not serve the redemptive purposes of God.

Jesus Himself said, "Blessed is he who is not offended in Me." There is something intrinsic in His being offensive, something built in by being what He is. God is something 'other', and the world is offended by that 'otherness'. They cannot define it, but they resist it and are irritated by it. But "Blessed is he who is not offended in Me" implies that there will be offense, and necessary offense, but if you can rise above the offense or see through the offense, then you are blessed.

## Chapter 7 - What is Prophetic Church?

If apostles and the prophets are the foundation of the church, it would not be wrong to conclude that the superstructure itself must be made of the same substance and kind; that the church in its entirety is itself a prophetic and apostolic phenomenon. It itself is the interpretive agency in the locality where it is, and in the nation where it is, to give meaning and understanding to the nation of its own events and its own history.

The heart of what is prophetic and apostolic is an absoluteness toward God in the jealousy for His glory and consequently an utter obedience without regard to the consequence to oneself. When we say, therefore, that the church has got to be prophetic, then this is what we are talking about. A fellowship that lives for God with an utterness toward God, without any regard for itself and consequences to itself, that has at its heart a jealousy for God, His glory, the fulfillment of His will and particularly His eternal purposes—then that church is prophetic.

Anything that we are saying about prophetic and the prophetic word is not only appropriate to the individuals that have such a calling, but to the church itself of the last days in its prophetic constituency. If the church of the last days is not prophetic in its character, make-up and use, in the locality where it is and the nations where they are, then God's program cannot be effected. A prophetic church is a church that understands these things and can bear these things. It can have men of a prophetic kind in their bosom and be able to sustain them and not be offended by them. It can understand the peculiarity of their calling and why they are required to function as they do, and not give itself to the criticism and the negative speaking or thinking about them that would discredit both itself and them.

Prophets see more than others the continuing influences that issue from the past and profoundly affect the present and the ultimate future. They see the continuum, the unbroken span of past, present and future as few see it. They know who they are in God. Whatever therefore the issues of the immediate future, however uncertain, a prophet can bear them. They can encourage others to bear them and communicate the sense both of the things that were past and the things that are future as being integral and related. This is also the distinctive privilege of the church.

Regrettably, the church more or less does not have this context. It does not see itself in the broad perspective of God, nor in the eternal purposes of God, and therefore everything suffers loss. The Lord Himself has said that He will not return until Elijah first comes and restores all things. The ministry of restoration must precede the Lord's coming. Part of that restoration is the apostolic and the prophetic view of the faith, which view has been itself been lost.

## Chapter 8 - What is Prophetic Ultimacy?

Here is a summary statement that T. Austin-Sparks makes:

Here is the thing to which the prophetic ministry all-inclusively relates: the original and ultimate purposes of God in and through His people.

We need to have something come into our consciousness as to the meaning of the words, ultimate and God's ultimate purposes and even the church in its ultimate configuration because whatever is ultimate is God's intention. To bring, therefore, the ultimate requirement of God in a world that is temporal, expedient and compromising, is to find ourselves in opposition to the whole spirit and tenor of the world. That same spirit has unhappily come even into the church. There are not so many in the church who want to hear about the ultimate purposes of God. If we will not, however, embrace the ultimate purposes of God, then neither, ironically, will we have any relevance in His immediate purposes. It is only in the investment of the ultimate that we have any practical significance. It is a paradox and yet it is true. That is why we are more or less of no value, because we have circumvented or not known the things that are ultimate.

The connection between ultimate and immediate is precisely the same as the connection between the past and the future. We have no immediate significance, until we have embraced the things that are ultimate. The ultimate purposes of God have very little to do with our self-gratification, in fact, they have nothing to do with it, and who has a heart for embracing something that has no particular relevance for oneself? When we do, however, embrace them, then all Hell will howl, and we will have made ourselves candidates for such fierce opposition, which never would have been our portion if we had only contented ourselves with the things that are at hand. The moment we embrace the ultimate purposes of God, we become marked people before the powers of darkness.

We presently have little or no understanding of the ultimate and full purposes of God in and through His people. The church is bored stiff, lacking an orbit, a line of thought and a direction because it lacks this understanding. We condemn ourselves, therefore, to programs and services whose forms are unhappily predictable. To embrace that which is ultimate and full is what makes church the true church. It is at the heart of the very purpose for our being. For that reason, God has given us the full gospel and the fullness of His Spirit. Yet we can talk about the gospel and the indwelling Spirit and not have either because we do not have the full purpose. I am a little suspicious of people boasting on the "full gospel" and "the baptism of the Spirit" who have not the full purpose, because the Spirit is given for that very purpose. It cannot be obtained without Him.

T. Austin-Sparks continues:

To interpret the mind of God in all matters concerning the purpose of God, to bring all details into line with that purpose, and to make that purpose govern everything.

He is fanatical! It is not just to announce the purpose, but to demand that everything else be related to it. That is prophetic intensity and prophetic insistence. We are not only to understand the ultimate and full purposes of God, but everything else that constitutes our life and being is to be related to that. That will require a radical adjustment, and that is why prophets are not popular. That requirement is painful and that is why people do not want to hear it.

A prophet shows the unbroken continuum of things past, with the imminence of the eschatological (end-time) future, that culminates in the theocratic glory. In other words, he is so aware of the invisible cloud of witnesses that make up the saints of past times as being present, in order to prod us on to the fulfillment of the thing that is future. This prophetic way of seeing the continuity and relevance of things past and future is also God's way of seeing, and it is the way that God would have the whole church to see. The absence of that seeing is to be rooted in mere time or mere culture itself, which is the product of time. We break the bondage of culture and tradition that is so fixed in time by breaking out of the orbit of time itself. We do not need to wait to die to come into eternity, but we can already be in that eternal place. We are already seated in heavenly places with Christ. That is the prophet's seeing and he has the responsibility to communicate that seeing in such a way as to engage the hearer and bring him into that very reality.

The prophet sees the sweep and the purpose of God, the larger picture, the panoramic view. He is not one for the 'nuts and bolts', for the details: 'how do you do this and that'. He sees the arching overview, and that is what the church needs to see if that is the framework of its life. Without that overview, fellowships will be fixed entirely in the present moment. They will remain in the things that are really so narrow and so petty because they cannot see what they are doing and what they are about in this moment in the context of something much larger of which they are in connection and moving toward. Without the prophetic overview, they are caught up in the immediate program, which very likely has been birthed out of their flesh or out of a necessity to 'do something', and is not consciously in the continuum of things apostolic and prophetic. The prophet communicates the eternal perspective, which also includes the past. One has no more apprehension of the future than one has of the past. Our ability to perceive the things that are yet future is altogether relative to the appropriation of the things past.

If we are going to be the one who turns aside to see the 'burning bush' as it pertains to God's purpose for Israel, then we need to have already turned aside to see the flaming issues of our own life and not pass them by. We will not turn aside to see the 'burning bush' of God in which the Lord Himself is in the midst, in the revelation of Himself that waits on that moment of a particular kind, if we have not already 'turned aside to see' the 'burning bushes' of the issues of our own life. Most of us look away and our past is the wreckage of failed marriages, failed relationships, failed church situations, where we go on to something else and sweep the past under the proverbial rug and have not turned aside to see. It is painful and that is why people do not turn aside, and we look to the next situation to remove the memory of the past. That is the human propensity and it is a propensity that the prophet cannot indulge. He has got to have the guts to face up to his own past and his own failures. In fact, those failures have very likely been given him by God to fit him that he might not miss the 'burning bush' when it comes in the moment of his final calling.

That message is going to be resisted, because it is not convenient to be lifted out of time. The prophet must make that view, which is a lost view, the first priority for the hearer. It is not another option it is the way. The eternal view is the view, and he has registered it with such forcefulness in his speaking that it has become now the priority of the person who hears him. That is what the prophetic word is: the 'event'. It is not information or inspiration, it is the word as 'event' that creates what was not there before, namely, the eternal perspective, where God's own seeing now becomes that of the believer. To be apprehended by that perspective will alienate that believer from the world and from those who are still seeing conventionally, including his own family.

The prophet absolutizes those things that the world has made trivial, and he makes trivial and relative what the world has sought to make absolute and ultimate. He stands the world on its head and he turns it inside-out. He says, "What you are celebrating is self-delusion, and what you are ignoring is of eternal moment

and significance." He not only says it, but he establishes it. That seeing will change and affect everything: the way that you see your family, your daily life, what you do, how you order your time, your resources, your money, your future. The power of that word, and it requires power, is altogether relative to the authentic sending and the intercession that goes forth behind the one that brings the word. He is not some virtuoso in himself who is operating independent of the sending body. He is coming against the whole weight of a moral order that has not its origin from above but below, but has become so normative that no one thinks that there is any alternative to it and even thinks that this is valid. The prophet brings another view of the eternal kind that is calculated not only to compete with, but to demolish the other. It has, therefore, got to be expressed in power in order to win the willingness of the hearer.

The prophet announces or projects the impending end of the world in apocalyptic fury and judgment in a way to birth the longing for the new heaven and new earth in which dwells righteousness. If we have any investment in this present world, the prophet demolishes it and makes clear that God is bringing a judgment in which everything that is not sanctified and separated unto Him, will go up in the conflagration. We are willing for that because we are won over to the view of a new heaven and a new earth in which dwells righteousness. If this is what it takes for God to be glorified in His own creation, then let it come.

## Chapter 9 - What is Prophetic Anointing?

The prophetic ministry is an enlightened ministry. It is that which under the anointing is to bring things back to that position because it is true to divine principle. (T. Austin-Sparks).

What is anointing, therefore, and to what degree do we respect it, recognize it, esteem it and are jealous for it, and know that except that what we speak and do is performed in its power, that our activity is vain?

If God does not give His anointing, we are not to think that we can coerce Him nor compel Him. We need to respect it and know that if we are enjoying the anointing of God and the Presence of God, and there is a flawless life, then it is purest gift. It is altogether grace that comes down from above and we are so grateful for it. It is very life and reality itself. The very same things that we said yesterday effectively would be today as dry bones, if God's anointing is not upon that speaking. Every word might be the same, but without the anointing those words would bring death rather than life. The prophetic man, therefore, is eminently the anointed man.

If we are going to be the mouth out of which God's glory comes in a powerful anointing, we need also to be prepared for the occasions when it does not come. We who cherish the anointing of God most, who have the most difficult burdens to express to unwilling hearers, even God's people, and know that it can only be performed in the power of that Spirit, need not think that it will always be ours consistently to enjoy. It is not some mechanical or fixed thing that we can always count on. If we are going to convey the ultimate purposes of God, then we ourselves need to know that there are times when there are purposes of God being served that require our humiliation rather than our exaltation, and He is not going to be there to explain it. We need to bear that and suffer the indignity and the shame, not only with those who oppose us, but those who are our allies and our colleagues! The most painful thing is the look of disappointment on the faces of believers. If we are not willing for the one, then we will not be available for the other. "We are dead and hid with Christ in God until His life is revealed." We have no rights; we are dead men. We cannot command the anointing; we can only receive it when it pleases God to give it. Then and only then will He reveal His life and His glory. If He does not, then we just have to patiently forbear and do what we can and trust the Lord for that moment.

Our life is not our own. The anointing is not our own. I have seen God humiliate me before His people when they begin to look up starry-eyed at me as if I am 'God's man of faith and power'. The message goes absolutely limp, and I am never again invited back by people who were just about to elevate me to a worshipful status. God completely stripped me in their sight. It was painful for me to bear, but I had to for their sake because they were misreading and misunderstanding the anointing of God as if it were some inherent or intrinsic thing in me, rather than that which is given again and again, as He wills and at His sovereign disposition. For even when the anointing is there, there is a way in which we can yet tremble and wonder if we are just operating out of some force of personality, rather than the true, pure unction of God. I like to say that, 'God anoints what He appoints'. I think that is a fair way of understanding the principle of anointing.

## Chapter 10 - What is Prophetic Burden?

If a statement were to be made that would sum up the prophetic burden of the last days and of what we should be about in God, then it would, in my opinion, read:

The primacy of the prophetic word appropriate to the last day's purposes of God as it pertains to Israel's final redemption through a church, alerted and prepared through such a word, for its (self-transfiguring) part in that restoration.

That is a packed statement, and so we need to unpack it. Israel's final redemption is the final, consummating event of God that concludes the age. I cannot imagine that anyone who has any preoccupation with prophets and prophetic things, can omit reference to the single, great, epochal event that is yet future, namely, the restoration of Israel after thousands of years of apostasy and alienation from God. Unless this takes place, then there is no consummation of the age; there is no return of the Lord; there is no establishment of His kingdom, because His kingdom, by necessity, is the kingdom of David, the kingdom promised Israel. It is not, however, the kingdom for Israel's exclusive gratification, but a kingdom that will bless the all the nations through a nation that God has appointed and chosen to play the central role in His 'salvation history', namely, the restored nation, Israel.

We must not idealize the kingdom of God as if it is some airy, ethereal and phantasmal thing that has only to do with inward things or certain values. It is a political kingdom as well as it is the other. It is a political kingdom that is predicated upon those values, indeed, but it is authentically the issue of rule. It is the authority of God in His creation, through the nations, influenced by a redeemed nation that has been so long alienated from Him, but restored in the last days through the agency of the church.

In fact, my continuing lament and criticism of all of the celebration of prophets in this recent "prophetic" movement is the lack of any reference to Israel and the church's relationship to Israel, considering that this is the most significant thing that is before us historically, and soon to break. There is so little awareness, let alone preparation, that I cannot conceive that there should be a prophetic upsurge and this theme should be absent. The very absence of the theme makes me to suspect whether indeed what is being celebrated is prophetic.

There is yet a future, global dispersal and persecution of Jews called in the Bible, "The time of Jacob's trouble," out of which a remnant will be saved and preserved by the witness of the living God that comes to them through a church of a certain last day's kind. It is a formidable last-day's witness to Jews, who themselves do not welcome such a revelation, and who will be brought to a place of ultimate crisis and distress so as to fit them for its consideration. If it were not for ultimate crisis and distress, then they never would have considered the things that will ultimately save them. It would have been outside of their purview, outside of the things that they would consider as being valid. That is what we Jews are. We are nothing more than man writ large, but man in his final and ultimate depravity and obstinate rejection of God.

It will be an epochal event, but it is going to take a church of an ultimate kind. The church is nowhere near that condition presently, and the only way it is going to get there is through the primacy of the prophetic word. Everything is predicated upon the word of God. God will not do anything outside or independent of His word. He has exalted His word above His name. He sent His word and He healed them. Joseph was bound in irons until God's word came. When God sends His Deliverer, it is the Word made flesh. The word is central to God. In the beginning, God said, "Let there be...and there was." The word, therefore, is God's medium, and the prophetic word is a word of an ultimate kind because it is not just a word of

information or explanation, though it may include that. It is even beyond the word of inspiration. It is, in the last analysis, a creative word that brings that thing to pass which was not.

The word is not spoken abstractly out of some kind of mechanism, but out of flesh and blood organism, out of man with all of his sweat, defect and limitation. I do not know how to say this. No man is more acutely aware of his human limitation than the prophetic man and that is why they always cry out, "I am as a child, I cannot speak." In fact, if they have not that awareness, then they are not even a candidate for use. There is nothing more glaring in contradiction than the nobility of what a prophet is required to speak as being the very mouth of God and for God, and yet coming out of all of the defect and shortcomings of his humanity. It is like a contradiction of an ultimate kind and so men who have that calling are understandably and frequently discouraged. Their humanity is always before them. If the enemy can play upon that sufficiently so as to stop their mouth, which is his frequent attack, then the word does not go forth.

We desperately need oracles from God who can say what this hour means, and what it is to which we are tending, and what is God requiring in the light of the things that point to the consummation of the age. We need men who can communicate the word. If a prophet is not distinguished by his speaking, then do not look for his credentials on the basis of his gifting or his miracles or his gift of knowledge. That would be a real snare. It is not that their messages are not biblical and good, so much as they have not been oracular, that is to say, prophetic in the sense of the weight, intensity and solemnity of the messages. A word can be sound, biblical and doctrinally clean and yet not be a prophetic word. It does not have the weight, nor the meaning or portent nor ultimate requirement that a prophetic word should.

We are moving into the dangers of the last days and I believe that it is a giddy love for the demonstration of power in some kind of gifting that will seduce millions of believers who are not careful to examine the origin of that manifestation, so long as they themselves might be the happy recipient of a word of knowledge about them. People seem to need that, I believe, because they have a deep-seated insecurity in the faith. They have not the knowledge of God, nor the knowledge of themselves in God. They do not see themselves as they ought as accepted in the Beloved. They want a confirmation that God really knows them. To want to need that assurance out of an insecurity in one's faith will move us towards deception.

The prophetic standard, which in a certain sense is the statement of God before His people, communicates His fear and His holiness in a real and searching sense. When something is being labeled prophetic and is not, not only is prophetic being denigrated, but God is being denigrated because He Himself is intrinsic to the thing that is prophetic. We need to recognize that and not treat the prophetic thing lightly, because that is to treat Him lightly. God Himself suffers in esteem.

## Chapter 11 - Ezekiel: Prophet of the Resurrection

I want to give a perception or perspective of the issue of Israel, and one that I can freely commend, if indeed we have serious intention of being an apostolic and prophetic body, which is to say, an authentic expression of the 'called-out' ones; the church. There is something that needs to be fitted into our end-time perception, and it is the issue of Israel, so central, in my opinion, to the final and consummating purposes of God. What is more, the issue of Israel profoundly involves the church. We cannot talk of things prophetic without some kind of expression of this theme. It is a theme that is so dear to the heart of God, and should be therefore so to our own hearts

This is so enormously important. The issue of the Jew and the issue of Israel is in fact the issue of the church. God has locked these two entities into a reciprocal relationship, that the one without the other cannot come to its full fulfillment in the purposes of God. It behooves us, therefore, to give careful attention to this mystery, the mystery of Israel and the church, lest, as Paul says, "...you be wise in your own estimation ('conceits' - King James Version of the Bible)...(Rom. 11:25b)."

When Paul says in Romans 11:15, "For if their (Israel's) rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" , we can be sure that that thought had its origin in the 37th chapter of the prophet Ezekiel.

### **Israel's Call**

Israel will bless all the families of the earth, but not in her present condition, character and mentality. Blessing is more than a slap on the back, a chuck under the chin and some kind of platitude. To confer blessing is nothing less than a royal priestly prerogative. It is a palpable thing that is actually communicated and conferred in priestly authority and power. If ever there was a generation that needed to receive blessing by those who can bless, it is this generation. We are steeped in curse, but where are the people who have priestly authority? It is a question for the church and it is a question for Israel, for no one else has that privilege or that right or that call. Ezekiel chapter 37 speaks of a nation brought to the end of herself that she might finally come into her call of a nation of priests and a light unto the world:

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. And He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry. And He said to me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' And I answered, 'O Lord God, Thou knowest.' Again he said to me, 'Prophesy over these bones, and say unto them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord God to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. And I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin, and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD ' (Ezekiel 37:1-6).

The fact that they shall know that 'I am the Lord' is evidently important to God. The whole object of the entire process of the death and resurrection of Israel is for this one thing: "And you will know that I am the Lord." Why is it so important that they should 'know' beyond any other nation? This is not Talmudic knowledge nor academic knowledge. This is existential knowledge. This is the knowledge of a God who raises the dead, and until we know God as the God who has raised us from the dead, then we do not know Him at all. Why is that so imperative for Israel? It is because the only way that they can bless all the families of the earth is by communicating the knowledge of God as He in fact is, that is, the God who

raises the dead. Their communication of that truth will be more powerful than any other knowledge because they will have known it as the fact of their national existence. If there is no other reason for the death and resurrection of Israel than this, then that is reason enough. They have a destiny as a nation of priests and a light unto the world. The world does not need more religion, more humanism, more charismatic fun and games. It desperately needs the knowledge of God as He in fact is, namely, the God who can raise the dead and make those things to be which were not.

It is evidently only an extremity of being, reduced to this condition and being raised from this condition, that will confer that knowledge. How dear is the knowledge of God to us? How extensive or deep is that knowledge? Do we know Him as He in fact is? Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses and other sects and heresies are not the only forms of deception. There are countless numbers who count themselves 'Christian', who recite the correct doctrines of the faith, and who are as much deceived and out of the faith as a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness, even though they employ the vocabulary of the faith. That is why the Scripture tells us to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith. We are not to think that because we say the right things and have the right reality that we are in the right place. We do not know Him as we ought and the true knowledge of God is always expensive. How far will we allow God to bring us in extremity, trial and dealings in order to come to a knowledge that will enable us to stand in these last days?

So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew, and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then He said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God, 'Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life (verses 7-9).'

They are the slain of the Lord, evidently the people who have suffered through the final and yet future desolation and ruin that has brought their cities into utmost destruction. This either means physically slain or slain in terms of having any hope of restoration or meaningful existence as a nation.

### **A Resurrection Word**

Sin is death, and Israel's death will be in exact proportion to Israel's sin and it will be a very real death. The raising from that death will be something that will have to come to the nation outside of itself. Its death will be so complete that it will have no ability even to call on the Lord. Something must come to it outside of itself, as it came to Lazarus when he was in the tomb, dead for four days, namely, a prophetic word of resurrection.

This is no mere, religious word. This is a word of an ultimate kind that raises the dead, a 'come forth' word, and only a resurrected 'son of man' or 'son of God' can speak it! Israel will remain in her grave unless our word is resurrection life in that power, no matter how well meaning and desirous we are for her resurrection. We cannot be to them the agent for their resurrection unless we ourselves are first of the resurrection. We ourselves must have gone into the waters of death and not once and for all, but a death that will be daily, otherwise we cannot be a corporate 'son of man' with one mind, one heart, one soul and one will that God can command to address those bones in a once-and-for-all explicit moment historically.

It is remarkable how singular God is, that He will not depart from the principle of His glory which is resurrection or nothing. He makes no concession. It was required for His first begotten Son and thus for everything that pertains to His glory.

Then said He to me, 'Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.'" (Ezek. 37:9).

God commands the prophet to prophesy to the Spirit (ruach, breath), that He would come from the four winds of the earth and breathe on the bones. The Spirit is the breath of God, and it is implying that the prophet is to command God. Try and follow that. It is one thing to speak to bones and quite another thing to speak to God. You know when you are dead when you can speak to God in the way that He commands you to address Him contrary to your own instinctive deference. In other words, this is the most sensitive, gossamer thing, where if you are going to have a last resistance to God, it would be here: "Lord, far be it from me to command You. I am just dust. I am just a son of man. Are You are requiring me to command the Spirit, which is to command You? No, no, I have to draw the line. I mean, that is impolite. That goes too far. I am willing to address the bones, but I cannot command You." Unless the prophet, however, commands the Spirit of God to come into the flesh and bones that have been joined, then the house of Israel remains dead. They only become an exceeding great army when the Spirit comes into them. It sounds like the height of presumption and arrogance that man, who is a creature, should command the Creator, yet I intuit that there is a deeper significance. The 'I cannot' is the last vestige of 'spiritual' self that has got to go.

It is something parallel to taking your son, your only son whom you love, and making him a sacrifice. In other words, there is a delicacy of some final strand of self-will and independence that may even be legitimate, that is even God-honoring, and yet behind it can hide the last vestiges of self and independence from God. It can only be broken in what seems to be an act of disrespect because He has commanded it. God asked a man to kill his only son, who is the son of promise, and yet it is in that obedience that God spoke, "...now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me (Gen. 22:12b)."

I believe that it is something like that here: "Now I know by this" ...You have obeyed me though it contradicts the last residue of your spiritual self that is offended by the very thought that man should be presumptuous so as to command God; but until you have obeyed Me in this, I do not have you in full." It is an obedience unto death of the last subtlety of self that is even spiritual and God-honoring and God-respecting, behind which the palpitation of our self-life might yet continue. Until God has that, He does not have us in the totality with which He must possess the individual.

The word that is used in Hebrew here is 'rûwach', or 'breath'. It may well be that the translators could not bring themselves to the affront that this represents, and so they had to use the word 'breath', as if you are commanding natural elements rather than the very Spirit and breath of God Himself. We have to be alert to that possibility because the Hebrew word is clear. It is the rûwach of God, the Spirit of God. For those who have ears to hear, hear it; for those who have faith to understand, receive it; and for the rest of you, keep it on the shelf or put it before the Lord, and see if He is not touching that final, delicate and last strand that still keeps a man or a woman from that total surrender. It would be the final irony, that the last thing is our own spirituality that keeps us from total surrender. It is not our carnality, but the last delicate thing is spirituality itself. How jealous God is that He might be all in all, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen (Rom. 11:36)."

## **A nation brought to extremity**

So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life, and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. Then He said to me, 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off (verses 10-11).'

This is the pivot of this great chapter. Historically, to my understanding, there has never yet been a time when Israel, as a whole nation, has acknowledged that it is, 'cut off, without hope and as dry bones.' We die hard. We do not give up easily. We are an indomitable people. We are the inveterate optimists, not in God, but in ourselves. Not even the Holocaust resulted in this statement. We gathered up our rags and found ourselves in new places and established our fortunes. We went to Israel, which was a wasteland, and drained the malarial swamps and established a modern civilization. We resuscitated the liturgical Hebrew language and in forty years made it a modern language for a nation. It is a supreme accomplishment. We are a formidable, capable people with great expertise and prowess. Has such a people ever acknowledged that, 'We are cut off, we are without hope, we are as dry bones?'

In fact, the phrase that came out of the experience of the Holocaust, which is as close to dry bones as we have ever historically been, was the macho insistence of: 'Never again'. It was far more stringent and far more militant. "You Gentiles took advantage of us in our ghetto helplessness, but now we have a state that no-one will be able to take from us." That statement should never be made in the face of the God who intends to be their Strength, Redeemer and a place to run into and find safety. Israel's whole political posture today is predicated on the proud and defiant note struck by 'Never again'. God is required to bring down that nation that thought it could be its own defense. 'Never again' is predicated not at all in a confidence towards God to keep us, but in an ability to keep ourselves. It is a supreme confidence in oneself and in one's own ability. God's intention with Israel is ultimate and therefore it requires ultimate dealing. God is waiting for and will bring the whole nation to come to that recognition.

Israel's national anthem of today is entitled, 'The Hope,' Ha Tikvah. It is the hope in man. It is the hope in human ability. It is the hope of what the State will represent for a people that have been stateless and without nationhood for two thousand years since the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Dispersed throughout the whole Roman empire, we have been living in ghettos and in countries where we were persecuted and had to be in the gates by a certain hour at night. We are a people that were used for merchandise and cut off from occupations and careers. Lowly and disregarded, we have suffered immeasurably in the hands of the nations wherever we happened to find ourselves.

If only we had our own nation and not be at the mercy of Gentile nations, then we could show the Gentile nations the uniqueness of what a Jewish nation is. It would be more than a place of safety in the world. It was to be a place to exhibit the uniqueness of what a Jewish civilization and nation is, because we are proud about this one thing: that even when we were in the ghettos, and even when we were powerless, we had this distinction above the Gentiles, we were morally and ethically superior. It is a wonderful fantasy to enjoy when you are powerless, but when you have power, do you know what you find out? Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. That is why God has allowed the establishment of the present State of Israel. It was never established to be the permanent and enduring prophetic fulfillment of Scripture, but a necessary and instructive preliminary. "He takes away the first that He might bring the second." "First the earthly, then the heavenly." Our mistake is to celebrate the first as being the enduring, not recognizing that it was given, like the first begotten son, to die. That is what Jesus had to experience in the brilliance of His humanity. As the Son of Man, He had to be brought to death in order to be raised as the Son of God and to be exalted on high, and given a name above every name and the millennially exacted

nation must itself follow in the path of its own Messiah.

To invest your hope, even in a nation, is still idolatry. Hope is only a hope when it is in God. Anything less and other is a form of idolatry however much the nation itself is a thing to be desired. God must rid us of false hopes until He establishes Himself as the Hope.

There must first be the natural because we have something to learn from it, namely, that however gifted and capable we are, we cannot establish a nation that will "bless all the families of the earth." We might impress the families of the earth, but we cannot bless them. There is something higher than morality and ethics, namely, the holiness and righteousness of God, and you cannot fabricate that out from human intention.

When everybody was about to begin to celebrate and rejoice for the success (in only forty years!) of such a State, something began to happen that is called the Intifada, the Palestinian uprising. It started with the throwing of stones that today is going beyond stones and Jews are being stabbed to death and blown up in the streets of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem itself. That thing has multiplied and become such a threat, within and without, that the nation has been required to act defensively in ways that it would never would have thought possible. Would it not be ironic if history comes full circle and Jews, who were formerly the victims of others, would now be required to victimize another out of the necessity to preserve their Statehood, their existence and assure their survival?. When you trust in the arm of flesh for survival, how far will you go for your own preservation, if God be not your safety?

It would be a shame on us, should we ever join the world in the chorus of condemnation against Israel for her failures to be a moral and ethical nation, and for her increasing use of violence, brutality and expulsion. We have not understood that they must fail; that God Himself is the Author of their predicament; that things are set in motion by which they must show themselves violent; that they must disappoint themselves; that they cannot be the hope for a nation that they had intended until they come to such a final impasse of such desperation, futility and hopelessness, that they cry out with one voice, "We are cut off, we are without hope, we are as dry bones", in terms of any fulfillment for which they could have hoped for as a nation.

### **The Death Before the Resurrection**

This people has got to come to a time where their problems are so insuperable, so beyond solution, that they themselves cannot save themselves. If we do not understand that the perplexities that afflict Israel are God-given and that Israel's increasing failure to resolve those perplexities is also God-given, we will find ourselves inevitably drawn into a place where we join the increasing chorus in the world that condemns that nation for her failures because we do not understand that they must of necessity fail. There is a going down before there is a coming up. There is a death before a resurrection. There is a suffering and humiliation before the glory.

God yearns to hear men repent of any confidence that they have in their own flesh. Human pride clutches for anything if men will only esteem them, appreciate them and acknowledge them on the basis of themselves, what they are and what they can do. It dies hard. There is something in us that wants to be accepted for us. There is nothing good in the flesh at all. Jesus would not even allow Himself to be complimented when a man called Him 'good' master. He said, 'Why do you call Me good?' Jesus knew that this man was flattering Him as a man and would not allow him that kind of ideological or philosophical ground, because if that man could call Jesus good, what do you think that he thinks about himself, who obeyed all the laws and the commandments from his childhood up? 'There is no one good but God,' and

Israel will never bless all the families of the earth until they believe that. When Israel recognizes that, God turns to the 'son of man', and says, "Speak to these bones." That is why this whole chapter begins not with Israel, but the 'son of man'. Israel is helpless. The 'son of man' is the whole issue.

### **The 'Son of Man'**

Ezekiel chapter 37 is not just about Israel. It is about this someone called the 'son of man', a prophetic entity of a mystical kind who in the end becomes the voice of God's speaking and whose word raises Israel out of her death. God does not Himself in some mystical way speak to that nation but employs a 'son of man', who is first brought down into the valley of dry bones, and moved around and in them, right into the grit of that death! Why does God use the figure of the valley of "very dry" bones, and there were "many around about?" Why that metaphor and why the use of that image? I believe that it is because there is no death that is more dead. It is one thing to be a Lazarus in the grave for four days, but this is a condition even beyond that death. This is when you have decomposed, your flesh is gone and your bones are so desiccated, so utterly dried up, that they are ready to crumble to powder.

Who is this prophetic 'son of man' who has the authority, the creative power, the union and identification with God Himself that he can speak for Him and as Him, so as to raise an entire nation by the word, "Come forth"? I am suggesting that he is a corporate 'son of man', that is to say, a church that has come to its full prophetic constituency and stature. It is a church that speaks with one voice in perfect and total agreement, just as the church of old where they were of one heart, one mind and one soul. It does not mean that we are robots punched off the assembly line, but that we are distinct individuals, through the dealings of God in our lives. In the process and the formation of our own growth and maturity, we come into agreement with God, and so does everyone else with us, that we might speak the word of God as one voice that raises the dead. Only a church that recognizes the profound centrality of resurrection for itself will equally, by that recognition, understand the necessity for Israel's death and resurrection.

Then God asks him a teasing question, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' Have you ever felt like a 'son of man'? For all your spirituality, are you ever aware of your humanity at the same time? Have we been made to feel the terrible contradiction of the treasure in our own earthen vessels? The great prophetic man of faith could not say 'yes'. He had to say, 'O Lord God, Thou knowest.' When the crucial moment comes and the nation confesses that it is without hope, then God turns to the 'son of man' and says, "Therefore, prophesy to these bones that they might live."

### **The Mystery of Israel and the Church**

Why would the God of Israel not Himself speak directly to the bones? He does not need anything from anyone. God has, however, chosen to employ the 'son of man' or the church, because the Jews will be in their graves in the nations. This is before Israel returns to the Land as the redeemed of the Lord. God could have done it sovereignly by Himself, but I believe God is as much concerned for the transfiguration of the church as He is for the restoration of the nation. It is a mystery.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! (Romans 11:33).

This is what Paul saw in Romans chapters 9 through 11. This is why he broke through every barrier of language when the mystery broke upon him. He could not contain himself. It was more than just Israel's

restoration. It was the transformation of the church at the very same time, by the process of the crisis that came to the church, the 'son of man' company, called to speak to the dead bones in a faith that could believe that those bones could live.

God's concern for the church is as great as His concern for Israel, and this is the thing that compels the church to a place of authenticity, as nothing else ever given, ever required, could have. It is the ultimate requirement and it is in meeting it that we become apostolically and prophetically ultimate as the church. Unless we can meet this requirement, and it calls us to be larger than life, then we are not the church. It is the final challenge and it can only be met on the basis of the degree to which we can say, "For me, to live is Christ."

Our grasping of this word and the giving of ourselves to the fulfillment of it is the key to the church coming into the fullness of God's intention in the last days. There will be no other challenge of this proportion in the calculated stratagem of God for our rising to a fullness of an apostolic and prophetic kind than the challenge that comes to us by a prostrate, inert and dead nation that cannot help itself, and to whom something must come from outside of itself or it remains in that grave. We are that someone whose word will either permit it to rise from the dead or remain in that condition. This is an ultimate requirement of the church that will identify who, in fact, the true church is. Only a people who are so in union with God, and share the purposes of God, and desire the glory of God, will give themselves to this final cross requirement, a requirement that is beyond their own faith and ability.

It is a unity that cannot be obtained by a people in agreement of an ecumenical kind where we all give bear hugs and backslaps to one another. I mean the kind of agreement that the Lord forges out of suffering, the unity that takes suffering, pain and disillusionment to temper and establish, that we might be 'one as He is one.' It is a death to our individuality, our individualism, our many opinions, our self-will and our self-centeredness. This is a unity that can only be obtained at the Cross. How does God get us from the condition we presently are in to that where He can command us to prophesy? We are not attenuated to being commanded. We do not like it. We chafe. A crisis, however, has come that requires us to speak as one voice in order to give that speaking the power to raise a dead nation. Are we willing? It is not a compulsory requirement. To see Israel apostolically and prophetically in its death, to go down into the midst of it is to make the radical requirement. That is the genius and the mystery of God.

We have got a long way to go and this is the incentive for making that journey. If we do not make it, then we will languish in an inferior faith, and find ourselves cut off from the ultimate purposes of God in the last days. We might likely even find ourselves apostate. The church will be a prophetic entity that can speak for God, with the authority of God, that the speaking is not just inspirational instruction, but an 'event' that causes a nation to rise from death. A faith that would rather prefer to go to Israel and plant some trees or attend a Feast of Tabernacles conference is not a faith that God employs. This is ultimate requirement, and God is putting all of His eggs in one basket, namely, the church.

With what authority do we presently speak, who have given our mouths to trifles, to gossip, to chitchat, to nonsense and all the things that debase the currency of words? We have so little understanding, so little respect for the spoken word as 'event'. It will take much more silence, that when the speaking comes, then it will be consequential. That means discipline because we are a generation that cannot stand silence. We need to have the earphones on, even while we are on the bus, or walking in the street or doing our homework. We do not respect silence and we do not respect true speaking.

## Israel's Destiny

So long as the nation Israel remains in its grave, we will continue to have incest, abortion, child molestation, perversion and every sick and defiling, Sodom and Gomorrah sin. We will be inundated with every grotesque form of sin until the nation Israel comes to be a priestly nation and a light to the world, and bless all the families of the earth, because they know God as the God who raises the dead. The true knowledge of God is the knowledge of a God who raises the dead. It is not the knowledge about God, but the experience of the resurrection ourselves. Except we have experienced that resurrection from our death, then how shall we believe it for them? Except our word be a resurrection word in resurrection power, how shall they be raised from that death?

Since Israel has a millennial destiny that is central to all nations, there is no alternative but for God to bring her out from the place of man in his self-sufficiency and dependency and into a union with Him by which He alone is glorified. The unhappy thing is that no-one can come into that short of death. It is really a remarkable revelation of our own condition that we have not understood that necessity for Israel, and the reason is that we have not understood it for ourselves! The church itself is operating too much from its own unaided humanity and making a brave show of it in terms of meetings, enjoyment, success and programs. It is only when the issue of glory is raised that our presumptions and failures are apparent. I have a complete persuasion that all of our error and failure to understand how God will bring Israel down and our reluctance to consider the necessary suffering and devastation, stems from the fact that our central consideration is not the glory of God but the success of a nation, a fellowship or a ministry.

We need to understand that Israel's predicament shall get worse and worse, both from within and without. There has never been a nation so bewildered, so bedeviled with such vexing problems in culture, nation, and ethnic differences. They are ringed around by hostile enemies who are determined for their destruction, and have a hostile Palestinian presence within, that even if they resolve the present Palestinian crisis (which I cannot imagine that they can find a way to do it), the intractable hatred, the bloodlust and the revenge, that is characteristic of the Arab and Muslim mentality, cannot be placated.

This is neither accidental nor haphazard, but the calculated wisdom of God to bring a proud, stubborn, self-willed and self-assured people down and out, that He might raise them up in the power of God, supernaturally, by a word spoken through Gentiles, whom Jews disdain as being inferior. We will be ironically the key to their national restoration. That is why God does not speak the word, He has us to speak it, together, in agreement, one heart, one mind, one will, when it is commanded and in the faith that works by love.

This love, the faith that works by this love, is the love of God, the unconditional love of God that cannot be offended against, irrespective of what Jews do or what they have become. In a word, the 'son of man' who speaks for God has got to be in such union with God, that his love is God's love, his faith is God's faith, and for him to live is Christ. How many of us can say that that is our present and consistent condition? Can we say with Paul, with complete integrity and certitude, 'For me, to live is Christ.' Is that true of us at work on Monday, in the home, in relationship, as husband, as father, as servant? I do not live by my own wisdom. I avoid it. I do not trust it. I do not move by my own energy. I allow God to empty me. I am weak, helpless, and a frail thing. I am dust. Except that He lives, I do not live either. I am dead and hid with Christ in God until His life is revealed, then is my life revealed unto glory, for it is my life.

## **The Issue of the Glory of God**

Let me put it another way: If Israel had not been in this crisis unto death; if they had been in any less demanding place where the church could have helped them as it is doing now, for example, through finances, through making trips to Israel and through helping them effect the peace negotiation; if they would have had the security and peace and that would have been the end of history, then, in what condition would we have been eternally fixed, both as the church and as Israel? It would have been in a condition less than what glorifies God. It certainly would not have been a condition that fitted us for our eternal calling. If we miss this, we miss it all. For we cannot discuss the issue of Israel except in the context of eternity. It is not just their immediate need, their security and helping them through, but there is an issue of eternity at stake, and this is the last occasion in time and history by which that is to be effected. It is ultimate and final, both for Israel and for the church.

It raises a question for the church, "How can I communicate this to the church, that the church would be willing to embrace this death and to know this life?" It is exactly the same question here toward Israel. What does it take? A well-meaning prophet could never have succeeded. He has got to be brought to a certain place himself, and it is the crisis of Israel that brings him to that place. Ezekiel chapter 37 begins:

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. And He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry (Ezekiel 37:1-2).

Does this indicate that the prophet voluntarily would like to be in the midst of the valley of dry bones? Think on that. Would you like to be in it? When the Allies arrived in Germany at the end of World War II, they came upon scenes of mounds and mounds of stinking corpses and bones in the most ugly configurations that men puked, their stomachs went out on them to see the horror of those mass graves and unburied corpses and bodies in their final convulsions of death. It is not something that is pleasant, but it is something that is true. If the prophet or anyone will not come to the place of truth, if he will not see things as they in fact are, as God Himself sees them, then he cannot speak for Him.

The 'son of man' is as much a concern in the purposes of God as the valley of dry bones themselves. It describes God's preoccupation and jealousy not only for Israel but something symbolized in the phrase, 'son of man', who has a prophetic calling and yet evidently, unless the Spirit of the Lord brought him out and the hand of the Lord was upon him, he would not have chosen to come down into that valley. Unless we will allow the hand of the Lord upon us as a 'son of man' company as a prophetic end-time people, to bring us out of our charismatic shallowness and the other kinds of thrills and trivia to which we have given ourselves, and be brought down into the place of desolation and death, then we have no ultimate place in God's purposes.

## **The Depravity of Our Humanity**

It is the issue of truth, and we need to begin to see how desperately evil man is in his humanity. We need to see that only the Lord's death is the answer to it. Part of what is deep-seated in our humanity are our delusions, our wishful thinking, the way we like to color something in our views or see the good side of it. We want to avoid the hard, painful seeing of something as it in fact is.

There is an illustration I often give. Years ago, I went with my brother Lenny to a "Joe's Bar and Grill" to watch a Joe Louis fight. Joe Louis was the defeated former champion and Rocky Marciano, a rising blockbuster, was just coming on the scene and he was wiping out his opponents as if they were made out

of straw. So they get Joe Lewis out of retirement to meet this young threat and of course who do you think that my brother and I were rooting for? Joe Lewis. The sentimental favorite, the man we loved, was making a comeback. I will never forget it. We watched and it was pathetic. You wanted to look away. He was getting bashed from one side of the ring to the other. He was just being chewed up and spit out. An old man flailing wearily with his hands against this massive brute. There came one moment, however, when he began to try to put together some offense. I think I could have pushed him over myself. It was pathetic to watch. It was so hopeless. My brother leaped to his feet and cried out, "He's got him! He's got him!", and I am looking at Lenny as if he has gone mad.

Do you know what that says? He wanted so much to see Joe make it that it actually influenced the way in which he perceived reality. It is self-induced deception born out of the carnal heart that refuses to see something as it in fact is, and so colors it and transforms it, that it believes its own perception and its own lie. In that condition we will never prophesy anything. A prophet is a seer before he is a spokesman. If his word is not in keeping with the truth of what is to be seen, then it is not a true word and it will not raise the dead. I have to say that this text seems to suggest that this prophet is not willing, that there is a degree of reluctance, and there would be for us too, to see things as they in fact are. How many of us are willing to see the condition of our marriages as they painfully in fact are, or our children, or our fellowships, or ourselves? That is prophetic seeing and the truth is often painful before it can become glorious.

How do we perceive Israel? Is she just struggling through some temporary problems? Yes, there have been some unhappy things; and yes, they have had to use some force and even brutality; and yes, it was a very sad episode about that Jewish doctor going into the Mosque in Hebron killing many in cold blood with a machine gun; and yes, "Those things will happen." Is it rather a symptom and statement not of a man, but of a condition of a nation? When a man who is both orthodox and highly educated can in cold blood calculate the death of others as being the means by which Israel will preserve its security, then we have something much more than an aberrant individual. Are we seeing humanly, with a degree of wishful thinking that wants to dismiss painful considerations, or are we seeing something deeper and truer, as God would have us to see?

We have to ask whether it was an act of a deranged man, who really is not himself, or have the extremities and the pressures revealed what the man in fact is, and always has been, and it took this extremity to reveal it. It is asking the same question about Nazi Germany, the land of philosophy, ethics, morality, music and culture. Is that the true Germany or is the true Germany what was unmasked by the pressures that revealed the pagan heart of that nation in the Nazi time? In fact, does God allow, if not bring into being, the circumstances that will reveal our condition nakedly? God will not bring His redemptive answer to the changing of that condition until we acknowledge it, and do not make excuses for it, and say, "That is me."

I was a 16-year-old kid getting papers to be a merchant seaman and found myself in Sicily and Italy in 1945. The war was just over, the harbors were full of sunken ships and we sailors with our American cigarettes were kings. We could buy the city. For one pack of cigarettes you could have a woman all night. There were pimps that met us at the wharf to bring us to their homes so that we could line up and take on their sisters. Do you know what I realized as a tender, young, poetic, philosophical, Jewish boy from Brooklyn, when I saw dogs as meat hanging in the butcher shop windows, and respectable, middle-class women as prostitutes taking on an entire ship's crew? My supposed morality is only skin-deep. My assumed morality is a luxury that I have been able to enjoy because I have not been required to live under the desperate conditions that made these women do what they were doing.

## True Seeing

We need to see as God sees, and because we have not seen it in His Word, then we have to see it in our experience. The church needs rightly to interpret the meaning of these events and see them with a steady eye. Does that mean that we do not love Israel because they are not as nice as we had hoped, or that we do not love Germany, or that we do not love man that is made in God's image? Yes, of course, we love them, but we are not going to allow that to deceive us as to their condition and their need. We loved Joe Lewis, but the fact of the matter was he was being painfully done in. He should not even have been in that ring, but I am not going to be deceived to think that he was going to win.

Before we can speak prophetically, we need to see prophetically, and that is dying to every illusion and desire we have to see things in a better light because it feels better to see it that way. God is not saying, "Just take a glimpse at this." He brought him down into the midst of these dry bones and walked him all around and pushed his face right into it. What do you think of a God like that? In fact, we might just as well be talking about community. God puts your face right into it. If you want to live with delusion, then just be a Sunday Christian. Wear your pious face and let others wear theirs, and greet each other in the foyer of the church, and have a little backslap, and "How are you doing, brother?". If you want to see the true condition of the church, then live in community for the rest of the week and see people when their religious masks are off, as they in fact are. Do you know what is yet more shocking? It is what you in fact are!

Disillusionment is not a bad thing. What is illusion but another name for a lie. It is a grace of God that enables us to give up our illusions and disillusions, and see things as they in fact are. It is on that ground that God meets us. That is when His mercy is available. That is when we experience the grace of God on the ground of truth and no other. He is not going to play a game with us and allow us to feed our suppositions or romantic imaginings or any such thing, and think that He is going to meet us on that ground. He is full of grace, but also full of truth. Where is a prophetic people like that? I do not think it is compulsory. It is as many as will allow the Spirit of God to bring them out from their comfortable views and their wishful thinking, and down into the situation as it in fact is grim and full of death and from that place, to speak as God in the place of God. That is why the priests were barefooted. They had to touch the ground. They had no illusions about the truth of Israel's condition, and only in that intercessory condition could they go in and make sacrifice for the nation. Before you are a prophet you are a priest or you are not a prophet. Only priestly identification with the people, in the condition that they are, can bring the prophetic benediction and blessing. We have got to recognize that God is as concerned for the 'son of man' as He is for Israel. It is only in the interaction between the two that both come forth into the place of resurrection and glory.

It is death to be brought out and to be set down in the midst of the valley full of bones, and to pass by them round about. There is a death that precedes the glory and it is a very real one. We have got to taste it as this man did coming down by the Holy Spirit. "Son of man, can these bones live?" He could not even bring himself to say "yes" but, "Thou knowest". It is so despairing and so bereft of any hope, that he could not even bring myself to say, "Yes, they can live." This encourages me for the church today. When I look at the condition of the church I despair. We are so removed. There is not even a beginning of a flicker of things. God will reduce us to that, that if there is any hope, it is Himself.

## **For Me, to Speak is Christ**

There is a very interesting conclusion here, that we should not miss. After the prophecies, and bone comes to bone and flesh upon the bones, and when they are brought up out of their graves and into the land of Israel, verses 13-14 read,

'Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. And I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it,' declares the LORD.

How can the Lord say that, when it is clear from the text that the 'son of man' is the one who prophesied? How can the Lord say, "I have spoken it."? How can both things be true at the same time? God is not a man that He should lie. It is because the two are one. God is not exaggerating. It is the very genius of the faith of a coming together in that final moment where the son of man ends and God begins. God's word is his word; God's thought is his thought; God's will is his will and God's impulse is his impulse. The 'son of man' has no independent life of his own. He is a son reflecting the father, and that is the glory. For God to have performed it Himself would not have been a glory. The glory is always revealed when it is expressed through another vessel, "We have this glory in earthen vessels." That is the final demonstration to Israel of the genius and glory of God coming through a Gentile church for which they have been in long-standing derision and contempt. It is the last agent that Israel would have selected to be their deliverer. They would have loved for God to have been exclusively their Deliverer and then they could have boasted that they were the favorite son, but no, the agent is the Gentile church, the same church that has historically called them 'Christ killer!'. God will use, despite every negative prejudice, the church to become their redemptive agent.

What would you rather be, a Christian who receives help from the Lord that you can do so- and-so for the Lord, or a 'son of man', who has come to such a place of union with the Lord, that you cannot tell where the 'son of man' ends and where God begins? Your speaking is His speaking; your thought is His thought; your will is His will. You have no independent existence. What would you rather have, an independent Christian existence with your speaking, your thoughts and your desires, which are nice and good, or the abolition of yourself, where you are dissolved into the Lord Himself, and He is your life and He is your speaking? That He can say about your speaking that it is His, "I have spoken and performed this." I would hazard a guess that the majority of Christians would prefer not to cross over. Yes, they would like the help that God would give to them, and what they could do for God, but they do not want to cross over to that side where they no longer are.

How many women would be willing to cross over to that side where they no longer are, where their husband's speaking is their speaking and their husband's ministry is their ministry? Their own identity is so transmuted and into his that they have become one flesh, and that there is no desire for the woman in her own independence to have her own ministry or her own speaking. She is as much gratified when her husband speaks as if she spoke herself, and is willing so much to see that, that she will die to any possibility by which she could have been the speaker. I am getting now down to where we live. I do not want to be abstract. If the husband himself is the dry bones, then it may take the sacrificial act of the woman to bring him to life. I am not trying to evade that.

An ultimate condition of being in God is implied here beyond anything we have ever contemplated as charismatic, Pentecostal or evangelical. This is more than being a sincere Christian. This is coming to a place where you no longer have an independent identity in yourself, and that your life is in God. You are

dead and hid with Christ in God. Until we come to that, Israel remains in her grave. God will not allow Israel's restoration to be on any basis other than this. I am glad that He is a stubborn holdout. We have got to come into the place where we are so fused with God, so one with Him, so having come to the death of our own identity, purpose and being, however well intended, that our speaking is His speaking. On that basis it is the resurrection word that raises the dead!

Unless our death and resurrection as the church precedes theirs, then Israel remains dead, to the detriment of the nations and the holding back of the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the earth. The issue of the Lord's coming and the whole eschatological climax is so altogether interwoven with Israel's restoration, that to omit Israel is to lose any interest in the Lord's coming, except as personal escape.

### **The Conclusion of the Age**

That is the mystery of the church; it is the mystery of the Godhead; it is the mystery of Israel; it is the mystery of marriage. It is ultimate and final. It is the end of history. It is the whole purpose for which history has been established. It is the consummation of everything. The purposes of history, nations, and time are finished and the Lord comes. He has got an Israel that is one with Him, a church that is one with Him. His glory is revealed. He can take credit for everything. It is, "from Him, through Him, and to Him, to whom be glory forever." Now He can trust us to be co-heirs and co-laborers with Him in His kingdom. Now with Abraham we can be the "heirs of the world," where there is nothing left that would in any way threaten or jeopardize the interests of God in terms of our misappropriation of His glory.

The last day's dealings of God with Israel are not some novelty. It is not God putting on another face. It is not finding a new mode of conduct. This is God in His essential being. This is God in what was always intrinsic to Himself. This is the way that He has always performed and the way His wisdom has always been depicted. It has always been set forth that there is a suffering that precedes a glory. The Lord demonstrated that in His own earthly tenure. Why should we be surprised that the nation who is called to be the 'first born son,' (Exodus 4) should have an experience less or other than the Lord Himself? Our problem is that we are not attuned to God. We are not in keeping with the basic thought of God and the disposition of God of which the Cross is the great symbol. It has become a sentimental and ceremonial thing; we are seekers after experiences; we want alleviation from pain; we do not want to embrace it. The suffering I am talking about is the suffering that is intrinsic to the faith by anyone who has a jealousy for God's glory and desires the fulfillment of His ultimate and last day's purposes. The very embrace of those purposes and that glory makes one candidate for suffering.

My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever (verses 27-28).

It almost reads like the last chapter of the Bible. It is the consummation of everything. The kingdom is established under the greater David (Jesus). His rule is forever. God has a new nation which will never again break covenant with Him, with a new spirit and another heart, (Jeremiah 31). We have to see the whole death and resurrection of Israel in the context of the establishment of God's theocratic rule forever.

The last word is 'forever', which implies final, irrevocable and eternal. It is finished, finished on the basis of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. When Jesus said, "It is finished", He was envisioning this. This was the "joy that was set before Him", and that He was setting in motion, by His own death, the release of the power of the resurrection glory by which Israel at the end would be raised from the dead, that He might be King over them and rule forevermore. Everything is predicated on the resurrection of

Jesus Christ from the dead. That is why Paul had to ask the Corinthian church why they were saying that there was no resurrection. For if Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead, we of all men are most to be pitied.

I am very fond of saying that the one thing that will distinguish the apostolic from the apostate church of the last days is the subject of resurrection. That is not to say that the apostate church will deny the truth of it as doctrine. They will continue ceremoniously and religiously to acknowledge it, but they have no intention of living in it. Whereas the thing that will distinguish the remnant church is that they can say with Paul, "For to me, to live is Christ." For me to live is Christ, for me to speak is Christ, for me to teach is Christ. It is a people who live eminently in the power of the resurrection life. Why would the apostate church have any reluctance to also live and move and have its being in the resurrection life, if it is available? Why is it only the remnant church? Why is one content merely for the form of it, and the other insistent on the power? It is because death precedes resurrection power every time. God will test those who avow that they intend living in the power of that life.

If we want religious success, then that is fine, and it can be done on the basis of our own expertise, prowess and religious ability. If we want our fellowship, our marriage or our life to be the issue of God's glory and not the issue of our success, then they must be predicated totally on resurrection ground. The question is, "How far do we want to go?" For most of us success is all that we want, be it enjoyment, gratification or satisfaction, religiously or in any other way. The root problem of the church is that we have a false center, namely, ourselves, when the true center should be the glory of God. We never will have gratification and satisfaction until we make that radical adjustment and put God, His interests and the fulfillment of His eternal purposes by which He obtains His glory as the central, primary and first and foremost purpose of our being.

Our very failure as the church to understand the necessary death of Israel shows that we have not truly understood God. Our hope to see the fulfillment of Israel in fifty years as the prophetic, Messianic state is really an expression of our own impatience, immaturity and lack of understanding of the centrality of the Cross and of suffering in the effecting of things that are enduring and eternal. There is a fulfillment of the Scriptures, but by a process that is much more painful, much more demanding and much more requiring the supernatural demonstration of God.

How much of the church's disappointment with Israel is predicated upon a false premise and hope of an idealized or romantic view of Israel, in which we had been fascinated by the energy of this people and their ability to raise themselves up in a generation. This is really a statement of a projection of our own vain perception of ourselves contrary to the whole tenor of the gospel that rests on the issue of death and resurrection, necessary for Abraham, necessary for Jesus, but somehow not as necessary for Israel nor for ourselves. We wanted a more facile and easier success both for ourselves and for Israel, but God is not accommodating our shallowness, for He must perform what He must perform that He might be glorified thereby.

## **True Unity**

If this does not come to us where we are at, then I despair for my entire nation. If every cell and every member of the Body constitute the corporateness and the fullness of Christ, then any segment of the Body cannot be exempted, whether it be in Harare, Zimbabwe or some place in the Ukraine. We are in this together, and it is this very recognition of our call to be the agent of Israel's deliverance that is the heart of God's unifying theme, principle and revelation. Any other basis for unity is political, false, ecumenical and a hoax. The only reason why men are working to obtain it, through denominational and religious structures rather than the organism which is the Body, is because they have not this revelation and do not want to have it because it centers in a people in whom they have no interest, and do not especially desire to see resurrected unto glory.

I was asked the question: "What is the difference between our death and resurrection as the church as opposed to that of Israel?" I first said, "No difference". Then it caught me. Our death is entirely voluntary. We do not have to enter these waters. We can prefer to remain only as subscribers to the truth of it, but we do not have to go down into the death of it; but Israel will have no choice. Israel's death is involuntary. That is not to say that it is arbitrary. Do you know how skillful we have to be with words? Involuntary does not mean arbitrary. God requires it, but it is also the consequence of their own sin.

The issue of Israel is the issue of the church. Israel in its final, last day's death can only be saved by the resurrection power. It makes, therefore, a requirement of the church as nothing else has ever made a requirement, and in meeting it, the church becomes the church in its full, apostolic and prophetic character, and in that, is fitted for coming into its own millennial destiny of ruling and reigning with Christ as the overcoming church. Israel, then, is the final testing and preparatory provision for our own eternal destiny.

## Chapter 12 - Elijah: Prophet of Restoration

"Now then send and gather to me all Israel at Mount Carmel, together with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." So Ahab sent a message among all the sons of Israel, and brought the prophets together at Mount Carmel. And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, "I alone am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. Now let them give us two oxen; and let them choose one ox for themselves and cut it up, and place it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other ox, and lay it on the wood, and I will not put a fire under it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD, and the God who answers, He is God" (1 Kings 18: 19 and 24a).

The audacity and boldness of Elijah to say those things! This is a foretaste of the last day's Elijah ministry and that is what we need to appreciate. What heightens our appreciation is that it is also a picture of what must yet come: Elijah must first come and restore all things. The prophetic requirement of the last days is tied up essentially with the restoration of that which was lost, the ancient and the original, the pristine and the first thing.

We are not talking about the restoration of the ministry offices as if that is the thing in itself. It is a means to a larger and other end, namely, the "restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time" (Acts 3: 21b). That is to say, both the restoration of Israel after her yet future calamity, known as 'the time of Jacob's trouble', and the restoration of a church to its pristine and original apostolic glory and power. Truth itself needs to be restored that has been lying in the streets. Language itself has suffered terrible abuse and defamation. There is restoration work at every hand, and it is an enormously exhausting work. It would be easier to start from scratch than to have to first undo, pluck up, root out and destroy what men have celebrated and want to see continue and to be preserved, that is something other than that which was given at the first. One can only build and plant after one has rooted up, plucked out and destroyed. How many of us have the stamina to bear the cries and the shrieks of people who do not want to see things rooted up?

There must first come this 'Elijah company' before the Lord Himself returns. John the Baptist was equated with Elijah of whom the Lord described as the greatest of all the prophets, and in doing so, was celebrating the intrinsic 'Elijah' content of what John was. There is a spirit of Elijah, a quintessential, prophetic character that John exhibited that was of spirit and of kind with Elijah and will again picture what is yet future, namely, an 'Elijah company' upon the earth in that same separation, the same audacity and that same confident knowledge of God. They will have the same authority to perform the last day's works of God and to confront a church and a world that have become apostate and challenge them by challenging its prophets and bringing down the demonstration of God and the revelation of God in fire.

If Elijah, who is a prophet of an ultimate end-time wilderness kind, must first come, then what are the constituent elements or the defining characteristics of the Elijah prophet? What kind of prophet must we expect and that God is waiting for, all the more if it is to be corporate? He is not a writing prophet like Isaiah or Jeremiah, but rather he is the prophet of action and confrontation. What are we seeing from this prophet in action that is quintessentially the definition of prophet? There are going to be many false prophets. What is Elijah showing in his obedience to be the one fool? What does it show that inheres in the word prophet? Was Elijah drafted or was he a voluntary conscript? He was chosen but that does not mean

that he had no choice in the matter and that he could not have refused it.

## **End-time Confrontation**

It says of Ahab that he was more evil than any of the kings of Israel before him. The conjunction, therefore, between a political Ahab and a religious Jezebel, an illicit, strange, ungodly, vile union brings together the worst of things political and things religious, and makes it a consummate power. We need to understand this, because it is a prefiguring of the last day's world religious and political system to which we are now moving. It is the logic of our time. There needs to be some kind of a global authority and resolution of the things that are dividing mankind if there is going to be any sanity on this globe. In order to restore peace and order to the nations, there has got to be some kind of unity that ends the necessity for nations to be at war with each other. This union is foreshadowed by the union of Ahab and Jezebel in the time of Elijah. There is only one who stands up to oppose it, that whatever the benefit that it confers to men in seeming peace, it is not God. "How long will you hesitate between two opinions?" is spoken to an apostate nation that only wants peace at any price, the false thing that allows business to go in as usual.

Elijah sees right through it and will confront it, even when it reaches its most vile form. Jezebel's specialty was destroying the prophets of God. There is something about the Jezebel spirit that is so employed in a hatred against that which is prophetic. It knows that whatever Elijah represents, he threatens the whole system that is implied in the name Jezebel and Ahab. It is to that that God sends Elijah. Elijah's authority, power and audacity are not the statement of what he is externally but what he is inwardly and truly, which is the whole truth of what authority in God is. It is not the audacity that grows from the fact that you are 'macho'. That is a false pompous audacity and is not the basis for confronting Ahab: "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word (1 Kings 17: 1b)."

## **Prophetic Obedience**

And the word of the LORD came to him saying, "Go away from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. And it shall be that you shall drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there." So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, and he went and lived by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he would drink from the brook. And it happened after a while, that the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land. Then the word of the LORD came to him saying, "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you." So he arose and went to Zarephath...(1 Kings 17:2-10a)."

Here is a remarkable obedience to the strange requirements of God. The prophet himself is not exempt from the conditions that are established by the judgment that has come through his own word: the brook dried up. He did not pick himself up and go when he visibly saw the brook drying up. Logic, self-interest and the necessity for preservation would say, that if the brook dries, then you have got to find another accommodation. Here is the root of what makes Elijah who he is, namely, he was never once moved to any kind of action or conduct on the basis of his own critique, examination, logic, reason or any kind of thing that men will humanly employ to determine their movements. Only one thing moved that man and that was the word of the Lord.

What if the brook completely dried up and the word of the Lord did not come? We remain where we are. The word of God is not the word of God except unto death. The walk of faith is always unto death. If obedience means my death then that is what it is going to have to mean. There is never going to be a point

reached where I can on the basis of self-preservation absolve the principle that is the corner stone of my whole prophetic life. After all, whose life is it? I am moved by one consideration only, namely, the word of the Lord that comes. We need to be so habituated to that, otherwise we need not think that God will honor our word.

"So he arose and went to Zarephath..."

It is as if in each instance God is not just calling him to an obedience, but to an ultimate obedience in everything that defies human logic and religious understanding. Elijah was called to go to a city that was the birth place of Jezebel and the center of the very religious, occultic civilization from which she came, and he was to dwell there without analyzing. God spoke and Elijah acts. Any obedience that hesitates is no longer obedience. Any obedience that is partial is disobedience. We must not submit God's requirement to our reason.

The remarkable thing is that nothing precedes this description of Elijah. Here is the full-orbed, totally prepared man thrust on the scene of history in that condition of obedience and without anything to indicate how he came to it. We need to ponder that. Elijah is indicative in type of the last day's Elijah company also trained up for ultimate obediences in obscurity and hiddenness. God can take the ordinary elements of our lives and use them to discipline and train us up in a long preparation that is not recognized nor seen by others.

### **The Knowledge of a God who Lives**

"As the LORD, the God of Israel lives..."

This is a statement to an apostate generation that has lost all sense of the living God. That is why they could take their liberties and follow Baal, and make their altars to false gods and forget the God of Israel: "He no longer lives. Where is He?" That is also the statement of our generation and particularly the secular Jewish people today. There is no sense of God nor reference to Him.

Elijah, however, begins his first statement with, "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives..." What does Elijah mean by that, and why does he begin with that? Having said that, how impressed is Ahab? Is Elijah saying it merely as a point of introduction or is that the foundation of his life and being and his prophetic authority? How does he know that there is a God who lives in an age of apostasy, and why is it that he knows it and the others do not? To what degree does he know that there is a God who lives and how did he get to know it? We have got to know that our God lives before we stand before the Ahabs and Jezebels of our generation.

That knowledge is not cheap. How many of us are satisfied with our present knowledge that is satisfactory for most operating circumstances, but it is not satisfactory to stand before Ahab? Men prefer to remain with the quotient of knowledge that they presently have because anything more would bring requirement. To know God as Elijah knew him is to welcome suffering, to open ourselves and make ourselves vulnerable for such tearing, such trials, such dealings and the things that cannot be anticipated, that except God be God, we are likely to perish in any one of those things. Do we have a knowledge of God just sufficient for our need but not the knowledge of God that exceeds our need, namely, the knowledge of God as a He in fact is and desires to be known? Is the knowledge of God so dear to us that we are willing for whatever it takes to obtain it? The single factor that describes the Messianic age is "that the knowledge of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the seas" and it is the knowledge of God as Elijah knew Him.

## Intimate Union

"...before whom I stand..."

This is a mutually exclusive relationship. If we are going to stand before that God, then we cannot stand before any other. That means that we do not seek the approval of men, nor seek to rise in the religious system and become celebrated. This is to stand solely and exclusively before Him, with full accountability without so much as looking out of the corner of our eye as to how any other man or authority or religious group or prestigious segment will so much as take note of you. It is total and absolute indifference to what men think and say. This is not to encourage some kind of sophomoric, "Well, I do not care what others say." It is rather a refusal to seek acknowledgment from men. We cannot have the two. To stand before God is an absoluteness. How far are we willing to go with God? We will not be able to stand before the judgment throne of God with any kind of confidence, but with unbelievable terror, unless we can say in this life, "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand..." and say it in truth. Whatever the sacrifice in order to make that statement in this life is worth it, just to avoid the terror of standing before the throne of the Lord when he makes that eternal determination of our destiny. We need to know that we stand and to know it in this life.

That one statement out of a man's mouth gives such an awareness of a history with God, of what it takes to make that statement and make that statement to stand as a truth, that even an Ahab will tremble at the hearing of it. It is not a cliché coming out of Elijah's mouth. It resonates with power and authority because it is the word of truth. It is the statement of the logic of his entire life in God. We need so deeply to respect the statement of Elijah and God is so discreet that He draws the shade and we are not allowed to peer in and press in with our vulgar curiosity to find out how it was done. You can believe that it was done with sufferings, anguish, shrieks and cries in the night and, "Where is God?" and the dark night of the soul, that a man can be brought forth at a point of time historically to stand before the most dread enemies of God and make those statements, and not only to make them, but also to invoke a judgment upon the nation by his own word.

Elijah was solely, exclusively and totally God's. He was above culture, tradition, value, history and time. He was in that realm with God and the realm to which we ourselves are called and to which Abraham was called:

Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you...(Gen. 12:1b).

It was not just an accidental aspect of the call, but at the heart of it. Those are the places where we are compromised, not because they are necessarily evil, but there is something about the flesh and father's house and about kindred, family and country that keeps us from an Elijah obedience. How many of us would be ruthless about those things, that though we have fathers and mothers, nations and family, as far as we are concerned, there is effectually a total and radical severance? We only move when He speaks. That is the call we have, and the ironic thing is that however precious our forebears and their influence, there is a kind of a tie that connects us that needs to be cut of a soulish kind to release us for the Elijah ministry. It is one thing to shuck off a terrible father and background and a bad past, but how about if it is good? There is a greater danger of spiritual compromise there than in the casting away of that which had no influence.

## **The Word of Judgment**

Elijah was in this quality of relationship and therefore he knew when it was God speaking, even though the word that came seemed to contradict his categories. It implies that Elijah underwent radical, ruthless stripping and purging. Only a man that separated unto God could bring a word of judgment to Israel.

"...There shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."

How would you like to be a bearer of a word that initiates that kind of judgment? For Israel that would mean that there would be no food and therefore the end of life, even for children and infants. Is Elijah some kind of unfeeling robot that God has programmed to speak that word? He was a man of flesh and blood and like passions as we and who may well have had relatives in Israel. It was saying 'death' to the nation, Elijah's nation. A man cannot say that unless he is in the place of God that we are talking about. It is an utterance toward God and it has got to come through those who have a nature like ours, men of flesh and blood and that is what glorifies God. God could Himself speak those words to Ahab, but there is as not as much glory in His speaking it Himself as it would be to come from a man of like passions. That is what glorifies Him for such a man is His handiwork and so it is also a picture of the last days.

## **The Ultimate Place of Union**

"...I have commanded a widow there to provide for you." So he arose and went to Zarephath...

Elijah's obedience is a statement of an ultimate death that will even allow you to die to what the written word of God says. God is even allowed to contradict Himself, and we are not put off by that because of some insistence we may have that God has got to be contained within His own Word, however much he has exalted it above his own name! The Word describes the raven and such animals as beasts of prey that eat rotting carrion. It is an unclean bird and every Jew knew that, and yet that is the very thing that God selected to feed the prophet. If it pleases Him to exceed to His Word or to set aside His Word or to go beyond His Word, then that is what makes God God. This is not to encourage a loose attitude as if the Word is any flippant thing that we can set aside at will. As we have said, God Himself has exalted His Word above His name, but what if in some peculiar requirement of God, and by His own wisdom, He exceeds His Word or contradicts it or seems to? Is our relationship with Him great enough, where God can be God even beyond his own Word, and we will not limit the Holy One of Israel, even to His Word? I would not entrust this statement to a young believer or someone who is yet alive to himself and wants to justify himself in conduct by taking certain liberties. It can only be entrusted ironically to that one who has the deepest reverence for the Word of God and who lives totally by it. The word of the Lord came to Elijah and Elijah arose and went. It was a requirement beyond the Word, namely, being fed by ravens and being fed by a Gentile widow. He knew the God of the Word and he knew the Word, but here there is an ultimate recognition of God that many of us would balk at, that makes Elijah Elijah just as it makes God God.

To be in this place in God, that does not even limit God to His own Word, and will not even require an explanation when the request is at disparity with the Word, is to be in that ultimate place. Elijah never took God to task: "Does not your Word say that a raven is an unclean animal and You know that I am not allowed to go into a house of a Gentile?" He arose and went according to the word of the Lord-silently.

How did Elijah know that it was the word of the Lord and not the enemy getting him out from the place where God wanted him, moving him to another place outside of Israel itself, and bringing him into the greatest place of jeopardy and danger, the very city and kingdom of Jezebel herself? There is not even a

moment's hesitation as even to debate whether it is God speaking or the enemy, who knows well how to imitate God's voice. Elijah had such an absolute confidence that the word that came was in fact the word of God that he rendered an immediate obedience. Such a discernment cannot be performed by a novice. If we have missed previous whispers and intimations of God and calls to obedience, then how will we hear ultimate ones? This is why an Elijah is not formed nor fashioned in a day. He is rather a prized fruit of God with much investment of God to bring such a one, who was flesh and blood and like passions as we, to such a place. He had no more qualification than us. He palpitated; he sweat; he had other kinds of bodily functions as well as the same doubts and struggles. He was a 'son of man,' but he was brought to the place where he could hear the most uncanny statement that violates every known category of religious and spiritual understanding that is authentic about God, and yet recognize it to be God, and instantly to do it.

Why did God send an unclean bird to feed Elijah instead of a bird that was 'kosher'? Ravens were His express and explicit choosing. The last, subtle tyranny of self that will find itself in opposition to God is that thing that we have obtained from God. Even the thing that is correct in God can be employed against God when it has become something religious or something spiritual, as a value in itself. Until God has got that, then He has not got the man. Many of us are in the place, where we have a long history in God and we have been brought a long way from obedience to obedience, but the last thing that would never have appealed to us as being even a potential for opposition to God, is the very thing that is religious or spiritual and which we have celebrated, though it is a correct thing in itself. It only becomes incorrect when it stands as a barrier between a final, last, ultimate and total obedience to God. The only one who can pass that threshold is not someone who is indifferent or casual about the Word of God, but ironically the man who is most insistent upon it.

The realm of the things invisible are the true determinants of godly living. Absolute obedience, even unto death, is the wisdom of God contrary to the world's wisdom where everything is reckoned and effected by things visible. To act and live and have your being in an obedience to an invisible God in the face of the most visible authority that has the power to slay you, and yet be obedient to the invisible God, is the supreme wisdom of God. That is the place to which we are called and that is why it requires such an extraordinary investment of God to break the powers of the things invisible and the things seen that have such a seeming weight, opulence, prestige, authority, cities and skyscrapers. That is the last day's calling of the 'Elijah company,' a prophetic presence that will perform last day's obedience in utterness toward God.

### **Elijah's Identification with Death**

Now it came about after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became sick; and his sickness was so severe, that there was no breath left in him. So she said to Elijah, "What do I have to do with you, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance, and to put my son to death!" And he said to her, "Give me your son." Then he took him from her bosom and carried him up to the upper room where he was living, and laid him on his own bed. And he called to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, hast Thou also brought calamity to the widow with whom I am staying, by causing her son to die?" Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the LORD, and said, "O LORD my God, I pray Thee, let this child's life return to him." And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down from the upper room into the house and gave him to his mother; and Elijah said, "See, your son is alive." Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth." (1 Kings 17: 17-24).

The very thing that Elijah did with this dead son on his own bed is what Christ came to do on the cross, and only by so doing it, did salvation come. They both took death upon themselves, the identification with sin, which in itself is death. The Lord, in union with the Adamic mankind, was standing for it and was one with it by embracing it with all its stink. When Jesus said, "Let this cup pass from Me", it was not a statement of a man who was afraid of physical pain, but the identification with sin and with death, contrary to His own holy nature. Elijah stretching himself out over a dead, Gentile boy is a resonance and a picture of the very same thing. It is a heart attitude that is willing to embrace death and to taste death in exchange for another. It is like the prophet prostrating his body over the dead boy so much as to say, "Take the life that is in me and impart it to him." There is such an identification and a forsaking of himself for the other, that there would have been no resurrection if he had just stood politely at the foot of the bed. It required his prostration. This union with death is the embrace of the Cross.

It says that Elijah prostrated himself over the body three times. Why was the first time not sufficient? God was requiring an all-the-way thing, a final letting go and a coming into such an identification with this thing, that until God Himself answers, you yourself are merged into that death. There is no resurrection for him and there is no resurrection for you. There was a completeness of identification.

Elijah cried to the Lord three times. The Lord heard the cry of Elijah. Unless that same cry is emitted from us, then God will neither hear nor answer. What gives a man the capability to cry? Elijah was qualified to defeat death because he had already passed through death and was on the resurrection side. This is not a man who is being politely religious and doing the correctly prescribed thing. This is a man who has passed through death, and his bringing now the application of resurrection life to defeat death in this instance. How do we pass through the veil of respectable and appropriate prayer to the prayer that is a cry whose voice God hears and answers, and that is sufficient to raise the dead? This is the nub of the matter for God will not answer until He hears the voice of that cry. There is something about the whole environment of present Christianity that is contrary to this existential depth and cry.

The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months (James 5:16b-17).

Elijah was not some exceptional piece of humanity. The key word that distinguishes Elijah's prayer that affected the elements is earnestly. Other synonyms would be: fervently, intensely and passionately, or to put it in another way, Elijah prayed as God would pray. He prayed in the name of the Lord. He prayed in keeping with God's own constituent make-up and character, and God heard that prayer, for it was, as it were, His own. That which makes the prayer earnest is not the man's temperament, but the man's righteousness. The prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available and is dynamic in its working. There has, therefore, got to be some conjunction between effectual prayer and the spiritual standing of the one praying with God.

The resurrection man is therefore eminently the righteous man. The man who has such an identification with the Cross and the identification with the emptying of self in daily relationship is the man who knows the resurrection. He is so righteous that he knows and detests that God should be served out of his own human energy, his own intelligence or his own ability. What is righteousness but God Himself!

Elijah means, "He is deity". There is such an union with God that you cannot tell where Elijah ends and God begins. "...There shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." Elijah is a man on the resurrection ground which means that he himself is one with deity. It is no longer Elijah's righteousness. The cry of Elijah is not a piece of human temperament, but God's own cry through a man who is living in

the dimension of very God Himself. It is God crying unto God. It is deep answering unto deep in a man who has gone through and beyond the religious categories, and is in the realm of God Himself. That is the key to the last day's activity of God. Merely to be well-meaning, rightly-intentioned, principled, religious and sincere will not avail. The child, or ultimately the nation Israel will remain dead.

### **The Inadequacy of Man**

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon (Isa. 55:7).

We need to understand God's hatred for that which has its source in our unaided humanity. Religion is something that emanates from man, that thinks that it is doing God service, but it comes from below rather than above. It seems on the surface to be 'God respecting', but His ways are higher and His thoughts are higher. How can God call a man unrighteous or wicked if there was not a prospect for obtaining God's thoughts and living in His ways? That is exactly the crisis that Jesus brought when He came to Israel and revealed Himself before Israel as the Son of God. The scandal of Jesus is this scandal, which says to religious men: "However well-meaning your efforts are, they fall short of the glory of God. God is calling you up and out and away from that which has its origin in you, and wants to bring you into a dimension in which God is all in all." How was that received when Jesus spoke it? It evoked such a backlash as to bring death to the One who appeared to steal from men the basis for their own righteousness. If that is true, how much more must that be demonstrated by the prophet who by his very call and office is the testimony of Jesus! He has got to be eminently the man of the resurrection, and that alone is righteous, and that prayer alone out of that righteousness obtains the powerful answer of God.

Only that one who has passed through death unto life can embrace death (the boy) without the fear that it will be a loss of life to him. A man who is still clutching his life and living out of his life, however religiously, will not embrace death. He will pray respectfully, but from a distance. The man, however, who has passed through death and whose life then is not his own, can and will prostrate himself over that body without fear. He is already the dead man who has been brought back to life and his cry is not a religious cry but God's very own cry. It is the cry of a righteous man that effects much

We have got to have some sense of the stubbornness of that which is human that wants to establish its own righteousness. Of Israel Paul could say,

For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:2-3).

If anyone threatens a righteousness predicated upon one's own accomplishment and one's rectitude, one will kill him to remove that threat, and in killing him will reveal and prove that we are not righteous. Elijah's righteousness, his prayers and his obediences were not his own. He is the one prophet perhaps more than any other who mirrors God as God.

### **The Restoration of the Altar**

Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD which had been torn down. And Elijah took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Israel shall be your name." So with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he made a trench around the

altar, large enough to hold two measures of seed (1 Kings 18:30-32).

Elijah's first step after mocking the false prophets was the repairing of the altar that had been broken down. Elijah must first come and restore all things. If this is a pattern of things future, then we have to burrow into the meaning of the restoration of an altar that had been willfully broken down. What does that represent and why twelve stones without which the subsequent sacrifice could not be made nor could the fire have fallen? The restoration of the altar is somehow a classic requirement and must be expected in the 'Elijah prophet' of the last days. First, we have to identify what it represents, because it is an enormously significant act that would be revelatory about the heart of the prophet.

Twelve is the statement of God's divine government. The work of restoration is monumental; it is backbreaking in hefting those stones that had been scattered about. The altar did not fall apart. It was torn down. That implies a rebellion, a vindictiveness, a vehemence and anger against God. It is the utmost impertinence before the Most High, and that is the condition to which Israel had come. All Israel, who had participated or had benignly allowed that kind of thing to take place and had not themselves restored it, is now watching the prophet do so. What is the corollary, therefore, to this significant act for the prophetic call in the last days? That is to say, could our altars also be knocked down? If there is anything celebrated charismatically today it is worship and praise. Is the altar of God knocked down today when it is being ostensibly celebrated in such a welter of tapes, videos, musical groups and worship teams? All this is written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the age have come. If we are moving exactly to this kind of final showdown, particularly as the church is moving towards apostasy and does not even know it, then what does this mean for us who are called to be the 'Elijah band'? What altar has fallen down in our generation? I cannot believe that the Lord is going to come until there is an Elijah in the earth again in the last days to do this, and if we cannot even identify what it is that has been torn down, then how shall we restore it?

God has said that His house is a place of sacrifice or it is not His house. Whenever it becomes predictable and convenient, then it is no longer God's house. The very first time the word worship is used in the Bible is when Abraham was about to offer his son:

And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you" (Gen. 22:5).

When Abraham said 'worship', you can be sure he meant sacrifice. The very first use of the word worship is in the context of ultimate sacrifice. Worship is a synonym for sacrifice. What does that say of the church today? What does it cost to go to church on Sunday for a few hours? Is it an utterness toward God, or is it a modest and minimal, religious discharge that frees us for our real pursuits? Who is letting God's people get away with it? Who is not laying this to their charge and crying out and confronting them with this superficiality? Baptism has become a mechanical, religious ordinance where people do not know, or they would refrain from, going into a place of death. We are teaching them to sing choruses and to repeat 'Amens' and 'Hallelujahs' and by that to feel that they have done God service. The altars are being knocked down more than we know and, ironically, at the very hour that Christianity is being most celebrated! Worship teams are presently vying for what shall be predominant: the worship or the prophetic word. Men take all kinds of time to 'do their thing' in worship to 'create' the mood and the atmosphere, and instead of the people being prepared for the prophetic word, they are often turned off by it. The worship is inimical to the prophetic word rather than conducive. The thing that is supposed to be calculated to adorn and prepare the way for the word, ironically, somehow becomes the thing that opposes it and is in rivalry to it!

There is something that needs to be restored in truth that is intrinsic to the number twelve and only the prophet will have the guts to do it. He may have to knock down before he builds up. He may have to destroy what purports to be the altar of worship, but is really a plastic counterfeit that cannot sustain the true weight of sacrifice, and induces God's people, as the false prophets of Baal, to a pseudo-religion of convenience.

Elijah is not gathering up stones that just happen to be around. He is rebuilding an altar that once was and did have twelve stones. He is the prophet of restoration. He is bringing back something that once was, but has now come to the place, not only of decline or disuse, but that it had been violently rejected and thrown down. He rebuilds and restores that very thing. It is easier to find some loose stones and put them together for a first time than to take what once was and has now been totally rejected. The work of restoration is greater than the work of inauguration. It is easier to start from scratch than to go back and deal with the things that once were. It is a monumental, backbreaking work. Elijah must first come and restore all things, and unless this word 'restore' is in our spirits, then we are not prophetic candidates.

We can know to some degree whether we have a prophetic calling by the disposition we have to restore the ancient ways and paths, the things that have fallen down or been knocked down and cast aside. What is God intending that was at the first?

### **In the Beginning...**

If we want to see something in its authentic configuration as God intended it, then we must see it in its first expression in the Scriptures. That is why we are given the great patriarchal figures. Abraham is the prototype, the father of faith. The church in the book of Acts is how it was at the first, but no longer is. The church now is increasingly the sum of traditions, denominations, sophistication, modern technology and methodologies, for example, bringing God down through 'worship'. The whole thing invites being torn down, rooted up and plucked out and something restored that God has given from the first, namely, apostolic Christianity. It has got to be at the end as authentic as it was at the beginning, when the glory of God was in the church, that men were afraid even to join themselves to it. Anyone who violated against the Spirit of Truth, was carried out feet first by the young men. To restore that before the Lord comes is an epochal and gut wrenching task, because it is so easy to 'go along'. A prophet has the vision for the original and a jealousy for the glory that attended it. He cannot stomach any deviation, counterfeit or modern day equivalent. He wants the glory of God that was at the first, and wants to see the authentic thing restored and knows that it is going to be such a labor to pick up those stones. The prophet not only restores but he keeps and elevates the consciousness of the true thing before the people of God continually.

The false prophets did not know that they were false. They actually expected that there was a God that would answer them. The vilest form of apostasy is when the people who are apostate do not even recognize or see themselves as apostate, and think that they are fully in the faith. That is the ultimate apostasy and we need to seriously ask whether we are already describing the condition to which the church has come, even in its best and most celebrated forms. We are not just talking about the mainline churches like the Episcopal and the Methodist, but are we are willing to consider those forms of the church that are the most charismatically celebrated in Christendom today? The apostasy is even worse in those places because it is not even recognized as apostasy, and so much so, that when one comes to confront and challenge, then that one is called a 'troubler of Israel' and is shown the back door.

The prophetic man has somehow in the deepest corridors of his heart a little tremor of discomfort, that

though everyone is shouting 'Amen' and 'hallelujah' and having a great time, there is something in his own heart that cannot say 'Yea' and 'Amen'. It is not yet the authentic thing, though it purports to be and appears to be and uses all the right language appropriate to being it. The prophet is so attuned to God, who Himself alone is authenticity, that when he comes into the presence of something that appears to be right and is not, then it registers upon his own soul. How can such a man be found and formed in such a way? It is the crying need of the church in this hour because the deception is far more extensive than we know.

### **Fire from Heaven**

Then he arranged the wood and cut the ox in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, "Fill four pitchers with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." And he said, "Do it a second time," and they did it a second time. And he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it a third time. And the water flowed around the altar, and he also filled the trench with water. Then it came about at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, " O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that Thou, O LORD, art God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again." Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench (1 Kings 18:33-38).

There is a symbolic thing here that we must recognize or our sacrifices will be vain, our service will be incomplete and God's fire will not fall. The church will remain in its apostasy. It is an act of a once-and-for-all kind that reverberates. It is God revealing Himself as God, and refuting the wisdom and the logic of the world, and showing that He is greater. Even the stones themselves were consumed in the fire. Something was demonstrated before an apostate Israel who themselves had forgotten their God and had turned to other gods. The gods of Baal were so celebrated and honored that idols had been made about them and for them. It was because they did something for their false worshippers. They gave fertility; they helped in warfare; they helped in finance and in getting a job for you; they helped in a certain worldly wisdom. They were beneficial gods, and if you worshipped them, then they would help you. If you want to get rich quick as a Christian, then you will find an amazing facility in obtaining it through the false gods of this world.

Evidently by the time of Elijah these religions had such sway with Israel that they had displaced their respect for and honoring of their God. God in one moment of historical time has got to make a demonstration of such a magnitude of what He is as God as blows to smithereens everything in which Israel has falsely trusted. God was saying, "I will not only consume the sacrifice but I will set up that sacrifice in such a way as to defy it being consumed. I will put every obstacle and obstruction, everything that by any earthly reckoning would say that fire could not possibly be ignited, and I will show you who I am. Not only will it ignite, but it will consume the sacrifice, the water and even the stones upon which the sacrifice is set, so much am I God."

And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God; The LORD, He is God." (v39).

This was something so indisputable that they had to surrender their notions, their concepts, their attitudes and their traditions. This divine jealousy for the real thing and the real fire is at the heart of the prophetic call, and it will therefore enable a man to wait, and to wait in reproach, and then to be God's agent in the historic moment of God's choosing. There was no guarantee that the fire would fall, and a prophet has got to be prepared even for the bitter disappointment, having done all these things, that the fire does not fall.

God does not need to explain, and we suffer the unspeakable disappointment before the people for whom we most wanted to have God's glory revealed. Unless we are prepared for the fire not to fall and bear the inexplicable, unanswered disappointment, then we will not be the men that God will use that it will fall. A man, who is willing in his obedience to do everything according to His word and bear the unspeakable pain of disappointment if the fire should not fall, is likely to see the fire fall. The obedience of a son means the bearing of the reproach of the misunderstandings of men and the inexplicable 'disappointments of God.'

The fire was the testimony of God's complete and comprehensive approval of everything performed by the prophet. What a premium, therefore, on prophetic jealousy for the glory of God, that not any one thing be missed. However much there may be alternatives that might be convenient and at hand, they are not to be employed, but only the stones of God, the twelve stones!

The ministry of restoration is the distinctive call of the last day's prophetic work of God. Israel is going to be restored as a result of it, but it is the church that needs first to be restored in true worship and true faith, true obedience to the word, truth itself, because the church is the pillar and ground of truth. There is an enormous work of restoration for the church, and on being restored, they can be the agent of God's restoration for Israel. A defunct church will not bring fire down for Israel.

### **Life or Death**

The issue of the prophet is the issue of life or death. It always was and will be again, especially in the last days. The time is coming when we will have to confront the false prophets as Elijah did. We can no longer say, "Well, you are entitled to your opinion. You are not compelled to agree with me." Rather, "Your view is actually lulling people into a false security that will ensure their death and I confront you, for it is wrong." Elijah confronted the false prophets and we are coming to the hour where we will no longer be able to keep our opinions to ourselves. The issue of who is really true and who is really false is now being required to come out on the table and be an open matter. No present issue is perhaps more critical for the church in identifying and distinguishing the one from the other.