

Christopher Roberts

ANGELS

**God, Angels & Spiritual
Development**

Angels

Christopher Roberts

**More Titles By The Author Can Be Located At The End Of
This Book**

Copyright © 2014 Christopher Roberts

All Rights Reserved

About This Book

This book will consider the function of angels in the life of Christians today, based specifically on what is written in the bible. It will highlight some important aspects of angel interaction with humans to see what lessons we might learn from them. Along with considering the role of angel in the life of Christians, we shall also consider how they might help us develop spiritually on our journey with God.

By providing an examination of the work of angels throughout the bible, we can make an extrapolation about whether or not they can have any involvement in our lives today; I for one believe they can. It takes faith to believe that angles have a role in the lives of Christians. However, I have made every effort to provide a balance within this book when it comes to any interaction that may occur between Christians and angels.

Therefore, the first eleven chapters of this book will consider the role of angels throughout the Old Testament and what we can learn from them. The remaining chapters of this book will consider the role of the angels in the Gospels and in the New Testament; considering what encourage we might gain from their interaction with Christians.

In this book we will also consider some of the pitfalls that we can fall into, when interacting with angels, so that we are not led astray from what God has already written in his word. If we let angels deceive us, or permit them to take us away from God's word, then what's the point in having any interaction with them at all; especially if they do not help us in our walk with God.

It is my prayer that as you read this book, your faith will increase with respect to the function of angels in your life, and that such information will help in your spiritual development in the days to come.

**THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® , NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. ® Used by
permission. All rights reserved worldwide.**

Contents

- 1. Introduction To Ministering Angels**
- 2. The Battle Belongs To The Lord**
- 3. What Is Your Golden Calf?**
- 4. God's Kingdom Comes First**
- 5. All Things Are Possible**
- 6. He Touched Me**
- 7. Greater Is He**
- 8. I Had A Dream**
- 9. God's Living Creatures**
- 10. Put God First**
- 11. Angels Doing God's Will**
- 12. Angels And God's Favor**
- 13. God's Word Never Fails**
- 14. God's Got Your Back**
- 15. Do Not Fear The Sanhedrin!**
- 16. Discovering God's Agenda**
- 17. An Angel On Assignment**
- 18. Turn It Around**

19. The Twenty Four Elders

Appendix A. More Books By The Author

One

Introduction To Ministering Angels

The first time that we come across angels in the bible is in Genesis Chapter 16, when one of them appears to Hagar in the wilderness. Hagar, through Abram, had recently conceived; causing trouble to erupt between her and Sarai. Sarai dealt harshly with Hagar, who then fled into the wilderness. It was at this point that Hagar had an encounter with an angel, who instructed her to return to Sarai and submit to her.

At no point in this account of Hagar's meeting up with an angel does she show any concern about meeting a supernatural being. Nowhere does Hagar make any comment that she might be wrongly influenced by God's messenger, who had come with instructions directly from the throne room of God.

Obviously scripture informs us that God once spoke through the prophets of old, but now he speaks through Jesus Christ our Lord (Hebrews 1:1-2). However, nowhere in scripture is there any references to the fact that the angels were suddenly made redundant after the death and resurrection of Jesus on the Cross. In fact even after Christ had risen from the dead, Phillip

was instructed by an angel of the Lord to go to a specific road, between Jerusalem and Gaza, in order that he might help an Ethiopian eunuch find Jesus as his Lord and Saviour (Acts 8:26-27).

We only need to read through the Book of Acts to discover that angels were common place in the affairs of those who served the Lord. The problem for many of today's Christians is that they are so afraid of being led astray from the truth of God's word, which many of them refuse to have anything to do with God's supernatural beings in their lives. And because they refuse to entertain the prospect of angels having any impact upon their affairs, they miss out on a very important aspect of God's intervention with Christians.

These same Christians, because of their negativity towards angels, are the same people who say that angels cannot possibly have anything to do with human beings today. But we cannot have things both ways. If we do not believe that angels are in operation today, then we cannot complain if they do not have any involvement in our lives.

Let me give you an example of the work of angels in the lives of born again Christians today. Whenever we petition God in prayer, God does not leave his throne room in heaven and come down to earth with the answers we are looking for. Rather; God instructs his angels, on behalf of

his people down on earth, and sends them with the answers they are looking for (Acts 10:3-8).

In effect, angels are the messengers who transport the answers from heaven and deposit them into the natural realm of our existence. Just because we have made ourselves unaware of the operation of the angels in our lives does not mean that they have suddenly stopped working on our behalf. That is, God does not prevent Christians from experiencing the activity of angels in their lives just because they cannot see them.

On the contrary, Christians attempt to preclude the interaction of angels in their lives because of fear. They fear that they might be led astray from God's word, even though God warns them that they can test angels or spirits to determine whether or not they are from God (1 John 4:1). However, we will never be given the opportunity to test angels if we don't accept their interaction with us in our lives on a day-to-day basis.

If God never intended Christians to interact with angels, then why would he provide instructions, in the epistle of John, concerning how to test them? In other words, if God never intended his loved ones to interact with angels, then he would not have left instructions in scripture in the first place; there would have been no point.

The very fact that God instructs us in scripture, about how to test angels and spirits, proves that interaction with supernatural beings can take

place across the span of our walk with God. Some Christians are so afraid of being led astray by angels that they refuse to acknowledge their workings in their own lives, to the point that they don't in fact need to test them.

I for one would rather allow the interaction of angels in my life so that I can test whether or not they are from God. I would rather engage with angels and test them, rather than have nothing to do with them at all. But too many Christians are so afraid that they might interact with demons instead of angels that they dismiss them altogether, which is not the purpose of God for any of his loved ones. Remember what I said previously, if we don't accept the interaction of angels in our lives then we should not be surprised if we don't witness their activities throughout our walk with God.

All of this means that we need to make up our minds whether or not to allow God to work through our lives by the interaction of his angels, should he so desire. If we don't sort this out in our hearts at some point in our lives, then the rest of this book will not make any sense to those who doubt what God can do through angels in the lives of individual Christians here on earth today.

Many Christians do not realise that when God speaks to them in their hearts, this is most likely an angel relaying a message to them from the throne room of grace. They may not visibly see the angel, or even

acknowledge their interaction with them, but this does not change the fact that God can speak to them through his supernatural beings.

When Jesus has suffered from being tempted by the devil in the wilderness, God ministered to him through angels (Matthew 4:11). Also, when Jesus had gone through the agony in the garden, angels ministered to him yet again (Luke 22:43). When we go through difficult circumstances, God is able to send his angels to strengthen us in times of battle.

When people operate in the gifts of the Holy Spirit it is very often angels who are making sure that those gifts are dispensed properly to those who need a word from God. I have personally known times when God's angel has brought me a prophecy straight from the throne of grace. I have known that the prophecy has not originated from within myself, but it has been released to me through one of God's supernatural agents. All I have had to do is check to see whether or not the prophecy can be backed up by God's word. In other word, I have tested the spirits to see if they are from God.

I have never been worried about a false word coming to me through an agent of Satan, simply because God has given me the ability to test it against God's word. In other words, God trusts me to check out any communications that I receive supernaturally to make sure that they line up with God's word; it's not rocket science.

I have often been aware when God's angels have been stood next to me instructing me what to do next in my life on a day-to-day basis. As I have stated in one of my earlier books, I have witnessed the physical presence of an angel, who recused me one cold winter's night, when my car had broken down in the middle of nowhere.

Does all of this mean that I am somehow special or closer to God than anyone else? On the contrary, I am no different to any other Christian in God's kingdom; except for the fact that I do not doubt or discourage the operation of God's angels in my life. In many respects, it is quite comforting to know that God has got my back and that his angels watch over me, as they do with every single person who comes to Christ.

As I intimated earlier in this chapter, just because some Christians chose to ignore the operation of angels here on earth, this does not mean that they have suddenly been made redundant. My suspicion is that those who do not accept the work of angels in the life of a believer are the same people who think that the gifts of the Holy Spirit died out with the apostles; a concept which true born again believers know is nonsense.

Today, it is my supposition that true born again Spirit-filled Christians need to recognise that God is busy using his angels throughout the length and breadth of this planet. Many of them are involved in spiritual

warfare, and many of them are supplying the needs of God's people as they seek answers to their prayers.

There have been many times when I have sensed the presence of angels at night in my bedroom watching over me. I have deliberately chosen not to fear their presence; I have also chosen not to credit their presence to that of some unclean spirit invading my personal space. But this is all a matter of choice for those who want to go deeper with God. In fact, I suspect that it is impossible to grow closer to God if we constantly reject the operation of God's angels, who he sends to help us from time-to-time.

If we constantly attribute the presence of angels in our lives as something that is demonic, then we are deliberately choosing to accept everything's that comes our way as belonging to the devil. Too many Christians are more concerned about the fear of demons than they are about the presence of angels. It is vitally important to note that for every demon that ever existed in the universe, God has at least two thirds more angels to combat them.

It clearly states in Hebrews 12:22 that we have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God to an innumerable company of angels. Notice the word '*innumerable*.' I have heard Christians state that the angels were created before humans ever existed, which may very well be the case.

But nowhere in scripture does it suggest that God suddenly stopped creating any more angels after he created human beings.

I for one have no idea whether or not God created any more angels after he created humans, but if God is constantly allowing humans to reproduce, why would he prevent himself from creating more angels? I repeat, I have no idea whether God had created any more angels since Adam, but we should not presume that he hasn't without evidence to the contrary.

Christians make too many assumptions about what is taking place in heaven, and what God can and cannot do, without any evidence to support their theories. Such people make doctrines of doubt out of thin air and expect everyone to believe them, particularly doctrines which appear to limit what God can and cannot do; all of which adds to the unbelief of other doubting Christians.

One day God took me in the Spirit to a large desert, which was the size of Australia. This desert was filled from top to bottom with warrior angels. The Lord stood me in front of this vast army of angels to demonstrate that God is all powerful and that the devil had nothing in comparison to what God has at his disposal. Did you know that God can defeat the enemy and all his demonic forces in one day with just one word from his mouth? Yet too many Christians live defeated lives, thinking that

God has allowed the devil and his demonic forces to overrun the kingdom of God; which is utter nonsense.

The reason that the demonic kingdom is permitted to continue its operations, with respect to Christians, is for our ultimate good. Anything that the enemy throws at Christians is for their benefit, even though they may not understand it at the time. But because Christians can get distracted concerning what the enemy is up to, they neglect to find out about the operation of God's angels relating to their own lives. They neglect to allow God's angels to fight their battles for them, thus bringing them the promised victory according to God's word.

Today it is vitally important that Christians make up their minds about what God can and cannot do. That is, God can do absolutely anything he likes in accordance with his word. God can save the lost, heal the sick, drive out demons through us, and fill people with the mighty power of his Holy Spirit. God can create as many angels as he likes and he can do whatever he wants with them for our benefit across the face of the planet, and throughout the universe.

Sometimes Christians need to get with God's program and recognise that there is interplay between God and his angels in heaven and his people down here on earth. This does not mean that Christians need to

be looking for angels around every corner; they just need to recognise that they exist and that they are working on our behalf.

Angels can be trusted to serve us well while we are down here on earth; and no doubt they will serve us well when we reach the shores of heaven too. But for now it is important that we acknowledge and accept that God is at work in our lives and that he uses angels to bring about his plans for each and every one of us down here on earth right now.

This does not mean that God uses angels instead of humans; it just means that there is interplay between God, angels and humans; everyone has his or her part to play in the grand scheme of things. Today, ask God to open your eyes, to open your heart and recognise that he only works for your good and for your benefit; and this must also include the use of angels to accomplish that purpose (Romans 8:28).

Don't limit God and don't dismiss his use of angels in today's world, just like he did in the Old Testament. Just because we think that the world has changed, and just because we may do church differently today compared to those who have gone before us, do not presume that God has changed too. Yes God accommodates us, but he changes not!

We started this chapter by considering the interplay between God's angel and Hagar in the wilderness, in Genesis Chapter 16. As we read through the rest of this chapter in the bible, we find than not only did the

angel meet with Hagar but he also provided her with instructions. In Genesis 16:9 the angel told Hagar to return back to Sarai and submit to her.

In Genesis 16:10 the angel also told Hagar that God would multiply her descendants until they could not be counted. Finally, in Genesis 16:11, the angel instructed Hagar to name her son Ishmael; he also described what kind of man her son would be in the future (Genesis 16:12). In other words, the angel spoke to Hagar on numerous matters, to which she complied without question, even though the instructions were not necessarily easy for her to follow.

How many times has God spoken to Christians through angels today, only to be ignored for fear that they were hearing a contrary voice; a voice that they did not think came from God in the first place? If God can speak to Hagar he can speak to anyone. And because God has recorded this account of an interaction between Hagar and one of his angels in the Book of Genesis, then it is there for a purpose; God never includes anything in scripture for no reason.

God desires to interact with each and every one of us who have called upon the name of the Lord. So don't limit what God can do through angels when it comes to your own life today. Do not fear angles, do not presume that they all come from the enemy, and do not think that God has

stopped using them just because you have doubts about their involvement with you on a day-to-day basis.

Finally, we are all on a journey towards eternity, and the road we follow can sometimes appear long and difficult. But as you individually continue your walk along this journey, trust that God knows what he is doing when it comes to his angels, who have been created to help you complete that journey with increased success. And if you will accept that there is an interplay between God, angels and ourselves then let us discover more about what God's angels can do for us throughout the rest of this book.

Two

The Battle Belongs To The Lord

From the moment a person is born again they start to recognise that, not only has God saved them from a lost eternity, but he also protects them as they head towards heaven. This awareness of God's protection becomes more apparent the longer we walk with God. But have you ever stopped to consider how God protects his loved ones? Yes God is all powerful and omnipresent, but we should never presume that it is always God personally who protects each and every one of us; and I appreciate that this is something some Christians may find difficult to comprehend.

And yes, God is always watching over us, but it is his angels that perform the function of protecting his saints. The fact that God uses his angels to protect us does not take anything away from God; he still watched the angels to make certain that they comply with his guidance and concern for each and every one of us. Should God ever need to leave his throne and come down and sort out a problem for us he could. However, this is not necessarily reality concerning the function of God the Father.

We only need to read Exodus 14:19 to recognise that it was the angel of God who protected Israel from the front and from the rear during their journey through the wilderness. But the role of protecting Israel in the wilderness was interchangeable between God's angels and the Lord himself, who also took on the responsibility of guiding Israel on their journey towards the Promised Land.

As it says in Exodus 13:21, "*The Lord went before them as a pillar of cloud by day to lead them and by a pillar of fire by night to give them light.*" In other words, it was the responsibility of the Lord to lead Israel through the wilderness; and it was the responsibility of the angel of the Lord to protect them on that journey. This is why it says in Exodus 23:20 that God sent the angel before Israel to bring them to the place he had prepared for them.

It also says in Exodus 23:23 that the angel would go before Israel to cut off the inhabitants of Canaan so that Israel could dwell in the Promised Land safely. Of course Israel themselves had to go into battle, but it was the angel of the Lord who fought their battles for them. Most likely it would have been a company of angels who fought for Israel at the Lord's command.

When we read Joshua 5:13-14 it is evident that Jesus was the commander of the Army of the Lord, who led Israel across the Jordan and

into Canaan. All in all, God used angels to protect Israel, but it was the Lord who commanded the army of angels to assist Israel in their battles. In other words, there was a clear interplay and cooperation between the people of Israel, God's angels and the Lord.

When we read the account of the activities of Israel's time in the wilderness, and their incursion into the Promised Land in the Old Testament, it is evident that this interplay between Israel, God's angels and the Lord was part of God's strategic plan concerning the affairs of those he takes responsibility for. In simple terms, God provides a template that governs this interaction between those on earth and those in heaven through his angels.

Christians today need to recognise that this model of interaction takes place between the heavenly realm and us here on earth right now. I have met too many Christians, who think that all they have to do is leave everything to Jesus, concerning the battles they might be going through from time-to-time. I've got news for such Christians! The battle may belong to the Lord (1 Samuel 17:47), but that does not mean Christians should sit around doing nothing, just hoping for the best.

God wants us to be part of this three-fold chord (Ecclesiastes 4:12): where Jesus leads the battles for us; we engage in spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-20); and the angels fight our battles. That is, we pray, Jesus

leads the warfare and the angels fight on our behalf in heavenly places according to (Ephesians 6:12). Therefore, prayer is the key that Christians need to unlock God's mighty army of angels, who will fight on their behalf.

This does not mean that the angels only conduct spiritual warfare when we pray. Most likely, God's angels are probably conducting a constant war against the forces of evil that threaten planet earth. Many wars, if not all wars on earth, are often a reflection of the spiritual warfare that takes place in high places; that is, in the heavens.

We only need to consider the wars that have been taking place, such as in Iraq, Israel, Libya and the Ukraine, etc. to recognise that warfare is increasingly taking place across the earth. And these wars will only get worse as we approach the Second Coming of the Lord. These wars, as indicated above, are a reflection of the warfare taking place in high places; where God's angels are locked in battle with principalities and powers who want total domination over the earth.

Currently, God will not allow the devil to have total domination over the earth. However, a day will come when satan and his antichrist will be given a short period of time where they will dominate the entire earth and it's people's thereof. But for now, satan will keep up his attempts to destabilise the earth where ever and whenever he can.

Not only does the enemy desire to destabilise planet earth, he also has desires to destabilise those Christians who have a determination to follow God's purpose for their lives. Therefore the three-fold chord of prayer, the Lord's direction and angels are the key to victory. We Christians need to recognise that there is power in prayer that will mobilise angels to act on our behalf.

Not only is prayer a key to mobilising angels on our behalf, it is a key to drawing closer to God (James 4:7,10). Personally, I have discovered that a short period of time on my knees in prayer every day is the key to drawing closer to God; more than anything else in the world. Many Christians get discouraged because they pray for about a week, see no results to their prayer efforts, and then give up.

But prayer is much more than that. Prayer, patiently prosecuted over a long period of time reaps results. This is because not only do we learn patience through trials and tribulations, but we also learn patience and faithfulness as we pray through a matter on a continual basis. I have experienced incredible answers to prayer, not because I had faith at the time, but because I persistently petitioned God on certain matters until the answer arrived.

Amazingly, God answered prayers that I thought he would never be concerned about. And because I remained faithful to praying every

single day, my anxiety levels dropped and a new sense of joy began to fill my soul. I discovered that through prayer I had nothing to worry about. But it is only as we endeavour to faithfully pray over protracted periods of time that we will see the results we hoped for.

There was one other by-product of prayer that became noticeable to me over time. I discovered that as I continued to remain faithful to God in prayer the more I began to draw closer to him. I have seen far too many churches occupy themselves with various gimmicks relating to drawing closer to God. Many of them pertain to the flesh; providing mechanisms that do not help people to develop a strong healthy commitment of praying alone with God each day. It's time for some of these churches to stop all their gimmicks and start encouraging people to seek after God with all of their hearts.

We can engage ourselves on two levels of prayer, which relates to the work of angels. On one level we can engage in prayer for the battles that are taking place across the planet; that is, where wars are breaking out all over the place. On another level we can use the key of prayer to mobilise God's army of angels to fight our individual personal battles.

It is easy to think that our prayers may not have any effect on the outcome of wars taking place across the earth, so why bother? The point is, prayer will mobilise God's army of angels who will hold back the tide of

satan's plan to dominate the earth with evil; but only for a short period of time. Most Christians recognise that evil is abounding across the earth; the love of many is growing colder and colder with each passing day (Matthew 24:12).

However, we still have an opportunity to pray into the battle that the angels are fighting. This gives God the opportunity to send revival into various regions of the planet until the time of antichrist arrives; and we cannot presume that there won't be a move of God during the reign of antichrist. Therefore, praying into the battles that are taking place across the earth gives God the opportunity to move in power; thus providing unbelievers with the room they need to find Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour.

Not only can we witness the effect of prayer on warfare taking place in heavenly places and across the earth, we can also experience the angel's intervention into our own lives during times of personal difficulty or crisis. We have already talked about the three-fold chord of God, his angels and people when it comes to his purpose relating to each and every one of us; the model of which we have briefly discussed from the Books of Exodus and Joshua.

Such a model is appropriate for modern day Christians, who want to experience the intervention of angels in their lives on a day-to-day basis.

As we briefly mentioned above, too many Christians are of the mistaken opinion that the battle belongs to the Lord and nobody else. Yes, the battle belongs to the Lord, when we fulfil the criteria of prayer and accept that the angels are the ones who do the actual fighting on our behalf.

Equally, there are times when God's angels are working in the background of our lives without us ever knowing it. But there are also times when God will expect his loved ones to join in that battle through prayer. I am convinced that God allows difficult circumstances to invade a Christian's life in order to teach them how to pray effectively. Those difficult circumstances can have one of two impacts upon us.

We can either collapse in a heap on the floor or hope that one day things will start to turn out okay for us. The alternative is to get on our knees, join the battle, and let God and his angels have an impact upon those difficult circumstances which have invaded our space. Remember, the battle only belonged to the Lord when Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah sought the Lord in prayer; when they learnt that the enemy was fast approaching the gates of the city (2 Chronicles 20:3).

And once Jehoshaphat and Judah had prayed, God sent his word that all they needed to do was stand still and see the salvation of God (2 Chronicles 20:16). This resulted in Judah being able to plunder their enemy's goods for a period of three days (2 Chronicles 20:25). It also

provided Jehoshaphat and the citizens of Israel the right to live in safety for many years to come (2 Chronicles 20:30).

Too many Christians live in defeat simply because they do not understand this interaction between people, God and his angels. And there's nothing to stop Christians leaving their circumstances alone, hoping that things might get better later down the line. However, when we employ the key of prayer into the battle of our circumstances, then we will not only witness God's angels pushing back the forces of darkness on our behalf, we will also experience them plundering hell and returning back to us that which the enemy first took from us.

In other words, God will give us double for our troubles (Job 42:10). That is, God will give us double for what the enemy has taken from us, and double because we bothered to involve ourselves in spiritual warfare through the act of prayer. So yes, we can leave everything to God and hope for the best. In the alternative, we can employ ourselves in prayer and become a strategic part of God's vast army of angels, who are fighting on our behalf across the face of the earth.

You may be a person who has been battling against difficult circumstances for a long period of time. You might be a person who has suffered discouragement through sickness or poverty, even though you are a child of the King. You may be a person who has sat around scratching your

head, wondering why you are the one going through so many troubles when other Christians have it relatively easy. You may have wondered why you are the one who has suffered the brunt of the enemy's wrath when you have remained faithful to God throughout the years.

It may very well be that these difficult circumstances have been sent in your direction so that you might draw closer to God through prayer. You are no different to any other Christian. But it just may be that you have not given your attention to the most important aspect of Christianity, which is to pray. God's not just interested in buildings, and he is not just interested in your ministry.

God is primarily interested in you as an individual; he's interested in your spiritual growth and development. And sometimes the only way that God can get you to grow spiritually is to allow dark times to overtake you, so that you might use the key to unlock the door of those difficult circumstances. That key represents your need to faithfully set aside a little time in pray every day on your knees before God. This key will unlock God's vast resources of his army of angels to fight battles on your behalf, as you remain faithful in prayer day after day.

As we stated above, and let me repeat it again, this three-fold chord involves the Lord as the head of his army, the angels who fight on his behalf and the faithful prayer of his saints. Which part of this three-fold

chord do you think is often missing? It is often the requirement of God's saints to engage in spiritual warfare through prayer that lets the side down.

In conclusion, if you want to see the intervention of God's angels in your life fighting your corner, then it's time for you to enter the battle; down on your knees. Don't waste any more time worrying about your difficulties, your sicknesses or whatever it is that has stood in the way of your walk with God. Get on your knees, join the battle and let God's angels fight for you; you won't regret it!

Three

What Is Your Golden Calf?

In the last chapter of this book we began to discuss how much the angel of the Lord had been an integral part of the Children of Israel's journey through the desert, as they were led towards the Promised Land by God. By way of a short history lesson, in Exodus Chapter 12 we find that God called Israel to leave Egypt in much the same way that we are called out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light; when we first come to Christ.

In Exodus Chapter 14 the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea; again something that symbolises water baptism for new believers in Christ. It was at this point in Israel's journey that we discover the angel of the Lord, along with the pillar of cloud, was their protector and guide; as we stated previously. In Exodus Chapters 16 and 17 God provides manna, quail and water to feed the entire citizenship of Israel, as they journeyed through the desert.

In Exodus Chapter 20, God provided Israel with the Ten Commandments, along with the moral and spiritual code that they needed

to live better lives. Today, God writes his commandments on our hearts so that we might follow and obey him throughout our own personal journeys with Christ (Hebrews 8:10). In Exodus Chapters 25 and 26 God provides Israel with the designs for the temple and ark, so that they might now know how to worship God as part of their relationship with him. Today, God has provided each one of us with the opportunity to fellowship, so that we might find mutual encouragement through the rest of our brothers and sisters in Christ (Hebrews 10:25).

By the time the Children of Israel reached Exodus Chapter 32, a good number of them had backslidden and started to worship the golden calf, which Aaron had cooked up for them. God was so angry with Israel that he wanted to destroy them all in one go. But Moses sought God's favor so that he might spare them (Exodus 32:11). That day, the Levites killed 3,000 people who had turned away from the Lord to worship the golden calf, according to Exodus 32:28. Many more of those, who had grown cold in their hearts, died following the plague that God had sent among them.

Despite this difficult period in Israel's history, the journey for them was not over yet, according to Exodus Chapter 33. Despite their past mistakes, it was time for Israel's to move on. I've got some good news for you! Despite whatever mistakes you may have made in your life, the Lord will never prevent you from moving on.

I think that we Christians are often far more critical about ourselves, and sometimes other people, than God is. God knows that we all make mistakes. In fact, if I may be so bold, I think God fully accepts that we are going to make mistakes at one time or another, as we continue our journey of faith with him. God did not save a perfect people; he saved us as just we are, and he works tirelessly every day of our lives to bring us towards perfection (Hebrews 7:19). This perfecting work is something that God does and not us. And as God works to perfect us, just like the Children of Israel, we will have our ups and downs.

After Exodus Chapter 32 comes Exodus Chapter 33. In other words, despite what Israel had done it was time for God to send Israel help so that they could continue their journey towards the Promised Land. And despite whatever mistakes we might make, along our own personal journeys with God, the time comes when we need to pick ourselves up, and get on with it.

In Exodus 33:1 God told Moses to leave this place. In other words, leave the golden calf behind, leave the mistakes behind and move on! If you are a person that is constantly reminded about the mistakes of your past, then God's word to you today is the same as it was for Moses, "*Move on!*" I can tell you that I have made huge mistakes along my journey with God. But I've come to the place where I don't even let those mistakes enter my

mind. Maybe I've become a little hard-hearted concerning my past mistakes, but if God is not concerned about them, why should I?

As for Israel, they needed to know that they were not taking the next part of their journey alone. According to Exodus 33:2, God was sending his angel ahead of them; someone who would drive out anyone or anything that might get in their way. When we consider our own journeys with God, it is easy to think that the way ahead is either too narrow, too steep or there will be too many obstacles that will simply get in our way.

Don't worry, you are not alone; I have felt the same way as you. God is fully aware that our individual spiritual journeys will not always be plain sailing. This is why God provides us with the grace that we need to make it to our own Promised Land. When we looked towards our futures, we may be put off thinking that we will never make it.

Moses must have felt just the same, after the incident with the golden calf. Moses knew that God wanted to see the back of Israel, who were not that interested in continuing their journey away from Egypt. So it is quite understandable that Moses must have felt all alone at this point in his life. Sometimes we will feel alone, as though the journey ahead is far too difficult for us, and no one seems to care whether or not we will make it.

The devil is good at making us think that we are alone on our individual journeys, and that nobody cares about us. When we consider Exodus Chapter 33, Moses was probably the only person who was interested in moving forward, along with Joshua who would one day succeed him (Exodus 33:11). Moses must have had great strength of character to be able to lead so many disaffected individuals through the difficult times of the desert; towards a place that he himself would not enter, not that he knew it at the time.

I am convinced with all of my heart, just like Moses, we need to be reminded that God has sent his angel ahead of us so that we will safely fulfil God's plan for our lives. We cannot fulfil God's plan alone, we need God's grace, we need God's help and we need God's angels to go ahead of us. So naughty were the children of Israel, that God himself could not continue with the journey they were taking, which is probably why he sent an angel to help Moses and a Israel in the first place (Exodus 33:3).

Moses had such strength of character that he was able to lead God ' s people, even though God himself could not bear to be among them due of their sin. Today, we don't have Moses to help us along our journey, instead we have Jesus Christ. Because Jesus is familiar with our weaknesses and temptations, he is able to support us in our times of need, and in our times of weakness (Hebrews 2:18). God had to leave Israel, as they

continued through part of their journey, but God through Jesus will never leave us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6).

Not only does God want to send his angel with us along our journeys, he wants to come along too. Therefore, we are doubly blessed in having both God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and his angels helping us. This is because, not only does God save us, he wants us to complete our journeys with flying colours. But God also knows that we all get tempted and distracted along the path that he has put us on. This is why he tells us in Hebrews 12:1 to lay aside everything that hinders us, including the sin that easily entangles us, in order that we might run the race marked out for us; praise the Lord!

In other words, God is fully aware that sin easily distracts Christians. Remember, Israel's March through the desert and towards the Promised Land was a bit of a test run, so that God might understand the mistakes modern Christians might make today. It may sound strange that God could use the Children of Israel's experiences, through the wilderness, as a test run when he already knows everything. Yes God does know everything, but we humans have so many variables that we should not be a surprise when God makes observations about how different people react in difficult circumstances.

This is one of the reasons why God sent Jesus to become a man and dwell among us for just over thirty three years. God wanted to know how we would cope under difficult circumstances and temptations once we entered his kingdom. With such an understanding, God could help us cope more effectively in our own times of need (Hebrews 4:15). I appreciate that this can be hard for Christians to grasp, but Jesus himself learnt obedience through the sufferings that he experienced while he was here on earth (Hebrews 5:8).

Here's the point! God observed what Israel went through in the desert, but Jesus experienced what we would go through by becoming a man himself. Therefore, there is nothing that we can experience in life that Jesus does not know about. Jesus is in a good position to help us make it on our journeys, despite what we might come up against. So if the devil has been telling you that you are about to fail, he is lying to you. And if you yourself think that you are going to fail, then you are wrong.

God never saves anyone that he cannot bring through the storms of life, in order that they might fulfil their destinies. Failure may be in our vocabularies, but such a word cannot be found in God's vocabulary. God has provided an army of resources, which are at our disposal, so that we might not fail. God has provided us with his word, prayer, Jesus and his

angels; all charged with the task of helping us to succeed in all that God has planned for our lives.

God had provided Moses with the plan, he provided an angel to go ahead and fight Israel's battles, but there was something else that Moses needed to discover! Like anyone else, Moses wanted to know if God was still pleased with him; he wanted to know whether God would continue to teach him his ways and whether he still enjoyed God's favor over his life (Exodus 33:13).

Questions, questions, questions! Just like many of us today; Moses was full of questions! Will I get my promotion at work? Does God want me to move to a new house? Does God want me to move to a new church? Does God want me to start a new ministry? All valid questions, but like Moses, God had that little bit extra which Moses needed; and which all of us need today.

The Lord said to Moses, "*My presence will go with you and I will give you rest.*" We can know God's word, we can understand all the mysteries of God's kingdom, we can experience the help of angels and the working of the Holy Spirit, but if we have not enjoyed God's presence in our lives, then we are missing out on something that is vitally important to us.

Not long ago, I was seeking God in prayer every day for the things that I needed, as part of my spiritual journey in the kingdom of God. I was seeking God's favor, more of the Holy Spirit; help with my ministry and so on. But one day God spoke to me loud and clear. He said, "*You have sin in your life!*" God then showed me that I was wasting my time praying for the things I needed while ever sin needed dealing with in my heart.

God began to teach me how to pray about sins that had formed an addiction within me. The Holy Spirit prompted me to stop praying about all the things I needed in my life and just start pray that God would set me free from addictions. I argued with God that there was so much I needed from him in my life that I could not possibly stop praying about such matters.

God prevailed, and eventually I stopped praying about everything in the universe and just concentrated on seeking God; just to break the addictions in my life. I was surprised to discover that as I prayed for just this one thing, I experienced God's presence in my life more than at any other time. I think this was because I was concentrating on the one thing that was interfering with my walk with God. Everything was just superficial while ever my addictions needed dealing with. And yet, as I prayed about addictions, God used such prayers to allow me to draw even closer to him.

Remember what we said above! Moses wanted to know if God was still pleased with him, whether God would continue to teach him his ways

and whether he still enjoyed God's favor upon his life. But God was not interested in any of these issues as much as Moses was. God knew what Moses really needed; and that was his presence. God also knew that I personally needed God's presence, which I would never receive while ever I prayed about matters that were unimportant to God; and I'm not suggesting that God does not care about our individual needs, scripture teaches us that he does (Matthew 10:29). What I am talking about here are priorities!

We may think that many of our prayer needs are important to God, but this is not always the case. We can pray for everything under the sun, but if we don't pray for the things that matter to God, then we can easily miss the mark. God wanted me to deal with just one obstacle that was standing between me and him; and nothing else. I believe that when we get into the right place with God, we will automatically experience God's provisions in our lives. When we learn to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, then all these other things will be added unto us (Matthew 6:33).

And this was precisely what God was saying to Moses. He was saying that he could have all the other things he needed, God's favor, God's instructions and God's pleasure, but not until he had discovered God's presence in his own life first. In effect, God was telling Moses to seek first

the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and then all these other things would automatically be added unto him.

God is a god of priority and order, and sometimes our priorities don't line up with his. I am convinced that so great was this revelation that God gave to Moses, about his presence that everything else suddenly fell into place for him. This is probably why Moses said to God in Exodus 33:15 NIV, *"If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here."*

May I suggest that God wants his children to understand everything there is to know about the kingdom of God, including the function of angels, as we will discuss in greater detail throughout the rest of this book. However, none of these things can ever be as important as knowing God's presence in our lives on a day-to-day, after we have come to Christ.

God's presence brings God's rest, and if we don't experience God's rest in our lives, then everything we do in God's kingdom will become hard work for us. It won't matter whether we have interacted with angels or not, without God's presence in our lives we are going nowhere. God's presence is God's hallmark and guarantee that he is with us at every point in our journey. It does not matter what we face, when God's presence goes with us we will become more than conquerors throughout the rest of our lives.

I will repeat what I said above; once Moses realised that what he really needed was God's presence, then he knew that without it he would not move forward on the journey he was taking with Israel. Like us, Moses had been seeking '*These other things*', at the expense of God's presence, and '*These other things*' alone would not be able to carry him along the rest of his journey towards the land of Canaan.

I am certain that there's nothing that God wants to withhold from us; especially as we continue onwards towards the destiny that he has planned for each and every one of our lives. He wants us to enjoy these other things, and he wants us to enjoy everything pertaining to the kingdom of God. But without God's presence to guide and protect us we have nothing. In the alternative, when we have God's presence we have everything.

Maybe you have been journeying along the road you are travelling along far too long without experiencing God's presence in your life. I have told you what I had to do to enjoy God's presence in my life; and God will show you what you need to do to enjoy that same presence in your own life. If you have matters that need attending to, such as habits and addictions, an unforgiving spirit or whatever it is that is blocking your path, then do something about them.

The day that I made up my mind to seek God over the addictions that were tormenting my own life was the day that I truly began to experience God's presence afresh. My prayer life became easier and richer for the experience. By seeking God, to deal with that which stood between me and the Lord, this was the key to drawing closer to him. Your difficulties can be the key that opens the door to God's presence into your life. And if this sounds unlikely, then remember what it says in Isaiah 55:8 (paraphrased), God's ways are not our ways and our ways are not God's way; it's as simple as that.

Had a I known that I could have discovered God's presence to a greater degree in my life, through dealing with my addictions, then I would have done so much sooner along my journey with God. Like Moses, maybe it takes difficult circumstances to bring us back to dealing with ourselves, rather than dealing with the things we want in our lives. It may not be easy to seek God's kingdom first, especially above the things that we want in our lives, but it is necessary.

The rich young ruler had one problem, and that was the love of money (Mark 10:17-27). The love of money was the only thing that was standing between him and God, and yet it was the most important part of his life that he needed to pray about. Jesus did not want the rich young ruler to pray about missions; he did not want him to pray about people's

sicknesses or whatever concerns that surrounded him. Jesus wanted him to pray about one thing; he wanted him to pray that God would deliver him from the love of money and nothing else.

Christianity is not complicated, it's simple. But sometimes we make it more complicated than it needs to be. We can spend time seeking God's will for our live, how God is going to provide for us and what ministry he wants us to get involved in. However, if we have not dealt with the one thing that stands between us and God, then nothing else really matters at this point in time. This is not to suggest such matters won't become important later down the line; but for now we need to deal with whatever it is that would stand between us and God.

The golden calf of idolatry stood between Israel and God; and the golden calf of whatever we idolise often stands between us and God too. Rather than leaving whatever it is that takes up our imaginations, so that they don't live with us any longer, maybe it's time to start doing something about them. Prayer is the key to dealing with the golden calves of our imaginations, and such prayers will bring us closer to God than we could possibly imagine.

As we conclude this chapter, Moses asked God for one more thing, and that was to experience God's glory (Exodus 33:18). In other words, not only does God want us to experience his presence in our lives every day, he

also wants us to experience his glory too. When I began to pray to God about what was important to him, rather than praying about what was important to me, I began to feel God's fire coming down upon me.

It was as if I was catching on fire for God; something I had experienced when I first came to Christ. This was not something that I had tried to work up within myself; it came as a by-product of asking God to deliver me from addictions. Not only was God willing to reveal his presence to me in a new way, he wanted me to enjoy the glory of his Holy Spirit fire within my soul.

The experience of this fire within my soul gave me a refreshed impetus to seek God every day in prayer; something which I had started to do already. However, now I had an added excitement within me, relating to my prayer life; that is, I was filled with a fresh hope once again. Suddenly, everything about my life began to fit; I knew that I was in the centre of God's purpose for my life and the future looked rosy. It was as if all effort had gone, and I was being motivated from within and not just from without.

As we continue with the rest of this book, we are going to consider how much God wants us to recognise that his angels have a big part to play in our lives. But as part of learning about the interaction between angels and God's loved one, we also need to make sure that our focus is on God; and

on God alone. So please continue to enjoy the rest of this book, while examining what God is trying to say to you about your own walk with the Lord. And whatever you are going through today, remember that God's comfort is always available to you no matter what (2 Corinthians 1:3-11).

Four

God's Kingdom Comes First

Christians may be alarmed to discover that the work of angels is not only to open doors for us and make certain that the path ahead is clear, but there are times when God will permit his angels to close doors on our behalf. But why would God send an angel to stand in our way? We only need to read the Book of Numbers Chapters 22-24 to discover the degree to which God's angel had a profound effect upon Balaam.

Balak, King of the Moabites, instructed Balaam to put a curse on Israel. Balak had witnessed what Israel had done to the Amorites, and therefore sent for Balaam to drive them out of the land through the use of a curse (Numbers 22:5-6). However, Balaam had the sense to seek God for a word before he followed the instructions of Balak; a man who had no desire to see Israel prosper.

Angels will help those who seek God to discover what he would have them do and what he would have them say on his behalf. Jesus said that he would build his church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). And if I may provide a word in season here, I

have come across Christians who easily become side-tracked in their walk with God.

Too many Christians get diverted into all kind of issues that do not have any relevance to the kingdom of God; even though they may be worthy of merit. Some Christians get side-tracked into issues, although important, which may not help the kingdom of God to advance one way or another. Even though Jesus lived at a time when Israel was under the occupation of the Romans, he never involved himself with the politics of his day.

Jesus knew how to prioritise what was important; chiefly that the kingdom of God needed to be established in the face of the earth. There are many issues surrounding the kingdom of God which we could get involved in, but if those issues do not reinforce the building of God's kingdom through us, then nothing will become of them. This does not mean that Christians should not care about issues, but such issues should never take our mind off of what is the most important aspect of our Christianity after conversion, which is to see the advancement of God's kingdom across the planet.

All of this means that we need to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches in these last days of time (Revelation 2:29). And thankfully for Israel Balaam was listening to God and not to King Balak.

And when Balaam focused on God, he was instructed not to curse Israel (Numbers 22:12). God's angels operate when God's people stop and listen to what God is saying to them. God will not send his angels to fight a cause on our behalf if that cause is not his cause. Yes God will still protect his loved ones, but he will not support Christians who go off on a frolic of their own.

What Christians don't always recognise is the fact that we can be tempted away from reinforcing the building of God's kingdom through issues that would take us in the wrong direction, and when this happens God has to send his angels to prevent us from going astray; as we will discover later in this chapter. King Balak was not prepared to take no for an answer and once again he instructed Balaam to curse Israel (Numbers 22:15-17).

Christians need to be careful when listening to voices that they perceive are coming from God. I have met too many Christians who make statements such as, "*I felt God led me to do this*", or "*I heard God's voice telling me to go in this direction*", or "*I don't think God wants me to do that*". I have even come across Christians who state that God does not want them to do a certain thing because, in reality, they are fearful. Such Christians end up confused and act in ways that are not conducive to the direction in which God leads people.

These Christians need to stop listening to voices and start seeking God on their knees. God is well able to lead people without them needing to hear voices, simply because God often guides us without our knowledge. In other words, all we need to do is trust in the Lord with all of our hearts and lean not on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6). Too many Christians end up shipwrecked simply because the voice they thought that they were listening to was that of the enemy and not God.

And this was precisely what was happening to Balaam. King Balak represented the work of the enemy against Israel who was whispering in the ear of Balaam. There are too many Christians who God desires to lead by the Holy Spirit, but he does not get a chance while ever the enemy (Balak) is whispering in their ears. Mistakenly, Christians follow a voice that they think belongs to God, but in reality it belongs to the evil one or even to the flesh.

When we stop listening to these so called voices and start listening to the bible, we will see a greater degree of God's involvement in our lives. If we want to hear God's voice, then we should ask him to reveal that voice through scripture, as thus says the Lord. Temptation not only relates to sin, temptation often relates to what we think God is saying to us in our thoughts; again such thoughts may very well come from our flesh lives.

I have seen too many Christians following a voice that really relates to their own selfish desires. If they don't want to follow a particular course of action, then God has not told them to do such a thing. However, when they want to do something that pleases them, they suddenly get the go ahead from God. Remember the words of Jesus in Luke 22:42, "*Not my will but thine be done.*" The Holy Spirit is well able to lead us without us listening to our own thoughts; presuming that they always come from God.

If we want to experience the intervention of angels in our lives then, like Balaam, we need to resist the voice of Balak in our ears. And even though Balaam had sought God concerning Israel, he was still intent on going with the men who had arrived to bring him to Balak (Numbers 22:20). Balak represents the evil one and Balak's men represent demonic activity; whose function was to constantly pester Balaam to peruse a course of action that was not wholly in God's purpose for his life.

Like many of us, Balaam gained God's permission to go with Balak's men, even though this was potentially dangerous for him. Knowing it was not God's will for Balaam to curse Israel, just being in the company of the enemy could have forced his hand to unintentionally curse them. But sometimes, because of free will, God permits us to follow a path that may in fact become something that diverts us away from the purposes of his

kingdom. Sometimes God will allow us to walk a particular path to teach us a lesson, which was the case with Balaam.

Balaam went along with the king's men and made his way towards Balak, but that was not the end of the story as far as God was concerned. As Balaam saddled his donkey and made his way towards Balak, the angel of the Lord started his intervention and blocked him on his journey (Numbers 22:22). In other words, God's angel stood in Balaam's way as an adversary. Christians don't always recognise that God's angels can be dispatched to prevent them from perusing a course of action which could prove detrimental to them in the future.

Blockages can come, not just from the evil one, but from God himself; especially when dangers may lie ahead for us. When I have faced blockages in my own life I have often put them down to the work of the evil one. It has only been over time that I have recognised that God was the one who sent these blockheads, often to protect me from myself.

There have been times when I have wanted to peruse an interest that I thought would fit in with God's plan for my life. It has only been, as I have looked back over my life, that I have pursued some desires which I discovered were not from God. Had I succeeded in some of these desires, then I would have ended up shipwrecked or spiritually bankrupt to say the least. The key to God's purpose for our lives is never to rush into things too

soon. Learn to wait, learn to think, learn to consult with others and let God's plans for our lives unfold gradually over time!

When we don't listen to God we often don't listen to the wise council of godly men and women. It's so easy to get locked into a course of action without having an escape plan should we fail. And when people make up their minds to follow a particular path, which may not have come from God, these same people often shut others out to prevent themselves from having to consider alternatives. This can be a very sad state of affairs when we see people heading in a direction that could lead to their spiritual ruin. All we can do is leave such people to God, trusting that he will take care of them in the long run.

When the angel of the Lord tried to prevent Balaam from perusing his course of action, he could not discern that God was trying to get his attention. Only the donkey had the sense to recognise that the angel was trying to prevent Balaam from moving forward (Numbers 22:23). Balaam's response was to lash out at his circumstances and continue on his reckless pursuit (Numbers 22:24). How many times have we met people who can only lash out at us when we attempt to give them wise counsel?

As Balaam continued his journey towards Balak, yet again the angel of the Lord stood in his path; only this time the path was getting narrower and narrower (Numbers 22:24). One of the ways that God can

prevent his loved ones from heading down the wrong path is to place roadblocks on that path. For example, he can do this by limiting personal finances to prevent people from heading down a path that could lead to their own destruction. God can allow circumstances to squeeze us until we become totally dependent upon the Lord for all that we need.

Although God's attempts to get our attention can take time, eventually he can put the squeeze on us until it hurts. This he did with Balaam, so that when the donkey saw the angel of the Lord again, his foot became crushed against the wall (Numbers 22:25). Eventually, the angel positioned himself until Balaam came to a complete standstill (Numbers 22:26-27).

When God cannot get the attention of his loved ones, he will bring them to a total halt. Have you ever wondered why God sometimes brings us to a complete standstill? No matter what we try to do, we just cannot get ourselves to move forward in the advancement of God's kingdom. The reason that we sometimes come to a crossroads, where the angel of the Lord has blocked our path, is because we have followed a direction that profits ourselves, but has no discernible benefit to the kingdom of God.

It is very easy to become full of our own importance, even when we think we are making a contribution to the kingdom of God. And it is not always the point that God wants us to make a huge investment in his

kingdom, he just wants us to make some contribution that will provide us with an eternal reward. Sometimes there is a lot of talk in God's kingdom, from some quarters, with very little action.

Some folks believe that they have been given the gift of criticism, so that they can attack those who are trying to serve God to the best of their abilities. These critics then wonder why they are not experiencing the intervention of God in their lives for their positive advancement. Yes they are experiencing God's intervention into their lives through angels, but only to restrict them from causing further harm to God's kingdom. God is not mocked, we sow what we reap; and if we sow to the flesh we will reap corruption, but if we sow to the Spirit we reap life eternal (Galatians 6:5).

As Balaam came to a complete standstill, even the donkey questioned him as to why he was putting up such a resistance. It was only when God got the attention of Balaam that he opened his eyes and permitted him to see the angel of the Lord, holding a drawn sword in his hand (Numbers 22:31). And when Balaam recognised that it was God, through the angel of the Lord who was standing in his way, then and only then did he submit his will to God's will.

Some of the circumstances that come against us are not there so that we can engage them in battle; otherwise we would end up fighting God and not the evil one. Some of the circumstances that come against us are

designed to encourage us to submit to the will of God (James 4:7). The more time we spend on our knees in submission to God the more we will experience God lifting us above those difficult circumstances. In fact, most of our Christians life should be spent on our knees submitting to God.

We don't always need to know what God's will is for our lives; we just need to remain submitted before him on a day-to-day basis. I will repeat what Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "*I will build my church and the forces of darkness shall not prevail against it.*" In other words, we need to let God build his kingdom, and let him use us as part of his overall strategy; when and where it best suits the purpose of the Lord.

God wants to take the stress out of kingdom building by bringing us to a place of submission before him, just like he did with Balaam. The angel told Balaam that he had arrived to stand against him, simply because his way was perverse before God (Numbers 22:32). Perverse means '*An obstinate desire to behave in a way that is unacceptable*'. In other words, Balaam was heading in the right direction, but his motives were questionable and possibly untrustworthy in God's eyes.

Sometimes God allows his angels to stop us, not because we are following the wrong path, but because our motives are misdirected. When God brings us to a full stop, we need to seek him on our knees until we discover why it is that he is putting the brakes on our lives. Maybe we need

to get right back to why God brought us into his kingdom in the first place, and acknowledge that we have allowed ourselves to become distracted by the cares or issues of this world. But until we are willing to get down on our knees and surrender our lives before God, we may never know why the angels could be preventing us from moving forward on the path set before us.

When Balaam came to a full stop and submitted himself before God, the angel was able to bring God's message to him. The angel permitted Balaam to continue his journey, but reiterated that he was only permitted to speak God's message; that is, the word that God had originally spoken to him to begin with (Numbers 22:35).

Sometimes God has to bring us back to the narrow path, where we learn only to bring forth God's word into the lives of others. It is only God's word that can bring life to ourselves and those we desire to encourage within the kingdom of God. God's word is the only foundation we can lay, especially if we want to see fruit in our lives and ministries.

Today, is God encouraging you to get back to his word and to depend less on the words of other people? If you have come to a standstill in your life, then do not presume that the evil one is standing in your way. It may very well be that the angel of the Lord is standing in your path; attempting to gain your attention. If we are willing to trust that God's angels

can intervene in our lives, don't assume that they will only open doors for us; sometimes they will close them too.

When we come back to God's throne room on our knees, and trust in his word and the promises contained therein, then he can put tramlines down for us to follow that will only lead us safely towards his purpose for our lives. Without God's hand of protection upon us, like Balaam, our ways can become perverse before him. Stop fighting the angel of the Lord! He may very well be trying to serve God's purpose in your life by bringing you to a standstill, which will serve your best interests in the future. Trust that God knows what he is doing when it comes to leading and directing your life; through the rough as well as the smooth.

Eventually Balak brought Balaam to the highest place, Baal, to see God's people with his own eyes and to persuade him to curse them while they were in the valley (Numbers 22:41). However, as we can observe from Numbers Chapters 23-24, God put his word in Balaam's mouth and he only pronounced a blessing on God's people. He only wanted to pronounce good towards God's people and not harm (Jeremiah 29:11).

By the time we reach Numbers Chapter 24, we find that the Spirit of God came down on Balaam allowing him to prophesy a blessing on Israel. God's purpose for each and every one of his children is to bring them to a place of blessing based on the promises contained within the bible.

When we accept that it is God himself, through his angels who can stand in our way, then know that such an intervention is usually for a higher purposes involving ourselves and other people.

God first has to bless us before he can bless anyone else through us. So don't resist the work that God may be trying to accomplish in your life. Don't presume that the evil one is pulling at the strings of your circumstances to control you; it may very well be the angel of the Lord who is taking action to bring you to a place of complete submission before God; someone who cares for your total wellbeing.

And finally, when God is for you who can be against you? I can promise you that neither death, nor life, nor powers, nor anything in the present or in the future, nor height or depth; no nothing in the whole of creation can separate anyone of us from the love that God has exhibited in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

So no matter what happens to you in life, know that if you are a child of the King and you are truly born again, then God will use whatever resources are at his disposal to keep you on the narrow path; including his angels who may prevent you from moving forward on certain issues from time-to-time. Therefore do not fear, God is with you and he will complete the work that he has already started in you for the glory of his kingdom (Philippians 1:6).

Five

All Things Are Possible

During the time of the Judges in Israel, God raised up a deliverer called Samson. But before Samson was born, God gave precise instructions about how his parents should raise their child in the fear of the Lord. These instructions were provided by the angel of the Lord. In Judges Chapter 13 we are given a detailed account of the interaction between Samson's parents and the angel. In fact, this particular chapter provides us with one of the most fascinating accounts of an interaction between the angel of the Lord and humankind.

During the period of the Judges there was a time when Israel did not follow after God with all of their hearts; God therefore gave Israel into the hands of their enemies. However God also provided the answer to the problems of the day by raising up Samson to deliver Israel from the tyranny of the Philistines.

One day, the angel of the Lord appeared to the wife of Manoah, who would eventually become the proud mother of a new baby boy called Samson (Judges 13:3). There was a slight problem for Manoah's wife in that

she was barren and incapable of providing a child for her husband; not that such a problem would stand in the way of God's purpose for Israel.

Throughout scripture, and whenever there is an interaction between angels and people, such encounters often relate to a difficulty that is taking place in someone's life. Whether it was Abraham, Hagar, Jacob or Joshua, angelic appearance always appear to take place whenever a problem exists at the time of the encounter. Those who disbelieve in the interaction between angels and humankind often forgo the opportunity for God to bring about a miracle in their lives.

Whenever we consider the interaction between people and angels in both the Old and New Testament, God's people don't always show much surprise when they spend time with them; sometimes this is because they don't realise that they are interacting with angels to begin with. Yes, some of these people were awestruck by the fact that they are receiving a visitation from on high. However, it appears that many of them did not question such interactions as much as we might do today.

When the angel appeared to Samson's mother, he told her that despite the fact that she was barren; she would conceive and bear a child. In other words, no matter what we might think is impossible to us, God can make possible. This angel brought God's possibility into a situation of impossibilities. That is, the angel brought news that although Samson's

mother could not conceive, she would bear a child; and although Israel was under oppression, Samson would be the vehicle by which God would bring liberty to the nation once again (Judges 13:5:).

With respect to Samson's mother, the angel gave her strict instructions on two counts. First, he told her that she herself should not drink wine and not eat anything that was deemed unclean at the time (Judges 13:4). In effect, the angel was instructing Samson's mother to take on a temporary vow to become a Nazirite throughout the period of her pregnancy. That is, God's will for Samson's mother was to consecrate herself to the Lord for a period of nine months, which undoubtedly would be of benefit to Samson.

In the 21 Century, most people are aware that giving young people a good start in life can often prove advantageous to them in later sown the line. However, this angel was portraying the fact that it was God's will for Samson's mother to consecrate herself to God from the day she conceived Samson, or possibly even before actual conception.

Although God may not call us to be Nazarites today, there is some merit in heeding the words of this particular angel. Although many people see the benefits of giving children a good start from birth, how many Christians have considered giving them a good start from before they were conceived? This angel is suggesting that we should not wait until a child is

born before giving them a good start in life; he is suggesting that the good start should come about at the planning stages of pregnancy.

In other words, a good example is not just set after a child is born; it could be started before the period of pregnancy. Therefore both the mother and the father could be encouraged to live their lives consecrated to God during the pregnancy period, in order to raise the child under the strong hand of the Lord. Scripture is not suggesting that parents must do such a thing, but there is a strong hint in Judges Chapter 13 that there are advantages in doing so.

So if you have been concerned about how you might raise your child after birth, then why not consider how you might raise your child from before conception. If you desperately want the best for your child, and you want your children to grow up dedicated to the Lord's service, then there is nothing preventing you from consecrating yourselves to God at the beginning of pregnancy.

Although the angel of the Lord makes no suggestion that Samson's father should consecrate himself to the Lord, there would be no harm in him following after the example of his wife's consecration. For all we know, Samson's father may very well have been a man who was consecrated to the Lord to begin with. Whatever the case may be, spending nine months consecrated to the Lord would benefit the mother, the father and also the

child. And the method of consecration should always be left to the conscience of each individual parent.

Secondly, the angel of the Lord spoke to Samson's mother about her own consecration, as well as that of her anticipated son's consecration. Not only so, but the angel also prophesied to Samson's mother that she would bear a son (Judges 13:3). Many parents hope to conceive either a boy or a girl, but often feel powerless as to what input they might have into the gender of the baby before it is born.

I see nothing in scripture that prevents parents from speaking God's prophetic word over their unborn child and pronouncing its gender; particularly if they want a specific gender. God, through his angels, appears not to have problems with this as we can see from Samuel Chapter 13. Therefore, never fear to start prophesying over the type of child you want from the day you decide to have children, if not before.

We read from Judges 13:5 that Samson would be a Nazirite from conception, according to the rules of a Nazirite found in Numbers 6:1-21. That is, the child would be sanctified and consecrated unto the Lord, s/he would not drink wine or similar drinks and s/he would not cut his or her hair; such a vow was appropriate to both genders.

Although God does not necessarily expect Christian children to take the vow of a Nazirite, the concept of being separated unto God from

birth and throughout their childhood is an admirable occupation; especially where parents are keen for their children to go into ministry later in life. We hear too many stories of children from Christian homes going astray and bringing heartbreak to their parents. Consecrating children from before their birth may very well be one way of avoiding such heartache, as children grow from childhood through to maturity.

Not only did the angel of the Lord instruct Samson's mother about how to raise him in Judges 13:5, he also told her that the child would begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines in years to come. This may seem like a lot of information to load onto the shoulders of a child from such a young age. However, the angel of the Lord did not think that this was overbearing, otherwise he would not have provided such detailed instructions concerning the child.

Too many Christians leave things to chance, whether it's raising their children, sorting out a career path or even choosing a home, they don't recognise how much of an input they can have when it comes to raising a family. Yes, most parents have an idea of how they want to raise their children, but too many often simply hope for the best.

For example, I have heard Christian parents state that their children behave like they do because of their personalities; they emphasise that they should not be pushed into something that does not suit their individual

needs. In the alternative, some parents need to stop worrying about what they think their children are incapable of and start prophesying into their futures.

I once heard the testimony of a preacher, who went into his local park one day, and saw lots of young people going nowhere. Some were drinking booze, some were taking drugs and others were just being a general nuisance. All of a sudden, this preacher started prophesying into the lives of these young people, even though they were not Christians.

He went up to one person and prophesied that he would become a preacher. To another he prophesied that she would become a missionary, and to another's he prophesied about the kind of career they would end up in. It wasn't long before these prophesies started coming to pass; the preacher was able to witness lives being set free, young people being changed and folks heading in the right direction. If a preacher can do this with young people that were not his own, what can you do with your children from conception?

There is nothing to prevent anyone from prophesying into the lives of others, whether they are Christians or not. And it may be that you have never prophesied before, or you don't even know how to. You do not need to be a prophet to speak into the lives of others. Just start speaking God's

word and God's promises into the lives of others and you will discover that God's word will not come back to you void (Isaiah 55:11).

Many years ago there was a man called Tom Mercy, who lived in a town called Cross Keys in the country of Wales. Tom ran a church, which produced an outreach of two hundred more churches during his time of ministry. One day, Smith Wigglesworth visited Tom's church at Cross Keys and prophesied over two women; that their children would grow up to become preachers. One of those women was Tom Mercy's wife. She bore a son called Paul, who grew up to become a preacher. Paul preached the gospel one Sunday evening, and I became a Christian.

All too often we can end up becoming far too reluctant when it comes to speaking into our own lives and into the lives of other people. Whether through jealousy or lack of concern for other people's growth, we end up being down on people far too often. Rather, we should start speaking a word that will cause people to grow into the lives that God has planned for them later down the line. This angel in Judges Chapter 13 shows us that if he can speak into people's lives, what can the heirs of salvation accomplish in the precious name of Jesus.

Today may be the day when you need to start recognising that nothing is impossible with God. Not only so, but God can accomplish much through those who are prepared to speak his word into the lives of others.

Never presume that life is inevitable and that things will only change if we wait long enough. Start to become proactive when it comes to other people's lives; speak God's word and God's promises into their futures and see what God will do for them.

Learn a lesson from this angel and start working as one of God's ambassadors in the face of the earth, and speak forth God's word of hope and reconciliation into the lives of those around you (2 Corinthians 5:17-19). The darker this world becomes the more there is a need to speak hope into the lives of those who are struggling with their circumstances. Be the person who God can use to bring a message that will change the lives of those who find life a struggle today. What joy you will experience when you start to see God move on your behalf and in response to the word spoken from your lips; blessed be the name of the Lord!

Some Christians are of the mistaken view that angels only appear randomly, and can never appear to us when we petition God on a matter. This is nonsense and something that often relates to people's unbelief. In Judges 13:8 Samson's father prayed and asked God to send the angel back to him so that he could understand the instructions given to his wife in the upbringing of Samson.

Notice that in Judges 13:9 God both heard Manoah's prayer and sent the angel back to Manoah's mother while she was sifting in the field.

Quite evidently, Samson's mother may have only suspected that the man who visited her was an angel. Hebrews 13:2 tells us that some have entertained angels unaware; again another inference that angels are actively involved in the lives of his loved ones, even when they are not aware of the fact.

Maybe some Christians need to start noticing that some of the chance encounters they have on a day-to-day basis may involve God's angels. I can tell you, from my own personal point of view that my encounters with angels seem to be on the increase. I have no idea why this is; maybe I am more accepting of their role in my life without constantly doubting them.

Unbelief produces one thing in the lives of Christians; nothing! So don't let doubt or other people's negativity fill you with so much unbelief that you never experience God's supernatural power in your life. Even Jesus said to Nichodemus, in John 3:12, that if he did not believe the earthly things that he was explaining to him, how could he experience heavenly things? Seeing angels is not essential to increasing a person's faith. However a perception of them can be an indication of God's involvement in our lives. Essentially, faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of God (Romans 10:12).

Sadly, too many Christians are so earthbound in their thinking that they are not in any position to experience some of the supernatural encounters that God has planned for their lives. How sad it must be for Christians who live their whole lives void of any supernatural experiences, simply because they only understand Christianity from a religious point of view. Like the servant of Elisha, many of them need their eyes opening to see the fiery chariots of God ready to protect them (2 Kings 6:17).

Not only did the angel return to Samson's mother, she was able to bring her husband to the angel to hear for himself the wonders that God was about to perform in their lives (Judges 13:10-11). Scripture here is indicating the need to encourage people to seek God and allow angels to have an active part in their lives. We need to encourage one another that God has a resource at our disposal that can be of enormous benefit to us.

I have come to the place in my life where I have no problem asking God to send his angels to help me out from time-to-time. But please notice one important point here! Nowhere does Manoah pray directly to the angel and ask him to return to him. In fact let us read exactly what scripture says on the matter of correctly encouraging angelic intervention into the lives of Christians.

It says in Judges 13:8 NKJV, *'Then Manoah prayed to the LORD, and said, "O my Lord, please let the Man of God whom You sent come to us*

again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born."

Nowhere in scripture are Christians permitted to pray to angels, seek their help or ask them to pay them a visit. Agreed, Manoah did not know that an angel had visited his wife, as we shall discuss later in this chapter, but the principle of seeking God rather than angels is implied here.

Our prayers must always go directly to God through Jesus Christ and to nobody else. If we need help from angels, ask God and he will send them, whether we visibly see them or not. Sometimes God will permit his loved ones to see angels and sometimes he won't. But just because we don't see angels does not mean that they are not working on our behalf.

And this is the key to experiencing the intervention of angels in our lives. If we never ask God to send his angels to help us, then we should not be surprised if we don't knowingly experience their intervention in our affairs. However, if we learn to ask God to send us help in the form of angels, chances are that we are more prone to experience their visitations, and even meet with them from time-to-time.

Please remember what I said at the start of this book. God's angels help people whether they ask for their help or not. However, the more we ask God to send his angels to help us, the better we are of experiencing such help, even if we don't see them with our own eyes. Why do you think that

one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is to be able to discern the difference between good and evil spirits?

If it was never God's intention for us to encounter angels, then he would not have provided us with the gift of being able to discern the difference between good and evil spirit, according to 1 Corinthians 12:10. However, churches who only accept the gifts of tongues, interpretation, prophecy and the occasional word of knowledge are probably not that open to receiving the intervention of angels into their affairs.

When the angel reappeared to Samson's mother, she ran and brought her husband Manoah to meet with him in the field (Judges 13:10-11). At this point in scripture Manoah asked the angel to reveal what Samson's rule of life and work would be (Judges 13:12). Again, the angel of the Lord reiterated all that he had said to Samson's mother without deviating from God's word.

Here, both Manoah and his wife demonstrate that they were comfortable speaking with the angel concerning the required instructions for raising Samson, even though they did not know that he was in fact an angel at the time. And it is clear that they must have had some suspicions that this man been sent from God, because he prophesied about the future of Samson and instructed them on how to raise the child.

It is noticeable from Judges 13:16 that the angel made certain Samson's parents only made an offering to the Lord and not to him; indicating that this was an angel and not the Lord himself. That is, scripture is clearly setting out instructions concerning how we should deal with angels should we ever meet them on our journey with God. And if there was a danger that Christians would glorify angels more than God, then I am certain he would limit their ability to interact with them until they reach heaven.

Therefore, any encounter with angels should never take the glory away from God; and they certainly should not be worshiped. It was only when Manoah made further enquiries about who the man was that he discovered he was in fact an angel, sent from God, with instructions concerning how to raise Samson (Judges 13:20).

Finally; from the encounter Manoah and his wife had with the angel of the Lord it is clear that, as they fell on their faces to the ground, their worship was to God and not to the angel that had visited them. Yes they would have been thankful for the intervention of the angel in their lives, but they would have known that all this was due to God and to nobody else. In other words, they would have maintained a right perspective on the events that had just taken place regarding the anticipated birth of Samson.

Because Manoah and his wife had obeyed God's word, through the angel, Samuel was born and the Spirit of the Lord began to move upon him. If you want to experience more of God's intervention in your life throughout the coming years, then learn to get things in perspective just like Manoah and his wife did.

God does not want us to become dependent upon angels or give them more honour than they are due. However, when we get such matters into the right perspective, then there is no reason why God's angels cannot have a more active role in our lives today. So go ahead, start to ask God to provide you with the help that you need today. Let yourself become aware of the activity of angels around you and let them guard your steps as ordered by the Lord (Psalm 91:11-12).

Six

He Touched Me

During his ministry, and after he had won a great victory on Mount Carmel in 1 Kings Chapter 18 by executing the false prophets of Baal, Elijah ran into some opposition. In 1 Kings 19:2 Jezebel threatened to do to Elijah what he had done to the prophets of Baal. The evil one does not like it when God's people gain victories over the course of their lives.

It is noticeable that Jezebel, an agent of the devil, does not speak directly with Elijah when she threatens to take his life. Rather, she sends out messages to threaten the servant of the Lord. Likewise, although we may not have direct contact with the evil one, very often he can get word across to God's servants that he desires to curtail their activities relating to the work they do in the kingdom of God.

Those who serve God will discover that they will have a constant battle with the evil one, as he attempts to wear them out in their day-to-day ministries. The purpose of God, in the life of a Christian, is to transform them from a vessel of dishonour into a vessel of honour; a process that can last a very long time (2 Timothy 2:20-21).

God is constantly refining his servants, preparing them for even greater purposes further down the line, and the evil one knows this. Therefore, the evil one will make every effort to wear out God's servants when and however he can. Knowing this is half the battle, and knowing that the enemy very often makes empty threats against us is useful to know.

No matter how many threats Jezebel sent out against Elijah, she could not and did not touch one hair on his head. One day God gave me a revelation concerning the enemy. He revealed to me that the evil one was only permitted to come within one inch of my nose; and no further. He could huff, he could puff but God would not permit him to blow my spiritual house down; simply because it was being built on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ my Lord and Saviour.

It is easy for Christians to get it into their heads that the enemy is more powerful than he really is. When it comes to the world the enemy is powerful, but when it comes to Christians, well that's a different matter altogether. There is no doubt in my mind that God protects born again Christians in ways that are different to non-Christians, or even to those who only have some form of religious experience; God also protects those who he is leading into his kingdom and to their eventual salvation. This does not mean that we won't have problems, or that the enemy won't make life difficult for us; everyone faces struggles at some point in their lives.

However, Christians are always at an advantage when Jesus is steering their boats.

Jesus said that while ever we are in the world we would have tribulation; but rejoice Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33). In other words, whatever the enemy attempts to throw at us, through Jesus Christ we shall overcome. Elijah ran away from Jezebel, not because of what she did to him, but because of what he feared she might do to him.

If Christians today want to serve God victoriously, then it is vitally important that they recognise the limitations that God has placed on the evil one concerning them. God has placed a large chain around the dragon's foot to prevent him from overwhelming any of God's loved ones. Today, God does not want any of his chosen ones to live a life fearful of what the enemy might do to them; he wants them to recognise that they shall overcome in all things.

Undoubtedly, for many Christians, there are times when the enemy will appear to close in on them. This is precisely what happened to Elijah when Jezebel threatened him. He left his ministry and ran into the wilderness of Beersheba, sat under a broom tree and prayed that he might die. Elijah told God that he was no better than those who had gone before him (1 Kings 19:4). Like many Christians today, Elijah had come to the end of himself and had given up.

Often, the time when we come to the end of ourselves is the time when God is able to step in and provide us with the strength that we need. Too often we continue to serve God year after year in our own strength, not recognising that we are running on empty. The enthusiasm we once had departs from us, and everything suddenly becomes an effort. Like the virgins in Matthew 25:3, our lamps are prepared but the oil has run out. And when the oil runs out, we often revert to our own will power to get the job done.

It's at these times that the enemy often takes advantage of Christians, who are low in spirit. But this is not God's purpose for us. Like Elijah, we need to tell God exactly how we feel. We need to tell God when we feel as if we are running on empty and when our batteries need recharging. When my car battery is low on power it struggles to start on cold winter mornings. It starts fine when the sun is shining in the sky on a beautiful summer's day, but unless I charge that battery my car won't make it through the winter.

When Elijah had come to the end of himself and ran back to the wilderness of discontentment, all that he could do was sleep under the oppression of the threats that he had received from Jezebel (1 Kings 19:5). Today, too many Christians are falling asleep due to the oppression that they feel coming from the evil one.

They presume that they have no alternative other than to close their eyes and wait until Jesus returns. "*Let someone else take the reins of ministry*" many of these worn out Christians will cry; not knowing that God can send his angels to strengthen them once again, before sending them forward to complete the work he has already started in them.

As Elijah sat under his tree of discontentment, suddenly the angel of the Lord touched him and told him to arise and eat. When Elijah looked, he saw baked bread and a jar of water by his head (1 Kings 19:6). After partaking of this divine provision from God, he put his head down and slept a while longer, even though God wanted him to get up and continue on his journey.

There are two things that Christians needs to do if they want to enjoy the strength of the Lord in their daily lives. The first is to learn to enjoy reading God's word each day, and the other is to pray that God will provide the refreshing waters of the Holy Spirit to strengthen them in their inner being. One of the keys to my own personal motivation comes from the continued desire that I have to receive more of the Holy Spirit in my life.

Every day I seek God to pour more of his Holy Spirit into me, and the more I pray the greater the desire grows within me for more of God. We may think that we need a big supernatural revelation that will bring about a

great change in our lives, when really we need God to pour in the oil and the wine to restore our souls (Luke 10:34).

Each day, when I seek God to fill my cup with the precious anointing oil of the Holy Spirit, the next day I reap the reward of his living waters flowing within my soul. Nothing is more important to me than seeking God every day for more of his Holy Spirit. This is more important to me than any ministry that I might profess to have. Without the presence of God the Holy Spirit in my life then my ministry is meaningless.

Through prayer, the Holy Spirit is the one who puts the song of the Lord in my mouth. Through prayer, the Holy Spirit is the one who gives me boldness to stand against the wiles of the evil one. Through prayer, the Holy Spirit is the one who motivates me, restores me, strengthens me and helps me to bring about God's plan for my life on a day-to-day basis.

Have you been running on empty far too long? Have you resorted to your own efforts to motivate yourself each morning so that you can continue serving the Lord? Is the devil constantly getting on top of your circumstances over and over again? Then you need much more of the Holy Spirit in your life today. You need to stop off at God's gas station to get your tank filled, your windshield cleaned and your oil checked once again. You need to experience the song of the Lord in your heart each morning; you need to realise what God's kingdom is all about; it's all about people.

We can concern ourselves so much with what is taking place around us every day that we forget about ourselves. So exhausted was Elijah that he still fell asleep after the angel had touched him; and after God had provided for him. Therefore, the angel had to touch him again and get him to partake of the provisions that God had left for him. In 1 Kings 19:7 the angel told Elijah that he needed to rise and eat because the journey was too great for him.

In others words, the angel was telling Elijah that he could no longer continue his journey in his own strength; he needed to rely on God's provision. Nothing can motivate us more than receiving the anointing of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Going to a new city, finding a new job, changing houses are not the things that will give us a new perspective on life. Oh yes they will give us momentary relief, but they are no substitute for what we really need.

Our ministries will not develop because we instigate human solutions to our problems, or even when we try something new. I am going to tell you something that may sunrise you. Many churches maintain the interest of their congregation by trying out new things to motivate them. But a day is coming when people are going to get weary of these techniques and walk away from their churches. It may take years for this to happen, but

a day will come when people will not be able to go on for the Lord in the strength of some new gimmick.

There comes a time in the life of a believer that if they do not allow God to put his oil in their lamp, then they will simply run out of spiritual energy; no matter what they try to do to maintain their walk with God. I will repeat what I intimated above, without the continued presence of God the Holy Spirit in our lives we will one day run spiritually dry. Under no circumstances will we ever be able to continue motivated through our own natural endeavours.

He's the thing! Many Christians, including myself, can run on what God has given us year after year. That is, God's oil may not run out after a year, or five years or ten year or even twenty years or more years. But a day will come when that oil will suddenly run dry and the journey we are on will come to a full stop.

When I was a new Christian, in my late teens, I was encouraged to pray every day; which I did for a number of years. However, after a short period of time I could see no point in spending too much time praying when I really wanted to go out and serve the Lord. Many years down the line I came to a spiritual standstill on my journey with God.

After a long time of pondering, God eventually brought me back to the habit of praying every single day. As I got into the habit of praying, I

began to discover God answering my prayers. The things I tried to do myself, God was now taking care of. Answers to my prayers did not come straight away, they came gradually over time, but I had no doubt that God was taking care of my needs.

As I continued the habit of praying each day without fail, I came to a sudden realisation. Had I developed a regular pattern of prayer in my life all those years ago, I would not have ended up in a mess later in life. I had not recognised that prayer had a cumulative effect upon me spirituality. I also recognised that not praying had a cumulative effect upon my circumstances, which could have been avoided, had I not become reliant upon myself.

It wasn't the case that I did not pray during those earlier years of my walk with God. I prayed, but I did not develop a deliberate time and place where I would meet God regularly each day. I would pray here and there, for example, in the car when I was driving somewhere; or for five minutes or so just before a meeting. But what I did not do was set aside a deliberate time of prayer each day that specifically belonged to God.

There should always be a time in the day which we can set aside to pray, even when raising a family. And if it is not possible to find the time throughout the day, then get up earlier in the morning to pray. We don't need to get up early in the morning to meet with the Lord; although it is a good

time to meet with him. However, if there is no other time to pray throughout our day then there may be no alternative other than to get up earlier in the morning and seek the face of God.

If prayer is not the centre of our lives, then our ministries will not run the course for God. To be frank with you, prayer itself is our ministry above anything else that we might want to do for God. It's the place where God can send his angels to strengthen us in preparation for the journey ahead. As we can see from Elijah's encounter with the angel of the Lord, he was able to run in the strength of the food that God had provided for him for forty days and forty nights (1 Kings 19:8).

In other words, Elijah could not run for ever on one meal, he still needed to depend on God to provide for him on a regular basis; even though he was able to run for a long time on what he had received from the angel of the Lord. In fact, God's provision for Elijah led him to a mountain where he was able to come and pour out his heart to God. He was able to let God know that he felt persecuted, even though he had served God faithfully throughout his ministry (1 Kings 19:).

Too many Christians keep their difficulties to themselves, mistakenly thinking that it is unspiritual to bring their complaints to God. He's a word of encouragement for you; Elijah was a man of like passions just as we are and yet he was able to do great things for God (James 5:17).

And because Elijah was just like us, he was able to come before God and let him know what was troubling him.

Today, God wants to hear from those who love him, those who have served him and those who have been discouraged by the work of the enemy arrayed against them. God does not want any of us to sit and dwell on the things that concern us; he wants us to make our petitions known to him so that he might send his angels to strengthen us in our hour of need.

After Elijah had experienced a strong wind; an earthquake; and a fire, he was ready to hear the still small voice of God speaking to him on his lonely mountain of despair. If you will listen very quietly to the voice of God today, you will hear the following words from Matthew 25:21 "*Well done thou good and faithful servant.*"

And after Elijah had repeated his concerns to the Lord, he was sent to anoint the kings of Israel and Judah; and Elisha as his successor (1 Kings 19:14-16). Not only so, but God also told Elijah that he was not in fact alone. God still had seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18).

As we conclude this Chapter, it is important to recognise that the enemy is good at telling God's people that all is doom and gloom for them; and the kingdom of God. He is good at boasting that he has the upper hand, and all God's Christians have made compromises with the world. I've got

some good news for you! God has not finished with his church down here on earth, and he has not finished with you just yet.

As we have stated in an earlier chapter of this book, Jesus said that he would build his church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). Not only is the devil a liar, he is also the father of lies (John 8:44). So don't let the devil gain the upper hand in your life; you belong to Christ and your life is hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3).

Today, God wants to send his angel to strengthen you so that you will succeed on the next part of your journey. You need to come apart and rest awhile (Mark 6:31). You need to discover that your strength is in God and in God alone. You need to know that the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead dwells in you and he will quicken your mortal body (Romans 8:11).

You need to know that nothing can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:35). You need to know that you are more than a conqueror through him who loves you (Romans 8:37). You need to know that you are the head and not the tail (Deuteronomy 28:13). You need to know that he who began a good work in you shall complete it (Philippians 1:6).

Today God is looking for you to make your prayer life a priority, rather than your ministry; God is fully capable of looking after your

ministry when you submit it back to him. God will always fight for those who pray; and if you are not praying then God is not fighting. So come to God today and let him strengthen you in the power of his might (Ephesians 6:10).

Let God refresh you in his life giving waters, and let him worry about how he will complete the work that he has already started in you. It may take time, but if you will remain faithful to your prayer life, then God will remain faithful to you. And before long you will find that God will send his angel and strengthen you in your hour of need.

Seven

Greater Is He

The difficulty for some Christians, and their doubts about of angels, relates to their possible misunderstanding concerning the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is both visible and invisible at the same time. It is visible on earth and located within the hearts of its members; those who are born again; it is not located within a specific church building.

However, the kingdom of God is also invisible in that it resides within heaven as well as on earth; consisting of those who have gone before us, including the angelic kingdom. I also suspect that there's much more to the kingdom of God than we currently know about now; but all will be revealed to us in greater detail once we reach the shores of eternity.

As Christians on earth, we are forbidden to have any contact with those who have gone before us. However, we can speak to Jesus Christ on a daily basis in prayer. There is no such restriction on the interaction between humans and angels, who occupy both the visible and invisible realm; although we cannot pray to them or worship them in any way. However, God can send them to help us in times of need, as I have already discussed

earlier in this book. In Hebrews 12:22 NIV it says, *'But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly.'*

From my own personal experience with angels, I have discovered that they don't say very much when I have encountered them. I have found that they simply perform the function that God has assigned to them. That is, they help us in our times of need, but they don't communicate very much with us. They hardly ever reveal any of the secrets of heaven, or tell us about those who have gone before us. In fact, they say very little at all.

Should they reveal anything to us about eternity, they can only pass on information as ordered by the Lord. In other words, angels are not free spirits who can go about doing their own thing and contradicting God's written word. They are subject to God's word just as much as we are.

It's almost as if angels are on a tight leash, operating under instructions not to go beyond the authority that God has given them on the specific assignments they have been allocated to. So if you meet someone who claims that they have been involved in a long conversation with an angel, who has revealed lots of information to them, it is most likely that such a person has been deceived.

The role of angels is to help us and not to instruct us on matters relating to the kingdom of God. Instructions relating to the kingdom of God

can be found in the bible, therefore there is no need for angels to add to the instructions that God has already provided for us in his word. Once we understand that our interaction with angels should be limited, and then we are in a better position to accept their help in times of need.

But as we started, at the beginning of this chapter, some Christians will never be in a position to accept the help of angels in their lives because they can only discern the kingdom of God from an earth-bound point of view. That is, they can never understand that there is a spiritual aspect to the kingdom of God; therefore they are not in a position to accept that the kingdom of God is both visible and invisible at the same time.

Again, this does not mean that such people cannot have a visitation from angels when they get into serious trouble. We have all heard of incidents where people have received unexpected help from angels in times of need. It just means that some Christians are not in a position to understand that angels are watching over them and protecting them on a day-to day-basis. They don't necessarily recognise that angels can occupy the same space that they are living in. Quite frankly, some Christians walk around with their spiritual eyes shut.

One Sunday evening, when I was a college student, I walked through college campus towards church. My church at the time was located on campus property. As I was walking towards church, I sensed the

presence of God as I headed towards the centre of campus. All of a sudden, a young woman walked towards me with her hands held high, worshipping the Lord our God.

As she moved towards me, the whole of central campus lit up with the glory of God. As this woman sang praises to God, I could also hear heavenly music at the same time. This woman was singing in a language I had never heard before, but it was beautiful. From this one woman came a sound that could be attributed to a choir of angels.

As I got closer to the woman, she began to walk off in a different direction to me, and she seemed oblivious to the fact that I was there. Suddenly, God gave me a revelation that I had entered a camp of angels who were occupying central campus, even though I could not see them. This young woman was a representation of the fact that I had entered angel territory.

The revelation I received was that God had camps of angels strategically located across the entire planet. And just because we cannot see them does not mean that they don't exist. With respect to this particular young woman, I appreciate that some Christians think that all angels are male. It was difficult to tell whether this angel was male or female. I have met angels in the past where I could not tell which gender they belonged to.

We know that Gabriel and Michael must have male genders or why else would they have been given male names?

There is a distinction between Christians who are in a position to discern the presence of angels in their lives and those who do not. In 2 Kings Chapter 6, we have an account of two people; one who was able to discern the presence of God's mighty angelic army, and somebody who was not.

In the Old Testament, during the days of Elisha, King Aram was at war with Israel. Each time the king of Aram set up camp, Elisha would tell the king of Israel where the enemy was located (2 Kings 6:8-9). This was something that Elisha did time and time again. The King of Aram became so enraged by the fact that the king of Israel knew where he was located that he suspected an Israeli spy was in his camp (2 Kings 6:11).

The king of Aram's soldiers informed him that it was in fact Elisha the prophet who was able to tell the king of Israel the precise words he had spoken in his bedroom (2 Kings 6:12). The king of Aram discovered that Elisha was at Dothan, so he sent out a strong army with chariots to capture him (2 Kings 6:14).

When Elisha's servant got up early the next morning, he noticed the vast army that had come to capture his master. Fearfully, the servant wanted to know what they were going to do in such terrible circumstances

(2 Kings 6:15). Obviously, the circumstances that Elisha and his servant found themselves in were extreme. But many Christians face difficult circumstances throughout their lives, where they can only see the problem and not the solution.

As we are about to discover, from the rest of this passage in scripture, one person could see the problem whereas the other person could see the solution. Born again Spirit-filled Christians are in a good position to see the solution to their problems in the invisible realm, whereas earth-bound Christians often lack such a discernment.

The first thing that Elisha told his servant was not to be afraid! In 2 Kings 6:16 Elisha said, “*Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.*” Translated into today's language, '*Greater is he that is within us than he that is within the world.*' It is important to recognise here that Elisha's encounter with the king of Aram's army was a metaphor.

The armies that came against Israel, in the Old Testament, often represented the spiritual warfare that takes place against today's 21st century Christians. Therefore, a Spirit-filled Christian, who is walking with God and praying every day, will know that God within them is greater than anything that the devil has at his disposal (1 John 4:4).

As Christians, we should never fear that the enemy can gain the upper hand when it comes to our day-to-day lives. For one thing, God has at

least two thirds more angels at his disposal than the evil one does. Remember, a third of the angels fell when the devil rebelled against God. Obviously we cannot be accurate about such figures. Scripture only gives us a glimpse concerning such matters pertaining to the spiritual arsenal that God and the enemy have at their disposal.

Whatever the true numbers are, the devil is no match for God and his forces. In fact, the angels are so powerful that it will only take one of them to put the devil into the abyss for a period of one thousand years; during the Millennium reign of Christ (Revelation 20:1-3). So if it only takes one angel to deal with the devil, what can ten thousand angels do to protect us from demonic activity?

Whatever the case may be, Christians need to recognise that they are on the victory side when it comes to difficult circumstances. Christians also need to recognise that when the evil one wanted to attack Job, he had to come and seek permission from God to do so (Job 1:11-12). Not only so, but God restricted the devil's authority by forbidding him to take Job's life (Job 2:1-6).

As Christians we need to recognise that the devil is not permitted to come anywhere near us without God's express permission. And should he get permission, his activities can only take place in conjunction with God's purposes for our lives, which are always for our good (Romans 8:28).

Therefore, fear should have no place in the life of a Christian, as was the case with Elisha's servant. This does not mean that Christians cannot suffer from momentary fear when something difficult comes their way. But as soon as trouble comes, we should turn our attention to God and trust that his angels will take care of whatever problem chooses to manifest itself in our lives. We must always remember that if God is for us who can be against us (Romans 8:31)?

After the servant of Elisha had noticed the enemy surrounding them, Elisha prayed that God would open his eyes so that he could see what was really taking place in the realm of the supernatural. (2 Kings 6:17). In other words, because Elisha's servant could only see things from a natural standpoint, he was not in a position to see things from God's viewpoint.

Today, many Christians need to pray the same prayer that Elisha prayed for his servant; that their eyes might be opened to see what is really taking place in the realm of the supernatural. In other words, Christians need spiritual discernment so that they might understand that the forces of darkness are behind some of their difficult circumstances; and the forces of God are also available to protect them. Obviously, the devil is not behind every corner, and he is not always behind every difficult circumstance a Christian might be going through.

Jesus said that while ever we are in the world we will have trouble, but do not fear because he has overcome the world (John 16:33). Notice the key phrase here, '*Do not fear!*' When I was a very young Christian, I asked God to open my spiritual eyes. It wasn't long before I received discernment that some of the difficulties I was facing were not down to me; and neither were they necessarily down to something stupid I had done. Many of my difficulties related to the fact that I was in a battle; therefore the forces of darkness were taking advantage of the fact that I had not recognised their involvement in my circumstances.

And once I recognised that the enemy was behind some of the difficulties in my life, the weight lifted from off of my shoulders. I no longer blamed myself for my difficulties; I blamed the enemy. This does not mean that we should never take responsibility for our own actions in life. But I became aware that some of the things that were happening to me were too coincidental to be my fault. So I placed the blame squarely where it was needed, right at the door of the evil one. And when I don't know who to blame for my difficult circumstances, I give the devil the benefit of the doubt and blame him. What we must not do is blame God when things go wrong.

When I realised that the enemy was at war with God's saints, then I learnt to turn the battle over to God. Through prayer, God was able to defeat

the works of the evil one coming against me. Likewise, all Christians can have their spiritual eyes opened to see what the enemy is up to in the background of their lives.

Remaining ignorant should never be an excuse for not knowing what the enemy is up to in our lives from time-to-time. And once our spiritual eyes are opened, and once we recognise who is responsible for some of the attacks that come against us, we can turn such battles over to the Lord in prayer, as discussed above.

Again, I can promise you that we don't need to see devils around every corner when God opens our spiritual eyes. But having our spiritual eyes opened means that we become aware when the evil one is up to no good. Having our spiritual eyes opened means that we can recognise that we are not always to blame when something goes wrong in our lives. Having our spiritual eyes opened means that we can take the matter to God in prayer, rather than trying to sort out a mess that we are not responsible for.

When Elisha prayed that the spiritual eyes of his servant might be opened, he was able to see the fiery chariots all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:17). Discernment is not just about recognising what the enemy is up to, it is also about recognising what God's angels are up to. Some Christians think it's okay to discern demonic activity, but they are less forthcoming

about recognising the strong forces of God, which are at our disposal to defeat the works of the evil one.

There needs to be balance in the kingdom of God. Not only do we need to know what the enemy is up to, we also need to recognise that God's angels can fight battles on our behalf. When the enemy came down towards Elisha and his servant, he was able to pray that God would strike them with blindness (2 Kings 6:18). Did you know that when the enemy attacks a Christian, they can ask God to send the evil one's forces into confusion? This is one of the most powerful weapons at the disposal of Christians today, if only they knew it.

When God sent Gideon to fight the Midianites they sounded three hundred trumpets, which caused the enemy throughout the Midianite camp to turn on each other (Judges 7:22). In other word, utter confusion came on the camp of the enemy at the sounding of the trumpets, etc. The enemy was so preoccupied with fighting each other that victory came easy to Gideon and the rest of his men.

Christians first need to ask God to open their spiritual eyes to see what the enemy is up to in the background of their lives. Then they need a revelation of the vastness of the army of God, which is available at their disposal. Then they need to get on their knees to worship and thank God that the battle belongs to him and nobody else. Remember what I said in an

earlier chapter of this book, God fights for those who pray, but he may not fight for those who cannot be bothered to bring the battle to God on their knees.

When Elisha had struck the enemy with blindness, he was able to lead them straight to Samaria and into the hands of the king of Israel (2 Kings 6-19-20). Once again Elisha prayed for this army, God opened their eyes and they recognised that they had been defeated. When we read 2 Kings 6:21-23, we discover that God had given Elisha the wisdom to deal with the enemy appropriately.

The wisdom Elisha demonstrated here meant that the raiding parties of the king of Aram left the territories of Israel alone for a considerable period of time. If we try to fight the enemy in our own strength then he may very well come back at us time and time again. When we hand our battles over to the Lord, God fights our enemy; he doesn't just fight our current battles, he often fights future potential battles on our behalf.

As we conclude this Chapter of the book, we can learn lessons from Elisha's dealings with the enemy of Israel. Not only did God give Elisha spiritual insight into what the enemy of Israel was up to, but he also gave him wisdom on how to deal with them. This wisdom meant that Israel did not achieve a short-term victory over Aram, as we intimated above; Israel won a long-term victory throughout the lifetime of Elisha.

Having our spiritual eyes open does not mean that our attention should only be drawn to what the enemy is up to. Quite the opposite! Having our spiritual eyes opened means that our attention should be on the bigness of our God and not on the smallness of the enemy. Knowing what the enemy is up to is incidental to recognising what God is up to; especially when it comes to spiritual warfare.

Asking God to open our eyes concerning what is taking place in the spiritual realm means that we should also seek him for wisdom at the same time. Elisha demonstrates no fear when it came to what the enemy was planning against him. Quite frankly, Elisha did not bat an eyelid in the presence of his enemy. The revelation that God gave Elisha into the realm of the supernatural meant that he saw that the forces of God were far greater than what the enemy could throw at him. In other words, Elisha had the right perspective on the spiritual realm. That is, he did not become overwhelmed by what the enemy was up to.

Like you, I have met Christians who have gained the wrong perspective on what is taking place in the spiritual realm; all they can see are demons. This can be quite off putting for those of us who have a desire to maintain a balanced perspective on what is taking place in the realm of the supernatural. We need to remember that there is a supernatural realm

that belongs to the occult and there is a supernatural realm that belongs to God; we should never confuse the two.

If we want a revelation about what is taking place in the supernatural realm of God's kingdom, then we need to make certain that we recognise God's forces and capabilities are far greater than that of the enemy; the spiritual realm is not for the faint-hearted. Therefore my encouragement to you is; keep your eyes focussed on Jesus! Ask God to reveal to you the vastness and the greatness of his kingdom. Recognise first that the supernatural realm of God's kingdom belongs to his vast army of angels, and place your confidence in God's ability to defeat the enemy at every turn.

Recognise that you are more than a conqueror through Jesus who loves you, and do to go looking for what is taking place in the demonic side of the supernatural realm; that is maintain a healthy propensity towards God and his resources in heaven, and not towards the evil one and his demonic kingdom. And when the enemy sends trouble your way, you don't always need to ask God to reveal to you what the enemy is up to; just ask him to show you what he and his army of angels are up to concerning your welfare.

And above all, seek wisdom so that you might know how to pray, in order that you can release God to send his angels to defeat whatever it is

that the enemy has planned against you. As we finish today's chapter on angels, ask God to open your eyes and reveal to you the vastness of his kingdom; here on earth and as it is in heaven.

Ask God to give you a revelation concerning the heavenly Jerusalem, and the thousands upon thousands of joyful angels who are part of his kingdom throughout the universe. And remember, God's angels are ever present and willing to assist you on your journey; above all else, you have nothing to fear when you commit your ways to God.

Eight

I Had A Dream

One day, God took me in the Spirit to visit an administrative centre located in heaven. Until then I had no idea that heaven contained such a place. This administrative centre was a low-lying single story building of modern design. As I entered this building, it was full of tables and chairs, with people in white sitting at them. I was surprised to discover how untidy this room was with papers strewn all across the floor.

In the corner of the room there were some tall seats positioned in a circle with angels sat upon them; they were in deep prayer. I was not aware that angels actually prayed, although I was aware that they worship God. Maybe prayer acts as a vehicle of communication between angels and God? However, these particular angels were praying that the people dressed in white garments would make the right decisions during their deliberations concerning what was taking place on earth.

Suddenly, I heard the voice of the Holy Spirit prompt me within my heart. He said that nothing took place on earth without God's permission. No leader came to power, or was removed from power, unless it

had first been agreed in this administrative centre. God told me that nothing takes place concerning the leadership of the nations without his expressed knowledge concerning such affairs.

Nothing was left to chance, and everything takes place on earth for a specific reason relating to God's overall will and purpose. Therefore, when we don't understand why someone has come to power, or has been removed from power, be assured that everything happens as part of God's overall long-term strategic plan. Therefore, don't just view events taking place on earth from a short-term perspective that only impacts on one location or nation. Recognise that God is at work, and his plans will eventually unfold before the nations.

From this information that God had given to me, I was greatly encouraged when I realised that nothing happens on earth unless God knows about it. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground without it coming to God's attention (Matthew 10:29). In other words, we are not alone on earth while God, the angels and the rest of the church are up in heaven enjoying themselves.

It is vitally important for Christians to recognise that earth is directly connected to heaven and God rules over both equally. Therefore, world leaders are not ultimately in control of what takes place in their nations, even though it may appear that they are. They are directly

responsible to God for their actions, and will give account to him in the days to come. So no Christian should ever concern themselves that the things of earth are tumbling out of control. Everything happens for a reason, which always relates to God's plan and purpose for the world at large.

Therefore, despite the difficulties that we see taking place across the world today, God is still firmly in control. Not only so, but no leader of any nation comes to power without the direct say so from God. This may come as a surprise to you, especially when there are so many wicked leaders ruling nations that do not even comply with basic human rights. However God permits leaders, good and bad, to occupy their positions as part of his overall strategic plan for the planet, as stated above.

This does not mean that God never tries to speak to world leaders in various ways. Whether or not these leaders heed the voice of the Lord speaking to them in the stillness of the night is up to them. One such leader, who God needed to speak to, was king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Daniel Chapter 4). This was a leader who thought that the greatness, majesty and power of his kingdom came about through his own natural human endeavours.

One night God came to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream, warning him of the judgment that was about to come upon him; a judgment that was needed to bring Nebuchadnezzar to the realisation that God raises up one

leader and puts down another. Nebuchadnezzar could find no one in his kingdom to interpret the dream that had made him so afraid (Daniel 4:5-7).

Finally, when Daniel came into the presence of the king, Nebuchadnezzar relayed the details of what God was trying to tell him in his dream (Daniel 4:8). In this dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw an enormous tree in the middle of the land, where all the creatures could find food and shade in the leaves on its branches. It was then that Nebuchadnezzar saw an angel coming down from heaven calling for the tree to be cut down, its branches to be stripped off and its fruit to be scattered (Daniel 4:14).

However the stump of the tree was permitted to remain where it was, but bound with iron and bronze. The angel then announced that the recipient of the dream would be drenched with the dew of heaven and live among the animals of the earth; where his mind would be changed from that of a man to that of an animal for a period of seven years (Daniel 4:15-16).

It is noticeable from Daniel 4:17 that this decision in the dream was announced by God's messengers, his angels, but the verdict (judgment) was declared by God. This was so that all might know God is sovereign over all the kingdoms of the earth, and that he gives the kingdoms to those he wishes to; particularly to those with humility of heart. Clearly, from Daniel 4:18, Nebuchadnezzar neither knew what this dream meant or who it represented.

We should never presume that we know what is taking place in the heart of other people, whether they are world leaders or our neighbours next door to us. I suspect that we might be surprised to find, when we reach heaven, how much God has been speaking to people about their need to repent and come to the Lord. I am also convinced that God visits many people through dreams and visions, in an effort to warn them to change the direction they are headed in and turn to the narrow path of God's kingdom (Matthew 7:13).

Sadly, many of these people probably do not understand the meaning of their dreams, or they do not recognise that God's angels have been sent with a message for them to change their ways. It is to born again believers who God has committed the preaching of the gospel. However, this does not mean that God will not intervene in someone's life, through dreams, with an attempt to direct them towards his kingdom.

It is probably the case that God makes every effort to speak to world leaders, and anyone else for that matter; including those who have allowed the responsibility of leadership go to their heads. Sometimes people think that they are more important than the people they serve. God's authority resides in those who know how to walk humbly before the Lord, whether they are world leaders or your average Jane or Joe living next door to you.

No matter who we are, God is able to speak to any single one of us through dreams, visions and the appearance of angels. I am probably right in thinking that God has spoken to me more times in the privacy of my own home than in my church. This is not to suggest that there's anything wrong with our churches today, many of us hear God speaking to us through good sermons. However, I maintain that God probably speaks to many of us through the still small voice; if only we would keep our spiritual ears open so that we might discover what God wants to say to us.

The problem with dreams is that sometimes it can be difficult for people to recognise that God is speaking to us through them. So how do we know when God is speaking to us through dreams like he did with Nebuchadnezzar? The first thing that we need to recognise is the difference between our own dreams and those that come from God.

Ordinary dreams are the dumping ground of our sub consciousness. They are like the trash we throw out every day; they have no meaning and they are just a release for all the thoughts we have processed throughout the day, or even the week. Any attempt to interpret such dreams is like digging around in the trash trying to find something that we might have lost. There is nothing special about dreams, so we should not try to make more out of them than necessary.

Dreams that come from God interrupt the normal dreams associated with our subconscious minds. Those who suggest that we can find patterns in normal dreams are deluding us. Dreams that come from God stand out, and we don't need to go looking for them. Dreams that come from God will have a clear message of guidance and direction for our lives, like a revelation, they will make sense to us.

Such dreams will be hard to shake from us, whereas dreams from our own subconscious minds easily fade away through the passing of time. Therefore we should never fear that God has been trying to speak to us through dreams, but we have somehow missed what he has been trying to say to us. I will repeat the warning I gave to you above. There are Christians going around today attempting to find meaning in ordinary dreams, and their interpretations are either rooted in their flesh lives or worse, they are derived from that which is demonic.

So why could Nebuchadnezzar not understand this dream that God had given to him? First, Nebuchadnezzar was not a Christian, so he would not have understood that it was God himself who was trying to speak to him through his dreams. Second, Nebuchadnezzar suffered from pride, and would probably presume that he was being warned about an enemy trying to attack him.

Therefore, Christians should never ask non-Christians to interpret their dreams for them. They should do one of two things. First, they should ask God directly to reveal the hidden meaning of the dream to them, or second, they should ask another Christian to pray with them about it. Christians also need to recognise that if God is speaking to them through a dream, he is probably speaking to them specifically rather than about someone else. Therefore, we cannot impose our dreams on other people suggesting that God is warning them through us.

When Nebuchadnezzar had his dream, he knew that Daniel could interpret it for him because he recognised God's prophet was full of the Holy Spirit (Daniel 4:18). Here Nebuchadnezzar is providing us with a good piece of advice, especially when it comes to seeking out those who might help us interpret a dream that may have come from God.

We should only approach someone who is full of the Holy Spirit to help us understand what a dream means. That is, we should never approach someone who is a carnal Christian to interpret our dreams; someone who might pour scorn on what has happened to us. We should approach the leader of our church, or someone the leader has designated to help us in such matters. I repeat, never approach half-hearted Christians to interpret your dream; it is unlikely that they will be able to help you interpret what God is trying to say to you.

As I have discussed in one of my previous books, one evening I went to bed early. As I was getting into bed, it was impressed upon my heart to place a piece of paper and a pencil under my bed. This was a period in my life not long after I had come to Christ. Sometime during the night, I woke up and wrote some words down on this piece of paper and then went back to sleep. When I woke up the next morning, I had no recollection of actually doing this.

As I continued with my chores the next day, it wasn't until about noon that I remembered having written something down on my piece of paper during the night. I ran to my bedroom and retrieved the piece of paper from under my bed. I had written the following words on that piece of paper, *'The Rock is my judgment and I am free.'*

For about a year, I asked various people in my church if they understood what these words meant. Although people gave me a general understanding of what the words might mean, I did not really find anyone to provide me with the correct interpretation. Obviously, I could have made efforts to interpret these words myself, but as a relatively new Christian I was not confident in doing so.

One evening I went out with my pastor, Dave Powell, and a few friends to have dinner. Suddenly, I remembered the words I had written on the piece of paper under my bed a year ago! I asked my pastor if he knew

what the words meant. His eyes lit up and he gave me the interpretation, just as if he was giving an interpretation to a gift of tongues being presented in a church meeting.

My pastor told me that this Rock represented Jesus, who was falling upon me from a great height. He said that as the Rock, Christ Jesus; fell on me I would break into tiny little pieces. Then God would gather these tiny little pieces of Rock together and build me up into a new free creation in Christ Jesus. My heart lit up as I recognised that this word was from God, which meant everything to me. Over the years I have found that God has smashed down my old carnal life and he has been building me together into a new free creation in Christ Jesus.

I learnt from this experience how important it is to seek out the help from genuine Spirit-filled Christians when it comes to interpreting dreams, visions and words from God. We are all part of one body, the church, and we all need to work together with genuine Spirit-filled Christians to determine exactly what God is trying to say to us. If we do not do this, then we become in danger of being led astray by the agents of satan.

Nebuchadnezzar had the sense to seek out a Spirit-filled man of God, in Daniel, to help him find the meaning to the message that God had brought to him through his dream. Daniel explained to Nebuchadnezzar that

the dream he received, about the giant tree, represented the fact that he had become great and strong; his dominion had reached distant lands.

Daniel further revealed that Nebuchadnezzar had seen God's messenger, an angel, coming down out of heaven with instructions to cut down the tree; leaving the stump and roots bound with iron and bronze. Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom would be left intact, but he himself would be driven from it; he would have to live with the wild animals for a period of seven years.

In other words, God would drive Nebuchadnezzar away from his people until he acknowledged that God was Most High and sovereign over all kingdoms of the earth; and that he could give them to anyone he wished. Therefore, Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom would only be restored to him after he acknowledged that heaven ruled in the affairs of earth. Daniel encouraged Nebuchadnezzar to renounce his sins, do what was right and be kind to the oppressed (Daniel 4:20-24).

In other words, nobody can get away with doing just as they please in the face of the earth. From the least to the greatest in the kingdom of God, there are no favorites (Romans 2:11). And when it appears that people are getting away with doing precisely as they please, including leaders of the known world, then a day of reckoning will one day come for them.

This principle of accountability does not just apply to world leaders. It applies equally to church leaders as it does to those who have been given no specific responsibility within the kingdom of God. The account of God's dealings with Nebuchadnezzar is a good reminder for any of us who are considering taking on responsibility within God's kingdom. That is, nothing we do will go unnoticed by God.

We can never become disconnected from the Head, who is Christ, whenever we engage in any activity that takes place within God's body the church (Romans 12:5). And if you discover any of God's leaders carrying on activities that are questionable, all you need to do is leave them to God. In his time and in his purpose he will deal with anyone who steps out of line; those who conduct activities that do not bring honour to the Most High Sovereign God.

Like you, I have seen a lot of shenanigans taking place in God's kingdom. But this I know, God sees everything, God hears everything and a time will come when everyone will account for their actions, no matter who they are. So never become overly anxious when you see God's people or God's leadership stepping out of line; God will take care of everything and everyone who brings dishonour to his body.

As we conclude this chapter, we find that it is twelve months later when Nebuchadnezzar's dream is realised (Daniel 4:29). Here we discover

Nebuchadnezzar taking credit for all that had been accomplished within his vast kingdom of Babylon. God spoke to Nebuchadnezzar from heaven and pronounces that all he decreed to him in the dream, twelve months earlier, would come to pass (Daniel 4:33). And as we know from the rest of Daniel Chapter 4, everything that God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar in his dream came to pass.

It was only after seven years, and after Nebuchadnezzar had recognised the sovereignty of God in his life, that his sanity and his kingdom was restored back to him. Nebuchadnezzar came to a realisation that all of God's ways were just, and all those who walk in pride he will humbled (Daniel 4:34-37).

More and more I am convinced that God is in complete control of everything that takes place in the face of the earth, including the bad things; especially the bad things. We are living in very difficult times at the moment, and no matter what horrors we see taking place across the earth, God is still on his throne and God is still in control. Not only so, but God continues to speak to the inhabitants of the earth, and sometime in ways we know nothing about. If God was able to deal with Nebuchadnezzar he can certainly deal with anyone else.

Just look at some of the dictators that have come to power in the face of the earth over the last few years; many of them have been deposed

and defeated in their attempts to control people and nations. And should God allow a dictator to rise to power, know that he is using them for the good of his kingdom, even when it may not appear obvious to us. Remember, God determines what will take place in the affairs of people and nations and not the other way around!

Therefore, do not fear when you see events that are seeming spiralling out of control on planet earth. We are not alone, and God never leaves us to the fate of some of these wicked leaders for ever. God has a plan and he will execute that plan for the good of all, as the days unfold before us. And even when we think that some of these leaders have closed their minds to the gospel of Jesus Christ, this does not mean that God is not speaking to them in their hearts through dreams and visions.

Let me end this chapter with a final thought! God's plans often take time to come to fruition. Therefore the earth is probably like to a chess board. When the enemy makes a move in one part of the earth, or through some world leader or some faction, God sometimes takes his time to plan a counter move against them.

Never presume that because the enemy has made a move, nothing will be done to counteract such activities that takes place through some of our world leaders, or whoever it is that may have caused trouble on planet earth. Trust that God knows precisely what the next counter move will be in

his own good time. God is never outwitted by anyone on planet earth; after all, he is the King of the chessboard!

If you have been worried about world events if late, don't be. Yes, be concerned, but never think that God has somehow lost control of events taking place across the earth. I started this chapter by discussing the events that take place in the administrative centre of heaven; events which determine what takes place in the face of the earth on a day-to-day basis.

I am certain that we can have an impact upon the decisions made in this administrative centre in heaven through our prayers. So don't give up! Don't faint with despair at world events! Just seek God in prayer and ask him to intervene into the affairs of the nations, or the affairs of world leaders or even into the affairs of religious leaders.

I am certain, as I have said before in this book, that when we pray God fights on our behalf. And above all else do not give up hope. A day will come when Jesus will rule the nations with a rod of iron for the good of all concerned (Psalm 2:9). But for now, continue to ask God to intervene in the affairs of the nations so that we can at least live in relative peace; continue to be a witness for Jesus and until the Lord returns for those who belong to him.

Here's one final thought for you to consider. When Russia started to infiltrate the Ukraine, I was concerned about the effects that this conflict

might have on the world. The Holy Spirit whispered in my heart not to be concerned about the Ukraine, especially when other nations were doing relatively little at the time to assist this country.

God placed it on my heart that what was happening to the Ukraine was part of his overall plan for the world, and not to concern myself with events taking place there. He showed me that I could not change events that were beginning to unfold within the Ukraine because it was all part of God's end-time strategy. A peace settled within my heart that, although I could not understand President Putin's actions concerning the Ukraine, it was still all part of God's long-term planning for the planet.

Nine

God's Living Creatures

During the period of Israel's captivity in Babylon, the prophet Ezekiel came to prominence through the visions he had received from God. During his time in captivity, Ezekiel received a vision that many people have found hard to interpret. In fact, there are many differing interpretations of the visions Ezekiel experienced that it is hard to know which ones are accurate.

My own personal view is that there are a variety of interpretations available concerning these visions, particularly when it comes to explaining what the living creatures represent in Ezekiel 1:4-10. In this book, we will make every effort to provide a sensible analysis concerning what the four faces of the living creatures may represent in Ezekiel 1:10.

The first face of the creatures was that of a human. It is my humble opinion that this face represents the fact that God uses humans to undertake the work needed to establish his kingdom here on earth. Although we have discussed the fact that God uses angels in the affairs of human beings, their efforts relate to helping us, or bringing God's answers to prayer to us, or

bringing God's message through the gifts of the Holy Spirit to us, etc.; as long as such activities are supported by the word of God.

Too often institutions of religion stand in the way of human progress within the kingdom of God. In fact, I am convinced that there are times when churches stand between people and God, whereas Jesus should be the only person to stand between us and God as mediator. Sadly, too many churches have taken over this role of human to God contact, which has sometimes slowed down the work of God's Holy Spirit in the face of the earth.

In fact, I am convinced that some of these churches have stood in the way of God pouring out revival in various regions, simply because they have become controlling of people rather than liberators of the soul. To me this is a great sadness, especially in the light of the fact that Jesus came to set people free. Sadly, many churches have taken over the control of the lives of Christians, telling them what they should or should not do; shepherding them beyond anything that Jesus ever encouraged them to do (John 21:15-17).

Thankfully there are still churches out there that have not stifled the work of God through the efforts of individuals. In the vision of the living creatures, I think it is no coincidence that Ezekiel saw the human face first, ensuring that God would use humans rather than institutions to establish his

kingdom on earth. However, this is not to suggest that God will not use institutions in the building of his kingdom; particularly those which have ensured that people come first and not buildings.

Churches that recognize the importance of people, in the affairs of God's kingdom, usually know how to devote resources into those things that matters. And when churches recognize that buildings house Christians rather than becoming more important than people, then there is hope that God's kingdom can be built through the inspiration of individuals. Therefore, we should recognize what God is trying to say to us through the representation of these living creatures, which is, humans come first in the affairs of God's kingdom.

The second face of the living creatures, which the prophet recognized from Ezekiel 1:10, was that of a lion. My personal interpretation of this aspect of the living creatures suggests that Christians need to be as bold as a lion, or as bold as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Obviously, each Christian may have a different interpretation as to what the faces of these living creatures represent.

Therefore, I am not being dogmatic here; I am just providing a personal view to encourage you. If you have a better interpretation of what these faces represent, that's fine. I would like to suggest that God is looking for bold Christians when it comes to the administration of his kingdom here

on earth. And should any of us lack boldness, then we only need to ask God to fill us with more of the Holy Spirit so that we might receive the boldness we need in our service for his kingdom (Acts 4:31).

Boldness does not mean that a person lacks humility. Sometimes I have come across bold Christians who have portrayed arrogance; and sometimes they have put people off from the kingdom of God. There is a boldness that comes from the flesh and there is a boldness that comes directly from the Holy Spirit, which is full of love and compassion for other people (1 John 2:10).

Boldness that comes directly from the Holy Spirit will not harm people or put them off from the kingdom of God. However, boldness that is stirred up from within a person's own soul can be very off putting, and does not necessary represent the fruit of the Holy Spirit in a person's life (Galatians 5:22). This is why the living creatures had four differing aspects contained within one entity. Boldness that has no consideration for the individuals will achieve nothing.

I was once concerned about a particular evangelist, who was bold to the point of being rude. When I made enquiries about this individual, I was told that he had to be rude so that he could fulfill his role as that of an evangelist. Although I accepted this excuse at the time, I am not so

convinced now. Surely God can give a person the boldness to become an evangelist without the need for them to be rude to people?

This is why I believe God revealed these living creatures to Ezekiel, so that he would recognize God uses a variety of characteristics within his loved ones; characteristics that provide balance within a person's life and ministry. If we become overly bold without showing compassion for other people then we defeat the purpose of God, which is to show love towards one another.

The third face of the living creatures represented an ox. An ox is a creature that is able to perform hard work; especially when it comes to plowing a field. Today we have resorted to the use of combined harvesters to harvest our fields, but in many countries the ox is still king. As Christians we need to recognize that God's kingdom does not develop on its own.

There comes a point when God's kingdom will only grow when we put work into it. Paul said that he planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). In other words, everyone has a part to play in the kingdom of God. If we don't put our backs to the spiritual plough, then God's kingdom may not grow in our particular corner of his vineyard.

Faith without works is dead, according to James 2:17. Therefore if our spiritual efforts only involve prayer without actually getting involved with God's kingdom in a practical way, then we may not experience as much

growth as we should. For example, I can pray about writing Christian books year after year. However, unless I put pen to paper not much will happen; books don't write themselves.

This principle applies to any work relating to the kingdom of God. Obviously, there are people who can only pray, especially where they have disabilities, or they cannot get out to serve God in their localities. However, everyone can do something; but if we do nothing at all then God has nothing to pour his Holy Spirit onto to give the increase.

Our service for God involves cooperation with the Holy Spirit. God uses people to conduct his work in the kingdom of God. People need to put their backs into God's work, and prayer brings the increase through the Holy Spirit. Sitting around hoping that God will use us one day does not always cut the mustard with him. The phrase people often use as an excuse to do nothing in God's kingdom is, *'I'm Waiting on God.'*

There's nothing wrong with waiting on God as long as we don't wait forever. Sometimes we need to take a step of faith and have a go at doing something in the kingdom of God. And if this sounds unspiritual, let me clarify what I'm trying to say to you here. Sometimes, as I have discussed in my books before, we need to volunteer our service for God in our local churches and fellowships.

When we do this God sees our willingness. We don't need to worry whether we are in God's will or not, God is quite capable of moving us into something that pertains to his will, once we have made some sort of effort to get involved in his kingdom. And just because we volunteer our services at church does not mean this is God's purpose for us for the rest of our lives.

I have often stepped out in faith in one direction only to find that God has opened a door somewhere else. Had I not made my initial step of faith, I may never have come across a door that God opened for me later down the line. In other words, don't worry about making a mistake in God's kingdom. Nothing is wasted when it comes to serving God, and the Holy Spirit will always make sure that we head in the right direction, once we have made at least some effort to meet God half way.

The forth face of the living creatures was that of an eagle. What is interesting about eagles is that they need to flap their wings very hard to get airborne. However, the energy required to do this produces a tremendous strain on the eagle. It has been calculated that an eagle can only flap its wings to get into the air for about two minutes in total. This means that the eagle has to learn to find the thermals that will lift it into a high altitude, and then they can soar on the wind. Eagles can then migrate to far distances, which would otherwise be impossible by flapping their wings alone.

Too many Christians spend their time wasting energy by trying to flap their spiritual wings without much success. That is, they maintain their efforts through will power alone, rather than discovering the power of the Holy Spirit to help them. There's only so much we can achieve in God's kingdom through self-effort.

Have you noticed that the Christians who accomplish great things for God in the world today have one thing in common? They all rely on the Holy Spirit to help them. Those who rely on self-effort, without the need for the Holy Spirit, can only achieve so much in God's kingdom. I have also discovered something else that is interesting.

Churches today, that depend on the Holy Spirit, are much larger than the ones that don't; obviously there are always exceptions to this, so don't get offended if you are a small church that's attempting to do your best in the kingdom of God. For those of you who have read my books before, you will know that I have often criticized some of our big churches for becoming too complacent at times. However, this does not change the fact that a lot of large churches owe their growth to depending more upon the Holy Spirit, rather than depending on self-effort alone.

Size is not everything, but I have also noticed that some churches; those that have been around for many years going nowhere, often do not believe in the operation of the Holy Spirit and his gifts in the lives of

Christians today. Again, there are always exceptions to this. More people need to move towards the need of the Holy Spirit in their lives than ever before, but we still have a long way to go to get every born again believer filled with the Holy Spirit. I am convinced that there is a good ministry of getting people filled with the Holy Spirit; especially for those who are considering how they might be able to serve God effectively in these last days of time.

Returning to Ezekiel 1:10, the four faces of these living creatures represent the balance that God wants to establish in a Christian's life today. God uses people and not buildings. He uses Christians who will not let fear take hold of them but, like Jesus, they need to become as bold as a lion through the energizing power of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

They need to be people who will not shy away from work in the kingdom of God. They should be people who know how to soar on the wind of the Holy Spirit, just like an eagle does. And for those who will learn to soar on the wind of the Holy Spirit, they will travel greater distances for God; in a spiritual sense that is.

Sometimes we need to take a long hard look at our lives to see if they match up to the example of the living creatures as depicted in Ezekiel 1:10. I suspect that many Christians struggle today because they don't have

balance in their lives. Some even come to a full stop, not knowing how to proceed forward for God and the advancement of his kingdom.

It's very easy for Christians to hit a brick wall, not because God's isn't speaking to them, but because they back themselves into a corner with no room for escape. I have witnessed this in people on a number of occasions, some of who become their worst enemies. God is not one dimensional, and neither is his kingdom.

And when we limit our focus into thinking that God can only work in a certain way, and then we can miss the opportunities that are waiting for us in his kingdom. I believe in prayer, but not as a substitute for serving God; prayer and serving God at the same time work well together. And if I am going to make one aspect of my prayer life dominant it is this. I will pray for God to pour more of his Holy Spirit into me so that I can take up the challenge of promoting God's kingdom whenever and wherever I can.

So if you have been facing a brick wall lately, or you have been trapped in a dark cave of your own creation, then it's time to make a move. It's time to do something different that will help catapult you into serving God effectively. Don't let the devil fool you into thinking that the kingdom of God only works in a specific way. Ask God to give you a revelation about the workings of his kingdom, and start by considering which aspects of the four faces of Ezekiel's living creatures are missing in your life today.

I once attended a seminar at Princeton University's Theological Seminary in New Jersey. The subject of the seminar was, '*Paradigm Thinking And The Kingdom Of God.*' This seminar was hosted by the leadership of the Presbyterian Church in America. The idea was that the Presbyterian Church needed a paradigm change in how they approached the need to serve God within their congregations.

For too long the Presbyterian Church had led their congregations from the front, rather than utilizing lay people within their services; yes they used lay people, but not as much as they had wanted to. In other words, the church needed to move its center of gravity from the pulpit and into the congregation. Although this may not sound very radical to many churches, it was a complete paradigm shift in how the Presbyterian Church of America wanted to approach service in the kingdom of God.

This seminar provided a lot of food for thought in that many Christians hide behind the leaders of their churches. Church leaders have enough to do when it comes to running their churches. Therefore, what they really need are volunteers to get out in the community and bring the gospel to those in need. In other word, don't rely on your church leaders to come up with all the good ideas, learn to rely on the leading of the Holy Spirit when it comes to works of service located in and around your church; obviously in conjunction with your church leaders.

Just because your pastor is not involved in a particular aspect of church life doesn't mean that you cannot fill the gap for them. And don't criticize your church leaders for not covering all the bases when it comes to works of service in the kingdom of God, in your local fellowship. Be the one who stands in the gap and provides the much needed service that your church leaders may not be able to handle at the time.

There are two final aspects of Ezekiel's vision that I want to cover in this chapter of my book. Ezekiel 1:11 tells us that the wings of these living creatures pointed outwards and upwards. In other words, our service within the kingdom of God must first be centered on God above; not on churches or people around us. We are not justified before others; we are always justified by God. Our justification comes through what Christ did for us on the Cross; therefore works of service must follow and not proceed what Christ did for us at Calvary.

Each wing then touched the creature on either side. This represents the fact that once our justification rests in what Jesus has done for us on the Cross, and God is the center of all that we do, and then we can become a blessing to our fellow brothers and sisters within the body of Christ. If what we do in the kingdom of God has no discernible impact on other people, then we need to have a rethink about what it is we are trying to achieve for God. Remember, God has given us common sense; so there's nothing wrong

with evaluating our efforts to make sure that we are not wasting time and effort where it is not needed.

In Luke 13:6-9 NIV, Jesus provided us with an interesting parable about evaluating our efforts which goes something like this: *'Then he told this parable: " A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ' For three years now I ' ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven ' t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil? ' " " Sir, ' the man replied, ' leave it alone for one more year, and I ' ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down. ' "*

There's nothing wrong with eventually discontinuing a work that does not bear fruit. Obviously it is important to give a work time to develop, as we can observe from the above parable. However, it's a complete waste of time to constantly involve ourselves in a work that wastes everybody's time including our own. It is often better to move on from something that requires a lot of effort but does not produce results. Too many people start a work and feel religiously obliged to maintain it, even when it has no impact on the community.

I once preached at a church where about five people were in attendance. From my recollection, this church has been in operation for

over twenty years, and most of the time five people attended its meetings. This is a clear waste of everybody's time, effort and money. Sadly, there are probably lots of ministries out there similar to this little church. Effort put into a work going nowhere will only waste our energies.

Returning to Ezekiel 1:11, each creature had two wings covering its body. In other words, Christians need to make certain that they have the protection of God's armor on them before they go into service for God; this is something that I have written about in my book *'Armor of God.'* We should never attempt to do anything in the kingdom of God until we have first learnt to stand against the devil's evil schemes by wearing the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:11).

The enemy will have a field day with anyone of us who do not adequately find protection through God's armor. And nowhere will we find the attacks of the enemy more potent than when we attempt to serve God in some capacity within his kingdom. No one is immune to the attacks of the enemy, and if we don't like the heat of those fiery darts, then don't go into the kitchen unprepared.

The devil likes people to presume that they are the only ones he is attacking, especially when they make every effort to serve God on a day-to-day basis. And if the enemy can put you off from works of service within God's kingdom then he will. However, if you are prepared to enter the

spiritual warfare that affects every servant of God in the field of service, and not runaway at the first sign of trouble, then God will uphold you in your endeavors.

Understanding the need for the armor of God in the life of a Christian goes a long way in helping us to stand for God in our attempts to serve him (Ephesians 6:10-20). Also, understanding that we all have a common enemy in the evil one helps us to recognize what we are up against when spiritual warfare comes our way; forewarned is forearmed!

Although there is a lot more to say about the visions that Ezekiel received from God, I want to conclude this chapter with a final thought about these living creatures. In Ezekiel 1:12 it says that wherever the spirit would go they would go. Presumably the word '*spirit*' in this context refers to the Holy Spirit. As we have already alluded to throughout this chapter, being led by the Holy Spirit is a fundamental requirement when it comes to living for God and serving him (Romans 8:14).

Both the Old Testament scriptures, chiefly Ezekiel 1:12 and New Testament scriptures, chiefly Romans 8:14 encourage all Christians that we need to allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit. Any resistance to the prospect of being led by the Holy Spirit can cause a number of problems for us. First, by not following the Holy Spirit we are in danger of following our own inclinations; thereby detaching ourselves from the head; who is Christ.

Without directions from the Holy Spirit we will end up going down a route that takes us nowhere. Our efforts need to be energized by the Holy Spirit because he is also part of the body of Christ, to which all born again believers belong.

Second, by not following the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we open up ourselves up to hardness of heart and unbelief. Without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to guide our steps in parallel with God's word, then we have nothing to go on when it comes to receiving direction within God's kingdom. This is God's kingdom and not our own. It does not operate like the businesses of the world, through board meetings, schemes and plans and forecasted sales figures.

The kingdom of God operates through the unction of the Holy Spirit; therefore those who want to serve within it need to get with the program. I have heard too many excused from people who think that they can engage in the activities of God's kingdom based on their own harebrained ideas. The kingdom of God is an organic body that depends upon the anointing of the Holy Spirit, through the direction of God in his Son Christ Jesus, who are responsible for advancing it forward.

I apologize for being so blunt, but I have seen too many people cause havoc in the kingdom of God; they are nothing but nuisances, who have done more to discourage people from the kingdom of God than anyone else

has. The Holy Spirit is one of the most important keys to God's kingdom, after coming to God through Jesus Christ; and if we ignore the important work of the third person of the Holy Spirit within God's kingdom, then we do so to our own detriment.

Finally; operations within the kingdom of God, which are devoid of the Holy Spirit, can lead people to the creation of something that is religious in nature. This can very often cause confusion in the minds of genuine believers; those who have a deep desire to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in their own lives. Religion sucks people in; genuine Christianity liberates people and sets them free to serve God in refreshing ways. Religion is a control mechanism that lacks true purpose and is void of God's anointing.

Religion that is void of the Holy Spirit creates a vacuum. But he's the thing! There's no such thing as a vacuum in the kingdom of God. If something is created within the confines of God's kingdom that does not represent the work of God through the Holy Spirit, then something else will take its place.

That is, religion that fills a vacuum because it does not operate through the work of the Holy Spirit cannot remain in that vacuum forever; something else will take its place; that something else usually relates to the work of the enemy. So if you want to remain in a place of safety and

productivity within the kingdom of God, and then make certain that what you are involved in relates to the work of the Holy Spirit in your church; otherwise you are on a hiding to nowhere!

Ten

Put God First

I once had a dream which went something like this. In the dream I was living in an apartment block which only housed three sets of people. I lived on the first floor of the apartment block, someone else lived on the second floor and finally an older man lived on the third floor. One day I decided to open the front door of my apartment, possibly to let some air in. Suddenly, the man from the third floor entered my apartment and went into my kitchen.

I was startled by his entrance into my home, as he proceeded to make himself a sandwich. He searched my cupboards and found the ingredients he needed to make himself a snack. At first I watched on in amazement, not really knowing what to do. The elderly man appeared to be very much at home in my apartment, almost as if he had the right to be there. When I reached the point of total annoyance, I approached the man and told him to leave my kitchen. He looked at me in total surprise.

At no time did this gentleman speak to me, but I could almost read his thoughts. Slowly but surely I motioned this man to leave my house;

eventually he left and I closed the door behind him. As I was pondering this dream, God spoke to me. He told me that the old man in my dream was the devil, who had entered my home because I had left a door open for him to get into the kitchen.

God then showed me that because I had allowed sin to remain in my heart, the devil had made himself at home in my life and he was gradually using up my resources. In other words, poverty would come upon me if I continued to leave a door open to my soul. The devil would usurp his authority against me and gradually take away the things that belonged to me.

Obviously this dream and its interpretation were only applicable to me, although sometimes other people can find encouragement in a word that God provides to someone. But here, we need to be very careful that we do not follow a word that God gives to one person, presuming that it belongs to us, because this can lead us into error.

One of the problems I have encountered in today's modern church is when someone of prominence receives a word from an angel, and then presumes such a word applies to the rest of the body of Christ. And this should be a warning to all of us, should we encounter an angel who claims to bring a message from God to us; we must be very careful to weigh it against scripture. We should not presume that God speaks to the body of

Christ, through one specific individual, just because they have received a word or instruction from an angel. Such a presumption can open us up to all kinds of problems.

In 1 Kings Chapter 13 God provides us with an event, which will help us understand that angels cannot contradict the word of God, or cause us to deviate from the path God has put us on. After the death of Solomon, his son Rehoboam came to power in 1 Kings Chapter 12. Sadly, Rehoboam did not listen to the wise counsel of the elders, but put his trust in the advice of his young companions; who encouraged the new king to treat the citizens of Israel more harshly than Solomon did.

The citizens of Israel rebelled and left Rehoboam to rule Judah alone. The rest of Israel chose Jeroboam to rule as king over them. Because Jeroboam feared that Rehoboam might take back Israel from him, he created two golden calves for people to worship (1 Kings 12:28). He placed one calf in Bethel and the other in Dan. He also built shrines on high places and appointed priests who were not from the tribe of Levi. In other words, Jeroboam did that which was evil in the sight of God.

God sent a word to Jeroboam, through a man of God, warning him that a son called Josiah would be born to the house of David. Josiah would commit the sin of offering human sacrifices on the alter that Jeroboam had

set up in Bethel. The prophet also told Jeroboam that the alter would split in two and the ash would pour out from it (1 Kings 13:2).

After the man of God had given the prophecy, Jeroboam stretched out his hand and cried "*Seize him!*" But then the hand that Jeroboam's stretched out towards the man of God shrivelled up, the alter split in two and the ash poured out from it (1 Kings 13:4-5). Jeroboam then asked the man of God to pray for him so that his hand would be restored (1 Kings 13:6).

In this passage of scripture, we discover that the man of God had followed the instructions to bring God's word to Jeroboam as thus says the Lord. And along with the prophetic word that God had given the man of God, he was also instructed not to eat bread or water during his visit to Bethel, even though Jeroboam had encouraged him to do otherwise (1 Kings 13:7-9).

When God put it on my heart to start writing Christian books, he also put it on my heart precisely how to conduct my ministry. Despite the fact that I wanted to undertake other secular work, as well as writing books, I knew that God wanted me to trust him with the calling he had placed on my heart, and not go out seeking other work. In other words, not matter what other people might say to me about how I should live my life, it was

vitaly important that I followed God's instructions and leant to trust him to provide for me.

When God calls people into service for him, he often puts instructions on their hearts so that they might accomplish precisely what he has intended for them. I have discovered that in my ministry I have to be careful not to be diverted from the call God has placed on my heart. It is surprising to discover how many people think that they know what God's will is for another person's life.

Here's my encouragement to any of you who have a desire to serve God sometime in your future. Learn to ignore the advice of others; those who the devil often uses to prevent you from moving forward in God's purpose for your life. Yes always be open to good advice, but not to the detriment of your ministry.

One of the most prominent reasons why people discourage others from undertaking ministry is jealousy. Satan is very good at using other people to draw genuine servants of God away from the work that he has called them to accomplish in Jesus name. You are not compelled to listen to your critics, instead listen to the leading of the Holy Spirit in your heart, and then you won't go far wrong.

This is where Christians who have been called by God need to be careful and trust God's word to their heart. I have never accepted a word

from somebody else telling me what God's will is for my life. Yes, I have been encouraged by words that have supported instructions which God has already given me. However, I have never accepted any advice that contradicts anything God has already placed on my heart to accomplish for him. Had I listen to my critics, I would never have done anything for God.

There will always be someone who will come along and tell you to do something that is in direct contradiction to that which you believe God is calling you to do for him. And such contradictions can come to us camouflaged in a language that sounds spiritual. People will even suggest that because they have been on the road longer than us, then they have something positive to contribute to our lives; such contradictions are often an excuse for someone to exercise pride and authority over us.

The man of God who brought the prophetic word to Jeroboam was no different to us. He had been given strict instructions concerning precisely what God had told him do, but then another older prophet came along to divert him from his path. We need to be aware that God will sometimes limit the instructions he gives to us.

This is so that we might continue to walk by faith rather than waiting for a fresh word from God every five minutes. When God only gives you part of the picture concerning your future, do not be tempted to let other Christians fill in the blanks. Walk by faith; do not lean on your

own understanding and do not lean on anyone else's understanding for that matter (Proverbs 3:5).

Too often I have experienced Christians, including church leaders, who will try to add additional instructions for us to follow concerning God's call on our lives; instructions that will only slow us down. In 1 Kings 13:14:16 an old prophet of God went after the man of God, who had just prophesied to Jeroboam; he invited him to his home so that he could eat and drink with him. And here's where things get interesting. The old prophet told the man of God that an angel had instructed him, by the word of the Lord, to bring him back to his house to eat bread and water (1 Kings 13:18).

There are a number of issues that are raised in this passage of scripture. First, the old prophet claimed that he had received new instructions from an angel. Not only so, but he adds God's word to what he claims this angel had said to him. One of the ways that people can be deceived today is when someone states that they have received instructions from an angel, and then backs up their claim by stating that God himself has confirmed such instructions.

In other words, people use a two-fold application of instructions and God speaking to them in an attempt to validate their claims. That is, people will back up one erroneous word with another. For example, they will say that God spoke to them in their hearts; they will then claim they

received an additional word through someone else to support what God originally said to them. When people do this we can be led by a word that may not have come from God in the first place. Just because someone claims that they have received additional confirmation to a word, supposedly coming from God, does not necessarily validate that word.

Many of us have come across prominent evangelists on Christian TV, who have taken their instructions from an angel. They then lead lives that cannot be supported by God's word. If words we receive do not match up with God's word, then they have not come from God (Galatians 1:8). With respect to the account of the old prophet in 1 Kings Chapter 13:18, scripture states that the man was actually lying.

Through my training to become a lawyer, I have been taught how to both examine and cross examine witnesses. It did not take me long to discover when a witness was lying to me. At first, when I would cross examine my witnesses, I was a little gullible. I presumed that they would always speak the truth. Slowly but surely I began to detect the little signs that indicated my witnesses were telling lies.

As a Christian training for the Bar, I was too nice. One of the attorneys, who taught me, told me that I was too kind to become an advocate. As Christians, we can become too trusting; and there's nothing wrong with trusting people. However, we must not become gullible. There's

no account in the gospels of Jesus ever being fooled by people. In fact John 2:24 clearly states that Jesus trusted nobody.

The problem for the man of God, who had come to prophecy to Jeroboam, was that he was too trusting when it came to the old man of God. He went back to the old prophet's house to eat and drink; then God brought the proper word through the old man of God in 1 Kings 13:21-22. God told the prophet that because he had disobeyed the Lord, he would not be buried in the tomb of his ancestors.

As the man of God continued on his journey, a lion came across his path and killed him (1 Kings 13:24). Now here's the good news! Just because we may let other people divert us from the path God has placed us on, does not mean that we will be killed by a lion. However, what this lion symbolises is that anyone who interferes with our instructions from God could temporarily kill off the work we are doing for him.

And what I mean by temporarily killing off God's work of ministry through us is that God will not let anyone stand in our way, as long as we learn to listen to God and ignore our critics. Yes, we may be temporarily diverted from that which God has called us to do. However, unlike the man who was killed by the lion, God will restore our ministries back to us once we have returned to the word God originally placed within our hearts.

God will never send angels, or people, to bring us a word that contradicts what he has already spoken to us within our hearts. And this is a safety mechanism that God has placed within us; it's called peace (Colossians 3:15). When God places his word within our hearts, it will come with a sense of peace. When someone attempts to contradict that word or add to it, then that peace will be disrupted.

Angels are never permitted to replace the word that God has already provided to us; they can only confirm such words. The correct understanding, concerning how angels are permitted to interact with us, provides us with additional safety; should we encounter them. And this is very important. If we are in danger of becoming deceived by angels, then God will restrict their access to us.

Remember, we are all part of one body! Therefore, if angels contradict how others conduct their activities within that body of Christ, then they have probably not been sent from God in the first place. It is always the case that God's word comes first and angles come second; not the other way around. As I stated above, a prominent evangelist, who once was very popular on Christian TV, was clearly deceived by following instructions from a female angel, or so he claimed.

This particular evangelist was very good at attempting to verify his claims, but remember what I said about my legal training? It did not take

me long to recognise that this individual was actually telling lies to people; and this particular individual was good at deceiving people simply because he had deceived himself. Had he been permitted to continue his deceit, he could have led many trusting Christians astray. And the problem with such delivers is that they put people off from receiving genuine visitations from God's angels.

I need to repeat something that I said earlier in this book. The angels that I have encountered have hardly ever spoken to me, let alone provide me with instructions from the Lord. This is not to suggest that God's angels do not whisper in our ears and guide us from time-to-time. And here I must distinguish between God's leading and voices in our heads. I have never followed any instructions emanating from voices in my head. I hear far too many Christians use the words, "*I heard God tell me to do this.*" Very rarely do we hear these same people admit when things go wrong for them and that the voices they were hearing was not from God.

I want to conclude this chapter by reiterating a point; God often sends angels to help and guide us, even when we are not aware of it. However, they never provide us with additional information that contradicts God's word, or take away the peace that God has already given to us. You may not like hearing all the constraints that I am laying down in this book, when it comes to the interaction of angels in our lives. However, I am not

doing this to be negative, I'm doing this to provide you with help should you ever encounter angels in your life.

One evening, not too long ago, my dreams were interrupted and I found myself in what I can only describe as a wide open field. This field was full of market type stalls, with people serving the crowds that were gathered there. As I approached one of these stalls, I recognised two angels standing there. One angel appeared older than the other. In fact, I got the impression that one angel was being trained by the other.

I also got the impression that angels may not all be the same age as each other. I had always presumed that all angels were created at the same time, but this may not be true; scripture does not elaborate any further on this point. It may in fact be that some angels are more experienced than others. Whatever the case may be, one of these two angels was being trained up by the other; someone who came across as a novice.

I got into a brief conversation with these angels about my Christian book writing ministry. Suddenly, the novice angel began to speak to me about the kind of life I would lead in eternity. The angel told me that when I got to heaven I would not need to employ my energies writing anymore. All of a sudden, the second angel gently rebuked the novice angel. The senior angel said, "*He's not supposed to know such information,*" or words to that effect.

As the dream ended, I pondered the information concerning what the novice angel had provided me with. I recognised that what the angel had said to me may have been out of context with the kind of life I might live, once I reach heaven. In other words, the angel had spoken out of term as far as I was concerned.

Therefore, I have not put much weight behind what the angel said to me. The angel may have very well be correct in stating that I would not need to do much writing when I get to heaven. However, because the information that the angel gave me was so unimportant or incidental, I have not let it have any impact on me whatsoever.

Just like we might ignore what other people may say to us, I have learnt not to always accept what an angel may said to me, such as this one in my dream. And to be honest, this was the first time that an angel had engaged me in conversation to this degree. The experience was slightly out of context with any previous experience I have had with angels. And after all, this angel added nothing to my walk with God.

We are safe when it comes to angels, when we have a good grasp of God's word in our hearts. I am convinced that many Christians forego interaction with angels, simply because they do not have sufficient understanding of God's word, and would find it hard to distinguish between what is genuine and what is erroneous when interacting with them.

The problem for the man of God, who prophesied to Jeroboam, was that nothing he said to the king amounted to very much in the final analysis. It says in 1 Kings 13:33 NIV, *'Even after this, Jeroboam did not change his evil ways, but once more appointed priests for the high places from all sorts of people. Anyone who wanted to become a priest he consecrated for the high places.'*

Our successes in God's kingdom are incidental to whether or not we interact with angels. Jeroboam saw God's word come to pass in his life through the prophet of God; as his hand withered; as he was healed; and after he saw the alter break in two before him. But Jeroboam did not repent. If whatever experiences in our lives do not bring us closer to God, then they are not always worth seeking after.

The only thing that counts in the kingdom of God is that we are born again, filled with his Holy Spirit and that we might draw closer to the Lord each day of our lives. So never let anyone distract you from the course you are on, whether it's people, angels, demons or signs and wonders. God wants to bless his children with all of the above, but never to the detriment of drawing closer to the Lord.

So continue to seek after God, trust him and watch out for his ministering angels who may be visiting you unawares from time-to-time. And above all, remain expectant and excited because God has much more

in store for all of us in the days ahead, despite the fact that the days are growing darker than ever before.

Eleven

Angels Doing God's Will

Before we move onto discussing the role of angels in the New Testament, let us conclude our Old Testament account of angel by considering their activities in the Book of Zechariah. There is no doubt, from Old Testament scriptures, that angels have a clear operational role in the administration of God's kingdom; both in heaven and on earth. Modern day Christianity has to a large extent filtered out the role of angels when it comes to God's dealings with his church. However, nowhere in scripture is there any evidence that God has demoted angels in any way.

I am convinced that the written word is our guide and safety net when it comes to instructing the church. However, this does not mean that we should fear an interaction with angelic beings whenever God sends them to help us. When we reach the shores of heaven, I am certain that many of us will come across angels who will tell us that they watched over our lives during our period of time on earth. We will probably be surprised by how much God's angels took care of us without us even knowing it, or acknowledging their role in our lives.

Turning to Zechariah Chapter 3, we find Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord. Here we discover the interaction of angels in God's dealing with the high priest. At the beginning of Chapter 3 we find Joshua, the Lord himself, satan and the angel of the Lord all located in close proximity to each other.

Suddenly, the Lord announces his credentials by proclaiming that he is the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem; then he rebukes satan who had come to accuse Joshua before God. The problem for Joshua was that he wore filthy garments, which represented the outwards legalistic self-righteousness of those who followed the law.

It is important to recognise that Zechariah was God's prophet during a period of time when God was releasing Israel from their captivity in Babylon. Israel had rejected God, served false idols and had totally rebelled against God's law through the Leviticus priesthood, which Joshua now represented as he stood before the Lord.

Like Joshua's and Israel, too many of today's Christians have ended up in bondage by observing an outward judgmental code of religion; which is far removed from anything that God would have us involve ourselves in. Jesus came to set us free, not to let us get tied up in a yoke of bondage to a legalistic form of Christianity which lacks power.

Scripture warns us not to get involved with a form of godliness that denies God's power (2 Timothy 3:5). God's power represents the Holy Spirit, along with all the forces of heaven which are at our disposal; including the administration of angels in the affairs of God's people. If we reject God's power, we reject God's administration of that power through the Holy Spirit and through his angels, who have been given responsibility for our protection within the body of Christ.

Because the prophet Zechariah was open to all that God had made available to him, he was granted visions of what was really taking place in heaven; this included the impact of God's judgment on the Children of Israel. But now they faced a new challenge of leaving Babylon and returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and its walls. But first God had to remove the old garments of religion from Joshua the high priest, who represented the rest of Israel. Then he would be in a position to wear the new garments that represented a new covenant, which symbolically would eventually come through the Branch, who was Jesus (Zechariah 3:8).

It was in fact the angel of the Lord who stood before Joshua and ordered his fellow angels to remove the filthy garments from him (Zechariah 3:4). Here God had no problem in permitting the angel of the Lord to order the removal of Joshua's filthy garments; the angel of the Lord then instructed his fellow angels to complete the task. The angel of the Lord

informed Joshua that he had taken away his sin and he was about to put new garments on him (Zechariah 3:4).

It may come as a complete surprise to many Christians that angels were involved in the removal of Joshua's sin; they were also involved in placing new garments of righteousness upon him. We only need to look back at Isaiah 6:6-7 to recognise that it was one of the seraphims, who had taken a live coal from off of the alter, touched Isaiah's mouth with it and proclaimed that his guilt had been taken away and his sin had been atoned for.

Obviously, our sins have been removed through the shedding of Christ's blood on the Cross at Calvary. However, this insight into the activity of angels in the Book of Zechariah shows us how much they have an involvement in the administration of God's kingdom; both on earth and in heaven. I stated at the beginning of this book that it is not sensible to think that God alone administers the entirety of his kingdom single handily. But many Christians mistakenly believe this.

Yes God hears and answers our prayers, but how he administers the answer to those prayers is up to him. Most likely, God administers the answer to our prayers, along with the rest of his kingdom, through angels. So what is our responsibility with respect to the administration of God's

kingdom on earth? Our responsibility is to both proclaim God's kingdom to the lost and to administer his kingdom through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Here's a news flash for you! We cannot help in the administration of God's kingdom here on earth unless we are full of the Holy Spirit, as I have discussed previously in this book. Unless we come before God every day and ask him to continually fill us with the Holy Spirit, then our efforts to help in the administration of God's kingdom will amount to very little. We cannot put the cart before the horse when it comes to doing things God's way.

Jesus brings us into God's kingdom and the Holy Spirit empowers to operate within it. And should we attempt to help in the administration of God's kingdom without the Holy Spirit, and then all we will have to show for it is more religion and even more demonstration of our own flesh life. And without the infilling of the Holy Spirit, we will not enjoy the rest of the gifts God has made available to us; we will not experience dreams and visions and we will not have our eyes opened to see what God's angels are up to in the body of Christ.

As I have indicated earlier in this book, too many Christians are running on empty when it comes to their role in the kingdom of God. Many Christian are wearing themselves out by attempting to administer God's kingdom through their own self efforts. And as we have also considered

before in this book, many churches resort to gimmicks so that they might constantly motivate their members into action.

Personally, I am convinced that the closer we get to the Second Coming of Jesus the more we are going to need oil in our lamps. In Matthew 25:8-9 we discover that as the time of the arrival of the Bridegroom drew closer, the foolish virgins neglected to maintain oil in their lamps. Oh yes they had lamps just like the wise virgins, but they did nothing with them. Effectively they let those lamps run dry.

Those lamps would not work unless there was sufficient oil in them to provide light. Likewise, the light of God's kingdom will not shine through our lives unless we come before God each day so that he can constantly refresh us with the life giving waters of the Holy Spirit. These foolish virgins were so desperate that rather than going to God for the oil they needed, they thought that the other virgins would provide for them.

Listen, other people can only motivate us so far along our journey with God. Unless we get the oil of the Holy Spirit directly from God, then we will not be able to effectively serve Him in the way that we are supposed to. The wise virgins quite rightly told the foolish virgins that they could not depend upon them for the source of their oil. They needed to go directly to God if they were to secure the oil that they needed to light their lamps.

We cannot always live off of other people's experiences in the kingdom of God. We need to seek God for ourselves and get our own spiritual experiences directly from him. Far too many Christians are influenced by those who have chosen to follow God from a religious perspective; people who are void of the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Let me provide you with an important warning here! Do not let yourself be influenced by people who are not filled with the Holy Spirit, or by people who do not see the need to be constantly filled with the Holy Spirit on a day-to-day basis.

Recently, I allowed myself to fellowship with people who did not agree with the constant need to be filled with the Holy Spirit; some of these people did not even believe in the operation of the Holy Spirit, let alone gifts, dreams, visions and angels emanating from God's sanctuary. The period of time I spent with these religious Christians was absolutely dreadful. I should have known better than to associate with them. Rather than me encouraging them in the things of the Holy Spirit, they were drawing me away from the fundamentals of Christianity which I was accustomed to.

I started to doubt the operation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people today. I even spoke differently about the Holy Spirit, relegating him to a period that belonged to the past. But God rescued me from these

deceivers. So why am I telling you this? I am telling you this to protect you from those who do not believe in the operation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians today, so that you won't fall for the error that I almost fell into.

Because Zechariah was open to God, he was able to receive extraordinary visions concerning God's purpose to bring Israel out of captivity. Not only so, but he was shown that a Branch (Jesus) who would come in the future to remove the sins of God's people. But before all of that, God needed to remove the sin of religion from Joshua and cover him with clean garments of righteousness (Zechariah 3:5).

God revealed to Zechariah what he wanted to do through Joshua the high priest, who was symbolic of the rest of Israel at the time. But God could not use Joshua effectively until he allowed himself to be purified by the Lord. Likewise, two things need to happen to us if we want to go deeper with God and experience all that his kingdom has to offer us.

First we need to let God purify us and turn us into vessels of honour (2 Timothy 2:20); a theme that I have considered many times in my books. God can only turn us into vessels of honour when we are willing to quit habitual sin in our lives (2 Timothy 2:22). For too long we have battled with sin to no effect. It is when we realise that only God can break the bondage of sin that we can truly be set free.

When it came to dealing with my own addiction to sin, for years I tried to deal with it myself. But when I came to the end of myself, I recognised that prayer was the only way to deal with my uncontrolled flesh life. Each day I would come patiently before the Lord and ask him to break the bondage of addictions in my life. Nothing much happened to begin with, but as I remained faithful to pray each day miracles began to happen. That which I had attempted to do myself for many years God did with ease. Prayer took the effort away from me and put it all on God.

It is important to make a point about habitual sin here. Habits only gain power in our lives through addiction. If I am not addicted to something, then I will not be tempted by it. Habits can only form where we are addicted to things. Praying for God to break habits in our lives will have no effect upon us until the strong man of addiction is broken. So do not pray that God will free you from habits, but ask God to set you free from the root cause of habits, which is addiction. And when you do this, you will find that your prayers become more effective and soon you will be free.

Along with praying for God to deal with my addictions, I also prayed that he would fill me again with the Holy Spirit. I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit when I was quite a young Christian. What I did not realise was that I needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit constantly. I combined praying for God to break my addictions with praying for more of

the Holy Spirit; this combination of prayer worked quite effectively in my life, glory to God! However, if you have particularly strong addictions in your life, you may need to pray for them and nothing else; until God sets you free.

And here's a warning for those who start out praying for God to deal with addictions in their lives. Don't get discouraged if God does not answer your prayer straight away. Keep praying to God without putting a time limit on him. God does not like the word 'Now.' In other word, if I pray to God and say that I want him to set me free now, or heal me now, I won't get much of a response from him. However, if I leave the answer to my prayers in God's capable hands, then he will come through for me in his good time.

Remember, prayer is not for God's benefit, it's for our benefit. Patient long-term prayer is extremely effective, and when we start to see God's answers breaking through into our lives then our faith will increase substantially. Like Joshua, once we let God remove the filthy garments of addictions from our live and start wearing the new garments of righteousness, then we will start to experience God's kingdom in a new way.

Too many Christians are still on the starting block of God's kingdom, simply because they have let sin reign in their mortal bodies

(Romans 6:12). But when we come to God in prayer, he will do what we have attempted to do for ourselves in no time. He will set us free and he will fill us again and again with the power of the Holy Spirit. And when we come before God to constantly fill us with the Holy Spirit, we won't become exhausted by attempting to help administer his kingdom in our own strength.

As we conclude this chapter, we need to recognise that Joshua could not receive the new garments pertaining to his future while ever he was still wearing the filthy garments of self-righteousness; as epitomised through the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses was not wrong, but the application of that law through sinful people only led to an outward observance of what righteousness was all about.

Such an outward observance of religion, which only pleases people, will never bring about the full realisation and revelation of God's kingdom in people's hearts. In other words, we will never experience the joy of those clean garments of new life while ever we are wearing the old garments of self-righteous religion. And I repeat what I have just stated above. Self-righteous religion only please people, it does not please God.

Here we need to make a distinction between outward religion that pleases people and a transformed heart that pleases God. The angel instructed Joshua that God wanted him to walk in obedience to God and

keep his requirements, especially if he was going to govern God's house and have charge of his courts (Zechariah 3:6-7).

In order for God to get us to keep his requirements, he needs to move his word from off the pages in the bible and transplant them into our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33). In other words, we need to move from having head knowledge about the things of God and gain heart knowledge instead. If scripture is only something that we read in a book, then we have not let God fully into our hearts.

We need to let God plant his word in our hearts so that the Holy Spirit can energise it; motivating us to serve the Lord according to his will and purpose for our lives. And he's the point! God's will for me is not the same as God's will for you. We are not carbon copies of each other; one purpose does not fit all. We will never find God's will for our lives while ever we are trying to find it in other people.

Today is God calling you to enjoy a more personal and intimate walk with him, where he can reveal wonders that you never thought you would experience this side of heaven? Because Joshua allowed God to deal with him on a personal level, as seen through the eyes of Zechariah, he was permitted to see right into the future, when God would bring Israel to a place of peace and where sin would be removed in a single day (Zechariah 3:9-10).

If what God did with Zechariah and Joshua was glorious under the Old Covenant, what is God capable of doing with us under the new covenant today (2 Corinthians 3:11)? Don't limit God because you have been influenced by the unbelief in other people. Come to him afresh today and ask him to purify your heart. Ask him to remove the old garments of religion from off of you. Ask him to clothe you with the wonders of his kingdom and all that it entails.

Don't listen to those who tell you that angels belong to the land of make-believe. Listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches, and allow yourself to go on a personal voyage of discovering all that God's kingdom has to offer you. Don't let anyone limit what God is capable of doing in your life, and above all, never let church, people or religion stand between you and what God wants to do in and through you.

Now that we have considered the administration of angels in the Old Testament, let us consider their operation in the lives of New Testament saints in the rest of the chapters of this book.

Twelve

Angels And God's Favor

By the time we reach the Gospels, we discover that angels are still fully involved with the affairs of those who serve God. In Luke Chapter 1 there is an account of the role of angels in the life of God's saints. This particular account of angels in the gospels relates to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. During the time of King Herod, Zechariah was a priest and along with his wife Elizabeth; both were righteous in the sight of God (Luke 1:6).

Both Zechariah and Elizabeth, like Abraham and Sarah in the Old Testament, were old and childless. One day, when Zechariah was in the temple burning incense, the angel of the Lord appeared to him (Luke 1:11). The angel told Zechariah that his prayers had been heard: "*Elizabeth will bear a son and you will call him John.*"

This angel not only appeared to Zechariah, but he was permitted to prophecy into his life and provide exact details about his son; including what to name him. What is interesting about this angel is that he provides Zechariah with similar information to that which had been given to people

in the Old Testament; those who had similar dealings with angels in times past. That is, the work of this angel in the Gospel of Luke was consistent with the work of angels in the Old Testament.

After telling Zechariah that the birth of his son would bring joy to him and many would rejoice at his birth, the angel also told him not to give his son wine, and that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth (Luke 1:15). These instructions are similar to the information Samson's parents received from an angel in Judges 13:7; something that we have discussed in an earlier chapter of this book.

After telling Zechariah that John would bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God, the angel also told him that he would go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah; to turn the hearts of the parents to their children, to turn the disobedient towards the wisdom of the righteous, and to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:17 NIV).

In other words, this angel was providing consistency between the activities of angels in the Old Testament with the activity of angels in the New Testament. And this is a very important aspect of the work of angels and their relationship in with God's people today. Angels have the hallmark of God upon them; as would be the case with men and women of God.

In other words, because angels come directly from the presence of God, then they will carry the presence of God with them. Therefore, no angel that comes from God's throne will be backslidden or disobedient when it comes to anything to do with God, or the things of his kingdom. They will not be rebellious and they will not provide instructions that are contrary to what is already written in the bible.

In the same way that you would not receive spiritual motivation from a backslidden Christian, neither would you receive any such instructions from an angel that does not comply with the things pertaining to the glory and holiness of God. Therefore, any angel that tells us to do as we please in the kingdom of God, or to drink liquor, or to act in a way that does not lead us closer to God is not someone we should take any notice of.

Can you imagine an angel turning up and telling us not to read our bibles, not to worry about attending church and not to worry about how we should live our lives before other people, etc.? Can you imagine an angel turning up and telling us to prophecy something; but not to worry about checking its validity with scripture first? A visitation from an angel in our lives does not mean that we suddenly lose all common sense.

In other words, this account of the meeting between an angel and Zechariah provides us with the clarity we need concerning instructions we may receive from angels today. This angel in Luke Chapter 1 portrays

godliness, holiness and encouraged Zechariah to raise his child likewise, along with the fact that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth; someone who would bring people in Israel back to the Lord.

Therefore, any angel that provides us instructions that are contrary to walking before the Lord in holiness; someone who does not encourage us to engage in activities relating to the promotion of God's kingdom down here on earth does not come from the throne of God. Again, consistency between what is written in God's word and what this angel is saying to Zechariah is key in discerning between angels and demons along with good and evil spirits.

At this point in the chapter, it is worth diverting our attention towards distinguishing between good and evil spirits, just for one moment. Many Christians do not understand what good and evil spirits are. Although scripture does not provide us with a great deal of explanation about good and evil spirits, and the distinction between angels and demons, let us consider what these differences might be.

We know that angels come from God and are good; demons come from the devil are evil. So what are spirits? Spirits are probably supernatural beings that do not possess any form of physical body. People who are possessed by demons, on the whole, are most likely possessed by

spirits and not fallen angels; contrary to what many Christians believe today.

Angels that have fallen from grace, so to speak, are probably locked up in chains until the day of judgement (2 Peter 2:4). However, some of these fallen angels are probably generals in Satan's army that wage spiritual warfare against us. Demons, on the other hand, are spirit who desire to possess human bodies, which is how we get demon-possessed people. As stated above, all demonic activity is unclean and comes under the direct control of the evil one.

However, the bible states that there are good and evil spirits, who may occupy the universe (1 Corinthians 12:10). Good spirits, like demons, may not possess a body because (again) they are spirit. Remember that the Holy Spirit does not possess a body that we know of, although I am not suggesting that the Holy Spirit does not have his own body, simply because scripture provides us with no information on such matters.

Good spirits may be messengers, sent out from God, to provide instruction to his saints here on earth, as well as in heaven; they may operate almost like a delivery service. This is why we need discernment to be able to detect whether or not these good spirits are relaying information that is for our benefit and not for our harm. There are probably many types

of created entities that live in heaven that we have not been told about; something that we will learn more about when we enter eternity.

We know that scripture has provided us with clues about different angelic beings such as cherubims (Genesis 3:24), seraphims (Isaiah 6:10) and the like, so we cannot exclude the possibility that there are many types of supernatural being that we don't know anything about right now. Because this book specifically relates to the function of angels in the life of believers, we cannot divert our attention towards other potential types of created entities that may or may not exist in heaven. For now, we can recognise that there is probably a distinction between angels, fallen angels, bad spirits (demons) and good spirits (God's messengers).

Returning to Luke Chapter 1, although Zechariah knew that he was talking to an angel, he did not believe any of the good news he was bringing to him (Luke 1:18). This provides us with an important insight into the meeting that took place between Zechariah and the angel. Just because someone meets with an angel does not automatically mean that they will believe what the angel maybe saying to them.

In other words, angels are not intended to increase anyone's faith, as was the case with Zechariah. Faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). So if we ask God to send us an angel so that we might believe more in him, then chances are that our faith won't increase

at all. I have been encouraged by my encounters with angels over the years, but I have never experienced my faith increasing after meeting them.

The only emotion I have received from meeting angels is that God loves me and cares enough to send his angels to help me in times of trouble; they are a product of his grace. So never seek God to send you an angel so that your faith will grow more, it won't work. Our faith grows the more we read the bible and the more we trust that God will come through on his promises for us; that is, after we have sought him in prayer. Angels never add to our faith, they only assist us in our walk with God.

Should an angel ever approach me to bring a prophetic word, the first thing I would do is get my bible out and check that it is consistent with what God has already stated in scripture. But what happens if an angel tells me to prophecy that Damascus is about to be destroyed? I would get my bible out, turn to Isaiah 17:1 and make sure that there is a record concerning such a disaster.

I need to raise another important point here. I never use the bible as a weapon against God's people; I only use it against the enemy and his demons during times of spiritual warfare. I never get my bible out and start firing scriptures at other Christians; effectively, I don't hit them over the head with the bible. I appreciate that some Christians do this when they

want to prove a point, but this can often have a negative effect on other people.

When I see Christians in difficulty, rather than getting my bible out and hitting them over the head with scriptures, I pray for them in the quietness of my heart. Yes, we use scripture when we preach, but we don't become preachers when we interact with our brothers and sisters on a day-to-day basis; simply because we are not called to act legalistically towards one another, we are called to act in love.

However, what should we do if an angel turns up and tells us not to get on a train because it will get derailed before reaching its destination? In such circumstances you probably don't have much to lose, except your life by not boarding that train. So if an angel told me not to get on a train I would not get on the train, but I would check to see if the words of that angel came to pass. But what would I do about the rest of the passengers boarding that train?

Here's where we need wisdom. If an angel tells me not to get on a train that will crash during its journey, it would be obvious to me that the angel is attempting to spare my life and not necessarily the rest of the passengers on board that train. Remember, God is powerful enough to prevent that train from moving away from the platform if he wanted to save everybody else's life on that journey. The fact that the angel is personally

warning me or my family does not necessarily mean that the warning is for everyone.

Should I attempt to warn other passengers that the train is about to be derailed could mean that I am attempting to divert God's overall purpose for the rest of the passengers on that train. I appreciate that, as humans, we want to save lives. However, never presume that God wants to do the same, otherwise nobody would ever die. However, this does not mean that we should not prevent someone trying to jump off of a bridge in an attempt to commit suicide, as long as we don't place our own lives in danger. I appreciate that we can be quite squeamish about death, but God is not, otherwise he would not have sent Jesus to die on a Cross for us.

Once, I went to listen to an evangelist from the United Kingdom. He was someone who began to tell a story about a young man in his church who approached him to pray for his mother; she had contracted cancer. The young man wanted the evangelist to pray that God would heal her. When the evangelist sought God about praying for this young man's mother, he was told not to pray for her.

With regret, the evangelist told the boy that he was not able to pray for his mother. A few days later the boy returned to the evangelist with the local newspaper in his hand. He had discovered an advert about someone coming to town who claimed that he could heal any kind of sickness. The

evangelist told the young man that this healer probably could cure his mother of cancer, but there would be no point. If he prayed for his mother to recover from cancer, she would still die shortly afterwards. God had told the evangelist that it was his will to bring the young man's mother home to glory; and in fact she died a few days later.

I am convinced that it is God's will to heal the sick. However, God's healing can never take away God's perfect will to bring someone home to glory; especially when it is their time to leave planet earth. Yes I have heard people seek God when they have discovered that they are dying, and he has healed them completely; he did this with Hezekiah and gave him fifteen more years of life (Isaiah 38:5). However, this does not always happen with everyone. It can be very hard to accept that it is not always God's will to prevent one of his loved one from dying (Psalm 116:16).

Returning to Zechariah's episode of unbelief in Luke Chapter 1, the angel then told him that he was Gabriel. He also told Zechariah that he was someone who stood in the presence of God and he had been sent to bring him good news. Again, the revelation of this angel's name is consistent with Daniel's account of Gabriel, who came to reveal to him the meaning of the visions God had given to him (Daniel 8:16).

Gabriel did not just bring God's word to Zechariah, he also prevented him from speaking; due to his unbelief, until his son John was

born (Luke 1:20). But even God's judgment on Zechariah, through Gabriel, was seen as a sign from God when the people saw that he could no longer speak (Luke 1:22).

Sometimes we need to wait and see what God will do in some of our own circumstances, where he has provided a word, rather than just going around telling people before something comes to pass in our lives. This can provide a safeguard to protect the kingdom of God from falling into disrepute, especially when people bring words that never come to pass. Like you, I have heard far too many people prophecy words that have not come from God and have never come to pass.

I once heard someone tell me that there would be an earthquake in the town where I was born; a town called Rotherham. I have not lived in that town for many years, but I have remembered this prophecy which was given by a Christian from the church where I found Jesus. Recently, the person who gave the prophecy died before the prophecy was fulfilled, even though he said that the word would come to pass in his lifetime. I have stopped worrying about this potential earthquake taking place in my birth town.

After Zechariah had completed his term of service at the temple, he returned home and Elizabeth conceived (Luke 1:24). Nine months later, John was born; and eight days after his birth, Zechariah and Elizabeth took

their son to the temple to be circumcised. When he was about to be named Zechariah, after his father, his mother spoke up and said that he was to be called John; even though no one in his family had ever been called John before (Luke 1:59-61).

When they asked Zechariah what his son should be called, he wrote on a tablet the name '*John*'. In other words, Zechariah demonstrated his belief that God had caused these events to take place, and that his son would indeed become John the Baptist (Luke 1:62-64). At this point, Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied about the coming of Jesus as Messiah, and that his son John would prepare the way for him (Luke 1:67-79).

I want to conclude this chapter by stating that angels have nothing to do with increasing our faith, but they have everything to do with God's demonstration of grace in our lives. When Elizabeth became pregnant, she said the following in Luke 1:25 NIV, “ *The Lord has done this for me, ” she said. “ In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people. ”*

As in the case of Zechariah, angels are sent to us because of God's favor and for no other reason. We cannot make doctrines out of anything angels say to us. We cannot expect our faith to increase, just because we have encountered them at some point in our lives. But what we can do is

recognise that angels represent God's favor poured out upon us, which demonstrate an aspect of God's love towards us. And just because we may not receive a visitation from angels does not mean that we cannot find God's favor in our lives, just like Elizabeth did.

As I have said before in this book, just because we may not have physically seen angels does not mean that they are not evident in our lives. I don't mean to take anything away from angels, but when we reach heaven we will probably discover that angels are common place. Just like us, they will be worshipping the Lord, carrying out his commands and enjoying the benefits of eternity; as they are doing now.

Finally, angels are not above humans or above their decision-making processes. Currently we are a little lower than the angels, simply because angels can operate both in heaven and on earth (Psalm 8:5). They are not superior to us and neither should they be disregarded. The problem today is that they tend to be disregarded rather than being recognised as part of God's kingdom; agents of God who are sent to help us in our times of need.

So do not dismiss the work of angels in your life today, they have probably been looking after you for quite some time now. And when you get to heaven, do not be surprised if an angel comes up to you one day and tells you about how much they looked after you while down here on earth.

Remember, angels are part of God's unmerited favor, which is being demonstrated to you throughout the course of your life!

Thirteen

God's Word Never Fails

In Luke 1:37 the angel Gabriel said to Mary, the soon to be mother of Jesus, that no word from God will ever fail. In other words, everything written in God's word, every prophecy and every promise will come to pass when we place our trust in them. But let me clarify what I mean here! Every prophecy that has been written in both the Old and New Testaments will come to pass whether we believe in them or not.

However, many of God's promises can only be activated by faith, prayer or they are conditional. That is, if I read one of God's promises in the bible, they are general in purpose until someone appropriates those promises to themselves. For example, if it says in John 3:7 that we must be born again, then no one will be born again until they accept and believe on Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour; and that he is the only way to God. The entire world is not born again, just because there is a scripture in the bible saying that we must be born again.

Likewise, if God's word says that he will supply all our needs according to his riches in glory (Philippians 4:19), he will not supply

everyone on the planet's needs unless they put their trust in God's promises. God's promises will remain in a state of dormancy, within the pages of the bible, until we appropriate them to ourselves by faith.

Although most of God's promises are acted upon in the same way, some promises are conditional. That is, if we do something for God he will do something for us. For example, if God's word says: "*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then God will hear from heaven, he will forgive our sin and he will heal our land*" (2 Chronicles 7:14 NIV, paraphrased).

Therefore, some of God's promises are acted upon by some specific action required of us through obedience. Some promises are acted upon when we put our full trust in God's word, despite our circumstances. Many of God's promises in the bible can be appropriated to ourselves, not because we are good or super spiritual, but because God is a god of his word.

Many Christians suffer poverty or ill health simply because they have not acted upon God's promises written specifically for them in the bible. When God's word says that by his stripes I am healed, then all I need to do is receive God's healing and believe that specific promise written in the bible, despite my circumstances (Isaiah 53:5).

Remember what I stated earlier in this book, some of God's promises are appropriated to us over time. They are also appropriated over time as our faith grows through prayer. God is no respecter of persons when it comes to his promises. He did not include his promises in the bible, and then added a side note next to them saying, "*These promises are for everyone who will believe in them, except for Jane Smith from New Jersey.*"

Can you see how silly it would be for God to provide his promises in the bible, and then include a list of people who cannot receive them? But many Christians think like this. They think that they need to be special in order to receive God's promises; this my friends is a lie from the evil one. However, God's promises do belong to a category of people who will seek after them, and that category of people is called '*Born Again Believers.*'

The majority of God's promises in the bible belong to God's people; those who have fully accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. God's promises belong to those who have been adopted into his family and are known by him as his sons and daughters (Ephesians 3:1-5). That is, God knows those who belong to him (2 Timothy 2:19). And because we are known of God, he has left these promises behind in the bible so that we might activate them in our times of need.

And here's the point! I myself did not start to turn towards God's promises until I hit desperate times in my life; although we don't need to

reach desperation before seeking out God's promises in the bible. I had heard the testimony of many people who have turned to God's promises in the bible during their own time of need and not before.

But the key to God's promises relates to the fact that they are provided for those who have called upon the name of the Lord and are saved (Romans 10:13). In other words, God's promises are part of our inheritance, because our names are written down in the Lamb's Book of Life (Luke 10:20). Therefore, if you are truly born again, then God's promises are for you.

Returning to Luke Chapter 1, six months after the angel Gabriel had visited Elizabeth with the news that she would bare John the Baptist, he also visited her cousin Mary with some more good news. Mary was just an ordinary girl, someone who had been pledged to marry a man called Joseph (Luke 1:26-27). And again, Joseph is someone that scripture does not provide us with a lot of information about; except through the genealogy found in Matthew Chapter 1.

According to the genealogy of Christ, found in Matthew Chapter 1, Joseph could trace his ancestry right back through King David and all the way back to Abraham. If we consider the genealogy of Christ in Luke Chapter 3, not only can Joseph's ancestry be traced back through King David and Abraham, it can be extended back to Noah and right through to

Adam. Here's some good news! Not only can Joseph's ancestry be traced back through Noah and Adam, so can ours. And because our ancestry can be traced back through to Adam, and because we are born of God, then the promises in the bible belong to us too.

Because Mary was betrothed to Joseph, and because she was a Virgin, God had chosen her for a very special purpose. The first words that came out of the angel Gabriel's mouth, in Luke 1:28 were, "*You are highly favored!*" Why was Mary highly favored? Because she was betrothed to a husband who's ancestry dated back to Adam. Did you know that Christians are highly favored of the Lord? But why are we highly favored of the Lord? Because we can trace our ancestry back to Adam; and because we can also trace our spiritual ancestry back through Jesus, once we have received newness of life through the experience of new birth.

It is important that we all get this. Once we give our lives to Jesus, and once we have received the born again experience, we become highly favored of the Lord, just like Mary did. This is not because we are special but because our ancestry is in Christ, our High Priest, who's ancestry is like that of the ancient of days (Hebrews 7:17). That is, Christ's ancestry is of God, which has no beginning and no end; Christ is the alpha and the omega (Revelation 22:13).

Likewise, when God brought us into his kingdom, our ancestry becomes that of Christ, which also has no end. God's promises, therefore, are eternal and will carry on with us into eternity; and then some. Today, we need to recognise that God's promises are yes and amen in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20), and we need to appropriate them to ourselves.

God's promises are still gift-wrapped and unopened by those they are intended for. Many people are troubled by God's promises; they find it hard to believe that they have a right to access them through God's word. Mary was also troubled by the visit of the angel Gabriel in Luke 1:29. But the angel told Mary not to be afraid because she had found favor with the Lord.

The word that Gabriel brought to Mary was a word that we all need to take hold of in Luke 1:30. And that is, we too have found favor with God, even though we may not know it (Psalm 5:12). God's word cannot change and God's nature cannot change either. God is a giving god, but sometimes we Christians are not so good at receiving. We live in a world where most things have to be earned. But this is not the case when it comes to God's promises. As it says in Romans 8:32, *'How much more will God not also, along with Christ who he has already given up for us, give us all things?'*

The word from God, through the angel, is the same word that God wants us to receive today! We are highly favored of the Lord, and God's children need to recognise this. When we start to explore God's promises in the bible, and when we start putting our faith in them, then our walk with God will dramatically change. Mary would have had no idea that she was highly favored of the Lord. Today, many Christians need to recognise that they are also highly favored of the Lord, and that God has great things planned for their futures.

God had great plans prepared for Mary's future, and the angel Gabriel was about to reveal them to her. In Luke 1:31-33 Gabriel told Mary that she was about to conceive a son, who was to be called Jesus, the Son of the Most High. Her son Jesus would occupy the throne of David so that he could reign over Jacob's descendants in a kingdom that would never end.

Not only did Jesus die on a Cross for our sins, which is the most important part of our relationship with God, but he also died so that we might appropriate God's promises found in the bible. For example, he told us in John 14:16 that when he had gone to the Father, he would send the promise of the Holy Spirit to each and every one of us; which is precisely why the disciples prayed in the upper room to receive the Third Person of the Trinity. Likewise, there are many more promises available to us in the rest of the bible, if only we would seek them out.

The promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was not automatic. The disciples had to wait in the upper room to receive God's promise to them; as Jesus had instructed before his ascension in Acts 1:4-5. Apathy is something that affects many Christians, who think that all they need to do is accept Jesus Christ into their hearts, sit back and think of heaven. Yes, all we need to do for salvation is accept Jesus Christ into our hearts, but that's only the beginning of great things ahead that God has planned for our lives. Much of God's kingdom and the provisions for his kingdom are activated by faith, believing on God's promises written in the bible.

If there's one thing that I would encourage Christians to do today, this would be it! I would encourage all born again Christians to highlight God's promises in his word. I have already stated, in one of my books, that when I was going through difficult times I looked up God's promises in his word. When I did this, I noticed that many of God's promises complimented each other.

In other words, each separate promise backed up the other promises found in the bible. Most of God's promises related to the outpouring of his favor in the life of a believer. Each day I am fully aware that I am highly favored of the Lord, and each day I ask God to continue

pouring out his favor on my life. I have seen tremendous displays of God's favor in my life since doing this.

I am still experiencing God's favor over my life on a day-to-day basis. But there was a time when I did not really know about God's promises contained within the bible, and I did not receive his favor on my life each day. It was only when I did my research in scripture, and put all these promises together, that I discovered a new level of spiritual growth in Christ.

When I look back over my Christian life, it surprises me that I did not seek out and act upon God's promises earlier. Wouldn't it be sad to reach the shores of heaven, only to discover how much we had missed out on by not acting and trusting upon God's promises and favor that are incorporated into his word? Again, it is my prayer that God's people will open their eyes and seek out God's promises contained in the bible.

Unlike the visit of the angel Gabriel to Zechariah, in our previous chapter, Mary did not doubt what the angel was saying to her. I guess different people act differently to God's promises; some believe them, some don't. However, Mary did ask the angel how she could become pregnant when she was still a virgin, in Luke 1:34.

There's nothing wrong with asking God legitimate questions about his provisions for us, as long as we do not let doubt be the motive behind

such questions. In the case of Mary, Gabriel told her that she would conceive when the Holy Spirit came upon her; the power of the Most High would overshadow her (Luke 1:35).

In other words, Mary would receive a supernatural encounter with God that would bring his promise to pass in her life. When I started seeking out God's promises in the bible, I became curious about how God would bring his promises to pass in my life too. In reality, I was trying to work out God's promises from a natural perspective. I discovered God's promises to me in the bible, but I could not work out how they would be appropriated in my life.

There are three ways in which we can activate God's promises in our lives today. For promises that have a condition attached to them, all we need to do is act upon the conditions to see those promises realised in our lives. For promises that have no conditions attached to them, other than the fact we must be born again, something which is implied in scripture, we can simply trust God to bring them to pass.

The final way that we can bring God's promises to pass in our lives is to pray about them. We can incorporate God's promises into our prayer lives by asking him to bring them to pass. But here's the thing! God's promises are brought to pass in our lives through supernatural intervention.

That is, God's promises cannot be brought into realisation just through natural means.

Sometimes God will use natural means to bring his promises to pass in our lives. However, like Mary, God's promises and favour often require supernatural intervention to bring them to pass. And if we do not believe in God's supernatural provision in our lives, then we will have problems receiving anything from the hand of the Lord.

It is noticeable, from Luke 1:36, that Gabriel backs up God's promise to Mary by revealing that her cousin Elizabeth was six months pregnant, in her old age. In other words, Gabriel backs up one word of God, or one promise of God with another. As I stated earlier in this chapter, God is able to back up one promise, or one word of encouragement, with another to strengthen our faith.

And should we find three promises to back each other up in our times of need, and then we will experience God's three-fold supernatural provision taking place in our lives very soon. And when Mary heard the good report about her Cousin Elizabeth's pregnancy, the promise provided to her from God through Gabriel was reinforced. This is probably why Mary hurried to be with her cousin, in Luke 1:39-45. She was able to find mutual encouragement in Elizabeth, who had already become pregnant; that

is, because God supernaturally opened her own womb so that she could have a child through Zechariah.

It is vitally important that Christians encourage each other with testimonies about how God's promises have come to pass in their lives. Faith encourages faith and unbelief leads to poverty of the soul. Like you, I have come across a variety of Christians in my daily walk. Some believe God's promises and some don't.

The ones who believe God's word often come across as more dynamic in their walk with God than those who do not. I would advise anyone who wants to experience God's supernatural provision for their lives, through God's promises in his word, to avoid the doubters who may cast the shadow of unbelief over them. We don't always need to persuade the doubters, we just need to avoid being contaminated by their unbelief.

Mary did not seek out the doubters; she sought out her cousin Elizabeth, after the angel Gabriel had revealed to her about God's promise taking place in her life. And when Mary reached Elizabeth, these are the words she heard from her cousin, in Luke 1:45 NIV, "*Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!*"

Let me repeat that same word to you right now, '*Blessed are the ones who will believe that the Lord will fulfil his promises contained within the bible to them.*' I for one believe that God will always fulfil his promises

to me in the bible, and you should believe this too. To doubt God's promises is to doubt God himself. We need to believe that we are going to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living (Psalm 27:13), especially if we want to experience spiritual growth in our lives today.

Because God's kingdom is based on faith, then obviously there is no room for doubt. Zechariah doubted God until he saw God's promise come to pass in his life and in the life of his wife Elizabeth. Mary believed in God's promise to her, because she heard Gabriel testify about what had already taken place in the life of Elizabeth; that is, her cousin received God's promises, therefore she was ready to receive all that God had promised too.

As I conclude this chapter of my book, can I encourage you to seek out God's promises and favor contained within the bible. Can I also encourage you to fellowship with people who have experienced God's promises in their own lives so that you might find mutual encouragement. We started this chapter with the words of Gabriel found in Luke 1:37, "*No word from God ever fails.*" Mary then said to Gabriel, in Luke 1:38, "*I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled.*"

Let me finish chapter twelve of my book by saying to you, "*Let God's word to you, contained within the bible, be fulfilled!*"

Fourteen

God's Got Your Back

Our walk with God will not always be smooth sailing; we will have our ups and downs just like Jesus did. After Christ was born, it was not necessarily the joyous occasion that many of the Christmas carols might indicate to us. So let us recap on an aspect of Christ's life, when he was about two years of age.

Sometime after the birth of Jesus, the Magi decided to pay him a visit, according to Matthew 2:1. When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, seeking the king of the Jews as they put it, they stirred up a commotion among Herod and the rest of the city. Herod called together the chief priests and the teachers of the law in an attempt to discover the birthplace of the Messiah; they told Herod that Bethlehem was the place where the Messiah would be born, according to what the prophets had written in Micah 5:2-4.

On discovering where Jesus would be born, Herod asked the Magi to bring back precise information concerning his precise location; he was deceiving the Magi in that his ultimate plan was to kill Jesus (Matthew 2:8).

After the Magi had discovered Jesus, they worshiped him, but then God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod (Matthew 2:12).

It was at this time in the life of Jesus that he was now in danger of being killed by Herod. Therefore God sent an angel to warn Joseph to take Jesus out of the country to Egypt until after the death of Herod (Matthew 2:13-15). Herod then committed the hyenas crime of killing all boys in the vicinity of Bethlehem who were two years old and under.

It is unimaginable the devastation and heartbreak that Herod perpetrated on the innocent people of Bethlehem in his attempt to destroy Jesus. Rather than this being a time in history of great joy, it was much more akin to a nightmare. Likewise, when we come to Christ, not only do we experience a period of great joy in our lives, but this is also the time when the enemy will plan his campaign of attack against us.

When I first came to Jesus, I experienced joy beyond anything I had ever enjoyed before in my life. I was soundly born again, and my life completely changed, as I was transformed from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. But the evil one attacked my emotions, he tempted me with sin, and many of my friends lost interest in me.

But God began to direct my life, when I discovered that there was power in prayer. This was a time when God began to speak to me through the bible; every chapter I read stood out, as if God was speaking to me

personally through its pages. I discovered that the bible was like a manual for life, where God was able to direct me through the stormy waters that circumstances threw against me.

Returning to Matthew Chapter 2, it may be that Jesus spent a long time living in Egypt, until Herod finally passed away. Can you imagine being driven from your home because of who you are? Joseph and Mary must have feared for the life of their son, during these times of uncertainty, when an evil dictator ruled in their homeland.

Being a Christian does not mean that we are immune to difficulties and neither does it mean that the end of the world has come upon us. Jesus and his family faced their difficulties, but the devil did not have the last word with regards to their future. This was because Jesus had God's call upon him, and no matter what the enemy was up to, God's plan would come to pass in the life of his own Son.

Likewise, no matter what the enemy might be up to in the background of our lives, we have nothing to fear. God has a plan for the lives of every born again believer, and he will not permit the enemy to override that plan. But let me provide you with a warning here! God's plan does not kick in for our lives until we are truly born again. I appreciate that some nominal Christians might think otherwise, but there is nothing in scripture to support such a belief.

The reason for this is because being born again is God's ultimate plan for our lives. It's after we are born again that more of God's plan can be revealed to us over time. The enemy did not mount an attack against Jesus until he was born, and therefore the enemy will not mount an attack against us until we are soundly saved. The enemy can distract non-believers or even nominal Christians who have not given their heart to God. However, the enemy will not attempt to divert the plan for such people until they have fully accepted Jesus into their lives.

It wasn't until I was born again that I discovered both the reality of who God was, and the reality of what the devil was up to in the background of my life. Many Christians do not realise that the difficulties they face are down to the work of the evil one; they cannot see him, and sometimes they cannot perceive that he has been working against them.

Joseph would have had no idea that Herod was plotting to kill Jesus; until the angel warned him in a dream to move out of Bethlehem and head for Egypt. Who would have thought that God's plan was to move Jesus from Israel to Egypt? And yet God was able to provide his only begotten Son with refuge in the most unlikely of places.

God will also move his loved ones into the most unlikely of places so that they might find refuge in times of spiritual storm. We may think that we have got everything worked out, until something happens to turn our

world upside down. Have you ever found yourself facing circumstances that make no sense to you, and your life seems to be spiralling out of control? I have on many occasions. This is because God has a plan for you; and the evil one has got wind of it. Like a game of chess, the devil will make his move but the King has yet to make his final move to defeat your opposition.

If you have faced difficulties in your life, where you suddenly find yourself on a dead end street going nowhere, I want to provide you with a word of encourage today. God still has a plan for your life, and no matter what the enemy has thrown against you, God will deliver you out of all of your troubles (Psalm 34:19). And the greater the trouble you face, the greater God's plan is for your life.

I have discovered that the level of the enemy's attacks against us always coincides with the size of God's plan for our futures. Jesus had the most important mission that God ever gave to anyone on planet earth. However, no matter what the enemy threw against him, he could not defeat God's plan for Jesus. Although the devil had a plan to kill off Jesus before his ministry began, God had no intention of allowing the evil one to prevail. Here's some good news for you. No matter what has come against you in your life, in an attempt to defeat you, God will not let the enemy win!

When the angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, he instructed him to remain in Egypt until he told him otherwise (Matthew 2:13). There are a

number of lessons worth considering from this account of the angel visiting Joseph. First, the angel appears to Joseph in a dream. This does not mean that Joseph's encounter with an angel in his sleep makes such an experience less valid. On a personal note, it has taken me time to recognise that angels also visit me in my sleep.

I have also discovered that God sometimes speaks to me through dreams, as we have already discussed earlier in this book. Along with hearing God speak to me in my dreams, it did not take me long to discover which dreams were from God and which dreams were rubbish. I have received the most accurate instructions from God in my dreams, which have proved both encouraging and helpful in my daily life.

It is important to state here that when God starts to speak to you through dreams, the devil will get wind of it and start disturbing those dreams. Here the devil is attempting to distract your dreams so that you can't hear God speaking to you in the still of the night. When the enemy disturbs your sleep, don't just put up with it; rebuke him so that God can continue to speak to you!

I suspect that God has spoken a lot to me through my dreams in the past, but I have not been open enough to recognise when God was speaking to me; and when he was not. I want to encourage you not to be afraid to examine some of your dreams to see if there is a message from God in there

somewhere. Don't presume that God will speak to you every day through dreams, but occasionally there may be a message waiting for you in your spiritual inbox. And like receiving emails in the real world, never be afraid to delete the ones that are spam!

The second lesson we can learn from Joseph's encounter with the angel was the fact that he was instructed to remain where he was until he was told otherwise. In other words, the angel only provided Joseph with part of the puzzle; the angel did not reveal the rest of the plan for him and his family all in one go.

This is something that we may find useful in our own walk with God. God does not necessarily tell us the whole plan for our lives, in much the same way as Joseph was only given part of the instructions concerning Jesus. In other words, God's plan for our lives is often revealed to us piecemeal. This does not mean that God won't tell us whether or not we will become preachers, missionaries or whatever he has called us to do for him.

The angel Gabriel had told Mary exactly why Jesus had come into the world (Luke 1:30-33). What she and Joseph were not told were the finer details of the journey Jesus would take in his future. Likewise, we may have an idea about what God is calling us into; but God does not necessarily tell us what will take place in our lives every step of that journey. This is because God wants his children to walk by faith. If we knew everything

about God's plan for our lives, we might give up if we saw the tough things that God expected us to go through.

Likewise, if we saw the good things that God wants us to experience in our lives then we might become apathetic. But when we meet each challenge in turn, then we will be prepared to meet future challenges further down the line. In other word, by tackling each valley and each mountaintop experience one by one, then we will not become discouraged, especially if we thought that we had to face our challenges all in one go.

If we did face our challenges all in one go, then we would look at our difficulties without considering the solutions to them; leaving us with a sense of defeat. This is not God's purpose for anyone of us. God wants us to become more than conquerors over whatever circumstances we might or might not face in life (Romans 8:37). And that's something else we all need to be mindful of.

Let me provide you with some good news here! It is not always God's intention that we should face difficulties across the span of our lives. The evil one is very good at magnifying our difficulties in order to make us think that our Christian lives are always going to be full of trouble. This is not always the case. God's plan for our lives is that we might overcome in all things (1 John 2:14); and that we might recognise God's plans for us are good; they will not harm us (Jeremiah 29:11). So don't let the devil fool you

into thinking that there will always be trouble ahead; as I stated above, we are more than conquerors through him who loves us.

When I look back over my life, I am certain that I would not have been able to stomach some of the difficulties that came my way had they come at me all at once. But now, when I look back over my life, those difficulties don't look like difficulties at all. They look like victories, because I can now see that it was God who gave me the victory throughout all of my circumstances.

Therefore, should we perceive any future difficulties that we might face on our journey with God, we need to recognise that God is also there with us giving us the victory; and God is also there with us supplying the grace that we need to face the challenges ahead of us. I can testify that it is God's plan to give us the victory over and over again, time after time.

The third lesson we can discover from Joseph's encounter with the angel was that he needed to remain where he was for now. According to Luke 2:41-42, every year the parents of Jesus went up to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. We can presume that Joseph would not have taken his family to the Passover at Jerusalem during their exile in Egypt.

Luke's Gospel states that when Jesus was twelve years of age, they went up to the Passover; as was their custom. So we can presume that Joseph spent a number of years in Egypt, patiently waiting to receive

further instructions from the angel of the Lord, concerning the next step of the family's journey; therefore it is safe to presume that Joseph and his family may have remained in Egypt for a year or more.

Can you imagine how patient Joseph and Mary must have been, waiting to receive instructions about returning to the land of their birth? Likewise, we need to learn the lesson of patience when God puts us in a location where we have no ideas when we will move on. Rather than struggling over where God has located us, at whatever point we may be at in our lives, my advice is to remain exactly where we are until God tells us to move.

Sometimes God will bring us to an unexpected place in our lives for our own spiritual safety. He will sometimes remove us from people who will not provide a benefit to us. He may remove us from people that are a potential detriment or threat to us; like he did when he moved Joseph and his family away from Herod. And sometimes that threat may not always be obvious to us. Sometimes God may even move us away from the distractions that would interfere with our spiritual progression within the kingdom of God.

Sometimes we need to stop struggling, stop trying to move on and settle down where God has placed us for the time being. We need to stop watching the clock and accept that we are exactly where God wants us to

be; even though we might not agree with such a decision. It is very likely that Joseph and Mary may not have been happy to live in Egypt, but Joseph was told to remain where he was until the angel told him otherwise. Although Joseph and Mary were in a strange land, they were right in the centre of God's plan for their lives; they were right in the centre of God will for Jesus.

I want to encourage you today, no matter where you are, as a born again Christian you are exactly where God wants you to be. So stop fighting, stop trying to change your circumstances, and let God's plan for your life unfold over time. Any attempts we make to change our circumstances, under our own cognisance, could put us in the way of something that the enemy might be planning against us.

I have learnt to remain exactly where God has put me, at whatever stage I have found myself in life; good or bad and whether I like it or not. Oh yes, I have argued with God over where he has placed me on many occasions. But lately, I have learnt to get comfortable where God has put me; and I have made the most of it. Remember, a day will come when we will be living in splendour when we reach the shores of heaven. But for now, by God's grace, let us learn to be thankful for wherever God has place us because God never makes a mistake; God is well able to turn your desert into something that you can rejoice about (Isaiah 35:1).

Here's some good news for you, according to Matthew 2:19, Herod died! And after Herod died, the angel returned to Joseph in his dreams and told him to take his family back to Israel; those who were trying to kill Jesus were now dead (Matthew 2:20). Sometimes God wants us to remain where we are until those who might oppose us are moved out of the way.

Sometimes God's moves us out of the way until the right people are in place to support us in our future ministries. Sometimes God will move us from one church to another because the opposition has increased against us; even when we may not be aware of it. Sometime God moves us because the church we attend may have moved out of God's will; and any attempts on our part to remedy deep rooted problems may come to nothing.

Sometimes God will move us away from other people; people who we think are good to us, but have ulterior motives that would cause a detriment to what God wants us to do in our futures. God sometimes moves us away from well-meaning people, who do not understand that God is taking us in a different direction to them. Sometimes God will move us so that we might get alone with him, so that we might seek to draw closer to God. Sometimes God may remove us from our workplace, simply because there is no real future in staying where we are, even though we might think otherwise.

In other word, there a vast number of reasons why God may move us into situations which we think are not beneficial to us; we don't always recognise that the alternative could be worse. When God first moved me away from the city and into the country, I was not pleased with such plans to say the least. It has taken me a number of years to recognise that I am exactly where God wants me to be. And when I recognised that I was exactly where God wanted me to be, I received a peace beyond understanding.

Let me encourage you today to discover God's peace wherever he has placed you. Do not presume that you are out of God's will because you have ended up somewhere not of your own choosing, or you are not in the place you think you should be. Submit to God's will for your life wherever that may be.

Learn to wait until God gives you alternative instructions, no matter how long you feel you have to remain where you are. Recognise that God may have moved you so that you might remain where you are over a longer period of time than you have anticipated. Submit to God and trust that you are exactly where he wants you to be. Don't kick against the pricks because you may end up kicking yourself (Acts 9:5 KJV).

As we conclude this chapter, there is one more point that needs to be made. Although the angel had told Joseph that it was safe to go back to

Israel, there is no mention that the angel was being specific about location at this point. Scripture does not state that the angel told Joseph to go back to Bethlehem. When Joseph and his family got to Israel, they discovered that Herod's son Archelaus was ruling Judea in his stead (Matthew 2:22).

Because Joseph was afraid to go to Judea, the angel once again gave him clear instructions, in Matthew 2:23; so he withdrew to Galilee. Joseph's fear, which provided him with further guidance from the angel of the Lord, led him to bring up Jesus and his family in Nazareth; something which was in accordance with prophecy (Matthew 2:23). In other words, nothing that happened to Joseph and his family was by accident, all the events that had taken place so far were according to God's divine plan for their lives; including Joseph's fear of returning to Judea, which was also part of God's plan.

So today, I want to finish this chapter with these words relating to our walk with God, '*We have nothing to worry about.*' We may have let circumstances trouble us, simply because we may not have recognised God's hand in them. I for one do not believe that God leaves anything to chance when it comes to the lives of born again Christians.

Therefore stop worrying and start submitting to God's plan for your life, even though you may not fully understand it. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6).

God's got your back, he's prepared the path ahead of you and there are more good days ahead for you than you might realise.

Fifteen

Do Not Fear The Sanhedrin!

By the time we reach the death of Jesus Christ, on the Cross for our sins, it starts to become apparent that angels have a role to play in encouraging the preaching of the gospel. This is probably why the apostle Paul said that if we or an angel from heaven should preach a different gospel let him come under God's curse (Galatians 1:8).

The preaching of the gospel is the most important aspect of the life of any Christian, even though this may not be the focus of some of our churches today. It is my firm conviction that angels have an involvement in encouraging Christians to preach the gospel and minister to the body of Christ, simply because the enemy attacks this aspect of our Christianity more than any other thing.

To be frank, the devil will do all that he can to prevent the preaching of the gospel wherever and whenever he can, because he does not want people leaving the kingdom of darkness to join the kingdom of God. Therefore, it makes perfect sense that God will provide his angels to

encourage and assist people in the preaching of the gospel. He will also provide angels to encourage whatever ministry we have relating to the body of Christ, wherever possible.

After the death of Jesus, in Matthew Chapter 28, the two Mary's went to look at his tomb; they had gone to visit his dead body. During their visit to the tomb, there was a violent earthquake and the angel of the Lord came down from heaven (Matthew 28:2). This particular angel went to the tomb, rolled back the stone that was protecting it and sat upon it.

Such fear was there, at the sight of this angel, that the guards collapsed like dead men. In Matthew 28:5-6 NIV the angel said to the women, "*Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.*" In effect, this angel was the first person to ever preach the good news that Jesus had risen from the dead; praise the Lord!

Although God has consigned the preaching of the gospel to people, this does not mean that angels have no part in such matters; which is a concept that some Christians may find hard to fathom. I have heard ministers preach from pulpits that angels have no part in the message of the gospel of salvation; a belief that is not evidenced in scripture.

The bible tells us, in Revelation 14:6, that the apostle John saw an angel flying through mid-air, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to

everyone who lived on earth. If we believe that humans alone have the sole responsibility for the preaching of the gospel, not only do we contradict scripture but we will also miss out on the help and strength we need to evangelise and minister to the lost.

There were a number of times, in the gospels, when angels came to strengthen Jesus (Luke 22:43). The angels knew that there would be times when even the Son of God would struggle to complete the mission God had given him. When it comes to the preaching of the gospel, or ministering to the body of Christ, we too need to ask God to send his angels to help and strengthen us with such a monumental task.

In my visits to various towns and cities, in our western civilisations, I have noticed that the preaching of the gospel on street corners is almost non-existent. It wasn't very long ago that the preaching of the gospel was taking place in almost every city in the western world. I am convinced that the enemy has done everything in his power to minimise the preaching of the gospel wherever he can.

Yes we can still see the gospel preached on Christian TV, but not every non-believer watches Christian TV. I am not suggesting that everyone in our churches have been called to get involved in mass evangelism. However, God will give every one of us the opportunity to drop a word into the ears of unbelievers; telling them that there is hope in Jesus Christ.

After the angel had told the two Mary's not to be afraid, and after he had shown them the empty tomb, he then gave them instructions to go and tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead; and that he had gone ahead of them into Galilee where they would see him (Matthew 28:6-7). Today, Christians need to hear the same words that the angel spoke to the two Mary's, "*Do not be afraid!*"

As I indicated above, the preaching of the gospel is probably the biggest battleground there is for today's Christians, as was the case after Jesus had risen from the dead; and as we shall consider in the Book of Acts later in this chapter. And if we do not accept the need for God to send his angels to help us in the '*Great Commission*' then we will struggle to effectively preach the gospel in our local towns and cities.

There have been many times when the enemy has tried to stand in the way of my own personal ministry, by sending me discouragements and confusion from time-to-time. But the biggest attacks that have been levelled against me, from the evil one, always seem to relate to the preaching of the gospel.

I have often spoken about spiritual warfare in my books, but nothing compares to the spiritual battle surrounding individuals who want to preach the gospel. Can you image how much spiritual warfare must take place against whole churches that want to engage in evangelism? Recently,

I asked a pastor why his church did not overtly preach the gospel in their Sunday night services. He told me that it was against church policy to overtly preach the gospel; this particular church did not want to put people off from coming to the meetings, especially if they heard someone preaching the gospel at them.

I suspect that this pastor is not alone in his misguided thinking; particularly when it comes to overtly preaching the gospel. Too often we consider the obstacles that might stand in the way of the preaching of the gospel, rather than considering the benefits of witnessing souls coming to Jesus. And whenever the enemy puts up obstacles to prevent the preaching of the gospel, God's angles will find a way of defeating them.

When the apostles started to preach the gospel, in the book of Acts, they came under tremendous opposition, to the point that many of the disciples lost their lives. However, not all of them lost their lives, and the gospel was still preached in accordance with the will of God. And this is exactly the case when the apostles began to preach and demonstrate the power of God, through signs and wonders, in Acts Chapter 5.

In Acts 5:12-16 we find the disciples demonstrating the compassion of Jesus by witnessing, and by seeing people healed every day when they met at Solomon's Colonnade; people were even healed when Peter's shadow passed over them. The high priest and the Sadducees were

so jealous concerning what the apostles were doing that they had them arrested and thrown into jail (Acts 5:17-18).

The difficulties that the apostles and disciples endured, in the Book of Acts, is no different to what the enemy would throw at us today; especially when we attempt or preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. We may not always be thrown into jail, but the enemy will attempt to make us prisoners of our own circumstances, so that he can distract us from the call of God to preach the gospel.

For the apostles who were thrown into jail, that was not the end of the matter. God sent the angel of the Lord to the apostles during the night to release them (Acts 5:19). And no matter what the prison of our own circumstances is, God is well able to send the angel of the Lord to us and make certain that we do not remain in chains forever; praise the Lord!

And here's where it gets interesting! After the angel of the Lord sprang the apostles from jail, he instructed them to stand at the public temple courts and tell the people all about this new life; that is, tell everyone about the gospel of Jesus (Acts 5:20). In other words, it did not matter how much the authorities did not like what the apostles were doing, the angel of the Lord was giving them clear instructions to carry on preaching about this new life in Jesus Christ.

In effect, the angel was telling the apostles to ignore the religious leaders of their day and get on with serving God. Friends, have you been put into spiritual chains of bondage by Christians who should know better; those who refuse to let you carry on with your ministry? If you were to meet this same angel of the Lord, who instructed the apostles to continue with their ministries, what would he say to you today?

I will tell you exactly what he would say to you; he would tell you to ignore the jealousy of other people and carry on with the ministry God has given to you, whether that includes preaching the gospel or encouraging other Christians. Jealousy is the number one sin that often causes people to prevent Christians from following their dream, their vision or the ministry God has given to them.

I cannot tell you how much discouragement I have received from other Christians concerning my own ministry. But there's one thing that I have learnt throughout my life. God is my boss, when it comes to deciding when to use my ministry. Opposition against ministries often comes from Christians around us, more than it does from the world. Yes there will be times when the world will oppose us, but most of my persecution has come from other Christian, and even churches.

I have learnt that being subject to God sometimes means that we cannot be subject to our churches. God's word instructs us that we should

fellowship one with another, but not when our churches become religious and controlling (Hebrews 10:25). It takes great strength of character to conduct your own ministry when there is so much opposition out there coming from some of our church leaders.

Talk to some of the great ministries taking place across the planet, and on Christian TV, and many of these folks will tell you the same thing. They will tell you that most of their opposition has come from religious churches; something that they would not have initially expected. So never feel that you are alone when it comes to any opposition focused against your ministry. Here's my advice to you, ignore the religious Christians and get on with it!

The apostles were not put off by the religious leaders of their day; they continued preaching the gospel in public, despite the opposition. When it came time for the Sanhedrin to deal with the apostles, they discovered that the jail was locked but no one was home (Acts 5:23). Having discovered that the apostles were back out on the streets, the captain of the guard brought them back to the Sanhedrin for questioning.

Even though the Sanhedrin gave the apostles strict instructions not to teach in Jesus name, Peter and the others said something interesting in Acts 5:29, "*We must obey God and not human beings.*" This is one of the

most important scriptures for anyone wanting to develop their own ministries; that is, we must obey God and not human being!

In fact, what Peter and the apostles were implying here was that they were going to listen to the instructions they received from God, through the angel of the Lord, and not through the religious leaders of their day. Friends, I would rather listen to an angel that encouraged me to serve God than a Christian who told me otherwise; and the bible cannot be plainer than that!

There are too many people today who are being held back from developing their ministries, simply because of the jealousy of their church leaders; those who fear their own positions within the kingdom of God, just like the Sanhedrin did. The problem is that many Christians feel guilty when they are opposed by their own church leaders, as if they themselves are in the wrong, which is often not the case.

While the apostles were stood before the Sanhedrin, a wise Pharisee, called Gamaliel stood up and provided some much needed wisdom (Acts 5:34). Gamaliel advised the Sanhedrin that if the purpose of the apostles was of human origin it would fail. However, if what they were doing was from God then the Sanhedrin would not be able to stop them; simply because they would end up fighting against God (Acts 5:38-39).

Even though the apostles were not given an easy time before the religious leaders of their day, they were able to continue the ministry that God had given to them. It says in Acts 5:42 NIV, *'Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.'*

There are too many people who do not give Christians the opportunity to develop their ministries today; thankfully some do! But on the whole, it can be very difficult for new ministries to get off the ground; this is often due to the lack of support from some of our Christian churches. Not all churches are the same and not all church leaders are jealous of new ministries sprouting up all over the place.

My advice to those who have discovered that their churches are less than helpful, when it comes to developing their ministries, is to learn to bypass them. Either find a church that will support you, or go it alone if you can. And if the ministry that you are trying to develop is of God then it will flourish over time, if it is not, then you have nothing to lose; at least you were trying to serve the Lord with all your heart. And if your ministry is of God, no human being will be able to stop what the Lord is trying to develop through your life. This is because you belong to God and your ministry belongs to him too, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

I want to finish this chapter with some encouragement concerning how God used Philip to help the Ethiopian Eunuch, in Acts Chapter 8. In this Chapter of Acts, the angel of the Lord gave the apostle Philip strict instructions to go south down the desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza (Acts 8:26-40). After obeying the instructions of the angel of the Lord, Philip came across an Ethiopian Eunuch; an important treasury official responsible to the queen of the Ethiopians.

The Holy Spirit then sent Philip to the Ethiopian's chariot, where he heard the man reading from the Book of Isaiah (Acts 8:30). The Ethiopian was actually reading from Isaiah 53:7-8, where Jesus was led like a lamb to the slaughter. Philip was then able to use scripture to explain the good news about Jesus Christ to the Ethiopian Eunuch, so that he could find Jesus for himself. And after the Eunuch had accepted Jesus into his life, Philip was able to baptise him in water (Acts 8:38).

God is able to send his angels to open the way for you to preach the gospel anywhere in the world, as was the case with Philip. Philip, most likely, did not ask God to send his angel to instruct him. However, he would have had an open and willing heart to serve God wherever that was possible. Like Philip, the apostles and the disciples lived during a time where it was hard to preach the gospel.

The religious leaders of the day did not support the apostles and the disciples, and the occupations of the Romans did not believe in just one God; the Romans worshiped many false gods. But through it all, God had a remnant of people who were neither religious or supporters of the Roman occupation of Israel at the time; a people who believed in God, who believed in the impossible and who believed in the intervention of angels in their lives.

Just like we have discovered in the Old Testament books of the bible, from the earlier chapters in this book, God's angels were just as active among the New Testament saints as they were among the saints of old. And if God's angels were active among the New Testament saints, after Christ's resurrection, then where are they today? Let me tell you that some Christians just will not accept that angels are actively involved in their lives today; as I have already discussed in earlier chapters of this book. I know this because I have met people who have not believed my own encounters with angels throughout my life.

I've got some good news for you! When Jesus returns, at his Second Coming, he's not coming alone; he's coming with all the angels who have helped in the development of his kingdom down here on earth, just as they have in heaven (Matthew 16:27). Your angels, who have helped you on your journey, will arrive with Christ. You will be able to meet them and you

will discover how much they have been involved in your life; and you will rejoice.

I am convinced that those who reject angels are rejecting God who sent them. To me angels are a normal natural (or supernatural) aspect of our walk with God within his kingdom; anyone who says otherwise is spiritually blind to what the kingdom of God is all about. The kingdom of God is about preaching the gospel and feeding God's sheep by any means necessary.

When the apostles and early disciples died, angels did not die out with them. The Holy Spirit did not cease to exist, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit did not stop being poured out upon all flesh (Joel 2:28). The gifts of the Holy Spirit did not cease; and signs and wonders were not consigned to God's bedroom drawer for the remainder of this dispensation of grace.

As we conclude this important chapter of my book, I want to encourage you to remain open to all of God's possibilities in your life. I have seen tremendous signs and wonders across the breath of my life; and I am no one special. As I have said before in this book, God has no favorites; everyone is special in his eyes and you are special to him today.

Don't let other people limit what God wants to do for you in your life today! Since I stopped listening to the doubters and to the jealousy

brigade, I have found more peace through trusting God to carry me along my journey with Jesus than at any other time in my Christian life. I have literally stopped listening to the '*Sanhedrin*' of religious believers; those who have tried to throw doubt at me along my own personal journey with the Lord.

I have discovered that God is for me and not against me (Romans 8:31). I have also discovered that God is a supernatural god who wants to invade our natural existence with his grace, love, favor, provisions, gifts; and yes he wants to invade our existence with his angels too. Today is a day to start believing God and to start doubting the doubters; such a strategy has worked for me. Today is a day when you need to come to God afresh and let him do what he wants to do with your life, and through your life.

Dare to be a Philip, dare to be one of the Mary's who visited the empty tomb of Jesus and accepted the angel 's instructions to tell people that Jesus is risen! Dare to believe that God can do absolutely anything with your life, and see what a blessing you can become to all those who live in darkness; those who need to see God's light shining through your open and believing heart, in Jesus name, amen!

Sixteen

Discovering God's Agenda

God is able to use angels in the mobilisation of the affairs of the kingdom of God; thus bringing everything together under one common purpose. He is able to use angels, along with visions and the Holy Spirit, to mobilise his saints into action so that they might experience growth and development within his kingdom. A very good example of how God used angels, visions and the Holy Spirit as part of building his kingdom can be found in Acts Chapter 10.

In Acts Chapter 10, there was a centurion soldier of the Italian regiment called Cornelius. Scripture does not provide a description of Cornelius. However, the fact that he was a centurion suggests that he would not have been very old. He would have been strong, and he would probably have obtained a good reputation; particularly because he was part of an elite group of soldiers within the Roman Empire.

Not only was Cornelius a Roman soldier, but like Naaman in 2 Kings Chapter 5, he and his family were devout God-fearing people, who gave to the poor and prayed to God on a regular basis (Acts 10:2). One day

an angel visited Cornelius, who provided him with some interesting information. The gifts to the poor and the prayers of Cornelius had come up as a memorial before God in heaven (Acts 10:4).

Everything we do in life is recorded in heaven, of that I am absolutely certain. I am convinced that God stores every prayer that we make to him in one of his bowls (Revelation 5:8). This is why no prayers are a waste of time; even though it may take time for our prayers to be answered. Each of our prayers is a testimony that we have petitioned God on a matter, so we should never take lightly the power that exists through our prayer.

I have come across Christians, who have been seeking God over a matter in prayer for a very long time, trusting that one day the answer will come. Each of those prayers are cumulative, where God will provide the breakthrough that his servants are looking for in his own good time and according to his will and purpose for our lives.

Acts Chapter 10 does not clarify whether or not Cornelius and his household were born again Christians at this stage. I suspect that Cornelius believed in God, but had not accepted Jesus as his Lord and Saviour; which is a reasonable assumption for us to draw from this particular chapter in the bible, otherwise he would not have needed the apostle Peter to come and

fully explain the gospel message to him, as we shall consider later in this chapter.

Cornelius would have known about Jesus, due to the fact that he lived in Caesarea, where Jesus spent much of his time during his ministry years. This is why Peter said in Acts 10:36 NIV, "*You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.*" Again, we will come back to the subject of Peter's message to the house of Cornelius later in this chapter.

Acts Chapter 10 encourages us that God hears the prayers of sincere God-fearing people, even when they may not be saved. And in such circumstances, God will provide the necessary assistance to bring such a person to salvation as soon as possible; as was the eventual case with Cornelius.

We should never presume that because a person does not profess Christianity that they do not pray to God. Neither should we presume that because someone belongs to another religion, they are not seeking after God just like anyone else. And again, when God sees the sincerity of anyone who prays to him, he is able to send angels to assist in the salvation of that lost soul. That is, he will leave the ninety nine sheep and go looking for that one lost sheep, wherever they may be (Matthew 18:12).

God is love and he is able to weigh the motives of the heart of every individual on the planet (Proverbs 16:2). This is why we should never count anyone as lost from the kingdom of God. Many testimonies are coming out of places like Iran, and other countries, where people have seen visions of Jesus. No one has preached the gospel to these people, but God has seen the sincerity of those seeking him; he has come to the rescue of some of these people and led them into his kingdom.

This is where prayer can be a very powerful force across the face of the planet; no matter where someone is in the world, God can hear their heart-felt cry and bring them to salvation. Time and space have no limits on God, and he can rescue the lost wherever they are in the world, even when they have not specifically heard the gospel preached to them. Neither should we underestimate the power of Christian TV to reach nations that are otherwise closed to the preaching of the gospel; praise the Lord!

I have heard many Christians ask how God will judge people who have never heard the gospel preached to them before they have died. It is my submission that God knows the heart of every individual person on the planet. When someone calls out to him, even where the gospel is not being preached to them face-to-face, God can send angels, visions or dreams to assist in the salvation of such individuals.

The angel that appeared to Cornelius then instructed him to send men to Joppa and bring Simon Peter to him (Acts 10:5). While God had sent an angel to visit Cornelius, he was also arranging for Peter to receive a vision in Acts 10:10. In other words, angels are part of God's purpose and process when he is attempting to bring the right people together to ensure that his will is accomplished in the face of the earth.

Here's some good news for you! God is well able to work things out, in the background of your life, so that resources can come together to help you advance in the kingdom of God. You may not see what is taking place in the supernatural realm of your life, but this does not mean that there's no activity going on that can effects the natural realm of your existence.

The key to spiritual activities that affect our natural existence is heart-felt prayer to God. But what makes prayer effective? The answer is always persistence (Luke 18:1-8). We have all experienced times when God has answered one single prayer uttered from our lips in times of need; but this is not always God's pattern when it comes to prayer. Persistent prayer over long periods of time can be very effective, especially if we want to see God move on our behalf.

We have no idea how long Cornelius had been praying to God, he could have been praying to him for years. But whatever the time scale, the

day of God's answer to the prayers of Cornelius was on its way. I want to give you another key to answered prayers and that is '*focus!*'

As I have already discussed earlier in this book, when we give our attention to praying over one matter, over a long period of time, the answer to that specific prayer comes more quickly. Not only so, but as I have personally learnt to focus on one thing that I have needed in my life, I have also discovered changes taking place within me during these extended times of prayer.

And I don't mean that I pray for hours in one session of prayer; I pray short prayers over many days and weeks at a time. And after each session of prayer, I find that my spirit is strengthened, and my faith that God will answer my one specific prayer grows stronger within me. I have discovered a real peace by praying about the most important issues that need taking care of in my life; while leaving my other needs to God. I cannot explain this in the natural; all that I can say is that such specific focused prayers over time are having a real and calculable effect upon my life spiritually.

With respect to the prayers of Cornelius, he received a visit from an angel, while God was preparing to change Peter's doctrinal thinking. Can you imagine that! The prayers of Cornelius were causing a fundamental change in what Peter believed. Obviously Cornelius did not know that his

prayers were affecting someone else at the same time, but that is precisely what was happening.

God can use our prayers to change other people and not just ourselves. In other words, God will not let anything or anyone stand in the way of the advancement of his kingdom through the prayers of his saints. So if you are in a church that is not moving forward in the kingdom of God, don't look to the difficulties you are facing in your fellowship, look to God! Don't pray about the hindrances and the problems, pray about the answers that you are looking for.

Don't concentrate on the fact that your church does not believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, just ask God to pour out his Holy Spirit on all flesh. I was once invited to visit a friend in the city of Manchester in the UK. He subsequently invited me to a house where there were a group of Methodists waiting for me. These Methodists were not allowed to discuss the baptism of the Holy Spirit in their church at the time, but they wanted to hear more about the potential work that the Holy Spirit could have in their own lives.

God began to pour out his Holy Spirit on these Methodist Christians; people who had been taught that the gifts of the Holy Spirit died out with the apostles long ago. They began to speak in tongues as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance; in fact, I think everyone in the room got filled

with the Holy Spirit that day. The problem was not that these Methodists did not believe in the Holy Spirit, the problem was that they needed to be refreshed in the life giving flow of God's living waters. And if God can pour out his Holy Spirit on these Methodist, he can pour out his Holy Spirit on anyone, any religion, anywhere, anytime.

Returning to Peter, in Acts Chapter 10, God was preparing him for a change in doctrine. While he was on the roof, waiting to be fed, he fell into a trance. Heaven opened and he saw a big white sheet being lowered down to earth by its four corners (Acts 10:11). The sheet contained four-footed animals, along with reptiles and birds. Three times a voice told Peter to kill and eat the animals. This same voice told Peter not to call anything impure that God has made clean (Acts 10:14).

During this vision, men from the house of Cornelius approached Peter's House, and the Holy Spirit told him not to hesitate, but to go with them (Acts 10:19-20). Hearing from these men, Peter agreed to go with them the next day to visit the house of Cornelius. Here we discover that angels, visions, human beings and the Holy Spirit are all working together as part of God's kingdom.

The kingdom of God is not a one-person band that operates solely through an individual; although some Christians think that God can only operate through their ministries. I have always stated in my books that the

kingdom of God is not actually a democracy, it is an autocracy; that is, we all serve one God and only one God. However, the kingdom of God is also built on the mutual respect and cooperation of many individuals, who are all working towards the same goal; and that is the growth and extension of God's kingdom here on earth.

Therefore, this account of events taking place, centring on the house of Cornelius, should not be exceptional. I do not think that we have any idea how much people resources are needed in God's kingdom; the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few (Luke 10:2). And when the church becomes full of leaders, along with ministry heads, etc., this is not necessarily a sign of growth within God's kingdom; it's more like a sign of a hierarchical structures being erected.

Although the kingdom of God is not like the world, we can learn wisdom from some of the organisational structures that exist within the business community; Christians should be as shrewd as snakes and innocent like doves (Matthew 10:16)! There is one impressive organisation in the world, known as the Toyota Car Manufacturing Company. This company does not have a hierarchical management structure. Instead it has what is known as a flat-based organisational structure; preferable to a hierarchical one.

That is, this company has few chiefs in their car manufacturing plants, and many more workers, who are able to take responsibility for the quality of the cars they produce. On the whole, this particular car manufacturing company has enjoyed tremendous success and increased car sales across the years; more than most other car manufacturing companies. Workers are given a lot more supervisory control over their working environment and they don't have layers of management above them.

Usually, every worker is about three steps away from the general manager of their particular plant, so that information is easily passed between management and workers; administrative work is not therefore delegated to lots of layers of managers, this improves the efficiency of the organisation. Faults in the manufacturing of cars are spotted more easily, maintaining good quality throughout the manufacturing process.

I suspect that the early church did not have layers of management structures, but that there was a close cooperation between the apostles and the disciples. The early church was probably more dependent on God and less dependent on structures. I have come across some large churches that have learnt to delegate responsibility to the volunteers within their fellowships, which has proved a great motivating factor for many of its members. I have also visited some churches, which have large numbers of leaders, who appear to stand in the way of progression.

We cannot have it both ways on the kingdom of God. We either learn to trust God and his resources, or we come up with our own limited structures that can restrict the movement and operation the Holy Spirit among us. I think that we have moved a long way from the simple structures that the early church operated under; where leadership was delegated among the disciples, and administration was kept to a minimum (Acts 6:1-4).

Returning to Acts Chapter 10, Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius, and informed everyone that it was not usual for Jews to associate with Gentiles (Acts 10:28). And this is important! Peter was going against everything that he believed in, by visiting people who were not part of his religious and cultural beliefs. In other words, God's purpose always includes breaking down the barriers that operate between different religions; where possible.

This does not mean that we all need to suddenly create one big world church; something which the false prophet will accomplish one day when he is revealed to the world at large. However, we should be willing to go and preach the gospel to the whosoever; wherever and whenever God's Holy Spirit leads us, just like Peter did. Peter did not compromise his beliefs; on the contrary, he expanded his belief system to encompass those

who were culturally and religiously different from him. That is, he did not compromise his beliefs, he expanded them!

Once all the pleasantries were out of the way, Peter began to preach the gospel to Cornelius, his family and his friends. And again, Peter did not compromise the gospel because he was speaking to people outside of his own cultural and religious beliefs. He told the house of Cornelius about the good news of Jesus Christ; that he was Lord of all (Acts 10:36). That is, Cornelius would have heard of Jesus, but he may not have necessarily placed his trust in him for salvation.

We can learn a lot from Peter's sermon in Acts Chapter 10. He began by preaching the gospel message that Jesus is Lord of all. He then acknowledged that God anointed Jesus with the power of the Holy Spirit so that he could do good, heal the sick and cast out devils (Acts 10:38). He also spoke about the death and resurrection of Jesus. Peter also explained, to the house of Cornelius, that Jesus had called his disciples to preach that everyone who believed in Jesus could receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:39-43).

In other words, Peter preached about the power that there was in Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, so that people might find salvation; that they might receive healing; and that they might be delivered from satanic oppression, should they have such a need. Peter preached a gospel of

power; something that many preachers might need to learn a lesson from today.

God is not looking for watered down motivational speeches coming forth from the platforms of our churches today; he's looking for dynamic Holy Spirit anointed preaching that will bring people to Christ, set them free from satanic bondages and heal them of their sicknesses. In other words, the gospel we preach should be a gospel of power; not necessarily a gospel that appeases people's need to have a tap on the back telling them that all is well with the world.

I am not suggesting that we should not have nice people saying nice things to us from the pulpit. But the preaching of the gospel must be more than that. I suspect that we get what we preach. If we preach about the power of the Holy Spirit, the healing power of Jesus and the casting out of demons, then that's what we will get. If we preach that all is well with the world and our souls, then there is a danger that the church could be rocked to sleep.

As we conclude this Chapter, it is evident that things may not have gone to plan, or in the way that Peter may have expected, as he preached to the good people of the house of Cornelius. Peter had not finished preaching his message when the Holy Spirit come down on Cornelius, his family and his friends (Acts 10:44). Those who came with Peter were astonished when

they heard everyone in the house of Cornelius speaking in tongues and praising God (Acts 10:45-46).

God is able to pour out his Holy Spirit anywhere and on anyone. We cannot limit the operation of the Holy Spirit wherever he decides to fall. When I was a new Christian, people told me that there was a certain order to how things worked in the kingdom of God. People had to be saved, baptised in water and then filled with the Holy Spirit. I think I was filled with the Holy Spirit before I was baptised in water.

We cannot give God a program and expect him to follow it; it would be presumptuous of us to do so. We follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and not the other way around (Romans 8:14). And if any our churches lack power, then they need to make sure that they are not following a people-made agenda rather than a Holy Spirit-led agenda. And once Peter recognised that God's grace was poured out on the Gentiles as well as the Jews, he would not let anyone stand in the way of those in the house of Cornelius from going through the waters of baptism (Acts 10:47).

As we finish this chapter, one phrase stands out to me more than any other. And that phrase is: we should not let anyone stand in the way of the operation of the Holy Spirit, wherever that may be. I suspect that God is always looking for opportunities to pour out his Holy Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28). And if anyone stand in God's way, or churches follow a

different diluted powerless agenda to that which has been devised in heaven, then God will bypass them.

God is not interested in our agendas unless they are his agendas. He's not interested in our humanistic orders of service; he's interested in moving by the power of the Holy Spirit on the lives of these who need more of God. Today, it is my prayer that we all learn the lessons of Acts Chapter 10, and do things God's way; preach God's word; encourage people concerning the signs and wonders that are available to the church; and let God pour out his precious Holy Spirit on all flesh.

Today's churches need to set aside time to cultivate all of the things we have considered in Acts Chapter 10. We need to see a demonstration of God's power taking place in our churches, especially if we are looking for revival. We must not bow down to other people's agendas! Rather, we need to have a healthy fear and respect of God, and make certain that we line up with his agenda. This is not rocket science, this is basic Christianity 101. And if we are not about our Father's business, then who's business are we about (Luke 2:49)?

Seventeen

An Angel On Assignment

In Acts Chapter 12 we discover one of the most fascinating accounts of an interaction that took place between one man and an angel. King Herod arrested members of the newly formed church, which came about when the Holy Spirit was poured out following Christ's ascension; indeed Herod even put James the brother of John to death with a sword (Acts 12:1-12). During the Festival of Unleavened Bread, Herod put Peter in prison, surrounded by heavy guards (Acts 12:4).

It is very important to point out that anyone today, who serves God in any particular capacity, are often be subject to difficult circumstances perpetrated against them by the evil one. The devil does not care whether we have a big ministry or a small ministry; he has such hatred against those who are born again that he will make every effort to cause disruption in their lives wherever and whenever he can.

Therefore, if we experience difficulties relating to our service for God, in the same way that the early church did, then the deliverances God provided for his people during the inception of his church must be available

for us today. If not then God could be accused of favouritism, where he helped the early church out of their difficulties, but left us to fight our own battles. In fact, I am convinced that today's modern church probably needs much more help than the early church, simply because it has grown so much over the last two thousand years. Therefore, the bigger the church the greater the attacks from the evil one.

The benefits that were available to the early church must be available to us today, or God is not God. God did not include testimonies in the bible, such as Peter's deliverance from jail, for no reason. If that were the case then we would be relegating God's word to a book of fiction, which it is not. God included stories, such as Peter's deliverance, to tell us that the same God who delivered members of his early church will also deliver members of his modern-day church today.

While Peter was in prison, the rest of the early church was praying for him, according to Acts 12:5. And here is the key to the great deliverances that took place in the early church; prayer. I once attended the midweek prayer meetings of a very large church for a period of about one year. Out of a church population of two and a half thousand people, only an average of about twelve people attended the midweek prayer meeting.

The question is what's wrong with this picture? I have attended other churches over the course of my life where low turnouts at prayer

meetings have followed a similar pattern. Miracles are not automatic. Miracles happen when people pray; and if church members become so complacent that they don't see the need to pray, and then we should not be surprised when we don't experience the supernatural intervention of God in some of our churches.

Too often we relegate the church to a one dimensional club that offers social activities for bored Christians. And although I enjoy church social activities, to a certain degree, that's not why God instituted his church down here on earth. We need to be willing to allow ourselves to move into a supernatural dimension, where God can do extraordinary things for his church through the power of prayer, as was the case with the early church. For those who want to see the supernatural intervention of God in their churches today, then prayer must be the key social event in those same churches.

Some years ago, I attended a group of people who held Christian dinner meetings every month. Their vision was to encourage people to hear the gospel in a non-threatening environment. The president of this group, at the time, was a man called Mr. Brewster. He was a man who encouraged the group to spend time in prayer before the dinner meetings took place, rather than just spending time dealing with administrative matters.

During his time as president of the group, we experienced large meetings with supernatural events taking place every month. People from all over the world would come and give their testimonies. People got saved, healed and delivered of demons during Mr Brewster's time as president. I will never forget those great dinner meetings where God provided supernatural answers to prayer for those in need.

When I first started attending the Christian Union at my local college, the president was someone called Anthony. He also turned most of the committee meetings into prayer meetings. Rather than trying to sort out the administration of the Christian Union, Anthony would lead us into times of dynamic prayer. Like Mr Brewster, Anthony knew that the battle was always won on our knees. This reflected in the main Christian Union Meeting, which were quite successful during his role as president.

When Peter was in jail, I am certain that the rest of the church did not try to come up with a plan on how to rescue him. They turned the problem over to God by praying about the situation. Many churches today would solve their problems on their knees rather than in planning meetings, or by delegating problems to one of their numerous committees.

Over the last few years I have gone through some difficult circumstances, which I won't go into detail now. It took me a long time to discover that most of my difficulties could be solved on my knees in prayer.

In fact, I am certain God permitted me to experience the pressure of increased difficulties so that I could find my way onto my knees.

Slowly but surely, as I have developed a daily routine of seeking God in prayer on my knees, I have seen my circumstances improve. My heart has started to fill with anticipation and hope now that I can see a much brighter future ahead for me. God did not answer my prayers straight away; he answered them slowly but surely as I maintained a daily appointment with him on my knees.

As the early church were motivated to pray, God's angels were mobilised into action on Peter's behalf. While Peter was asleep, an angel of the Lord appeared to him; and a bright light shone in his cell (Acts 12:7). The angel hit Peter on his side, told him to get up and his chains fell off. The angel even told Peter to get dressed, put his sandals on, wrap his cloak around himself and follow him (Acts 12:8).

In other words, this angel completely organised Peter and got him ready for his great escape from prison. Then the angel led Peter out of prison, pass the guards and towards the Iron Gate leading out to the city (Acts 12:10). This gate supernaturally opened by itself as Peter and the angel walked through it, then the angel left him.

This encounter between Peter and the angel provides clear evidence that God is able to do supernatural miracles on behalf of his

children. Not only does God save, heal, deliver and baptise people in the Holy Spirit, he can also supernaturally open locked iron gates. I am convinced that not only can God unlock physical iron gates; he can also unlock the iron gates of our difficult circumstances.

This encounter demonstrates that nothing is impossible with God (Matthew 19:26). Just because we try to put God in a box, and limit what he can do for us today, does not mean that this is reality. Sometimes Christians need to put one foot forward and make a leap of faith when it comes to dealing with difficult circumstances. There have been periods in my life when I have hardly had any money available to me. At such times, God has told me to do things that would deplete my resources to the point that I might not have enough money to buy my weekly groceries with.

However, when I have taken a step of faith, God has supplied all my needs according to his riches in glory (Philippians 4:19). In other words, God does not just want me to quote his promises; he wants me to act upon them by taking the appropriate steps of faith. Sometimes Christians think that God's blessings and favor will come upon them all at once, without any effort on their part. Sometimes this happens, and sometimes God's promises are realised through faith over time.

Although there are no formulas relating to how the kingdom of God operates, God's provisions are often released to us through prayer and

faith. Therefore, if I were to put a formula together, which brought about God's supernatural favor in my life, then it might go something like this; Read God's promises + Pray faithfully each day on our knees + Stepping out in faith + Answers over time = God's provision.

It took Peter a moment to come to himself and realise that God had sent his angel to rescue him from all the evil plans of King Herod (Acts 12:11). Where the enemy planned to harm Peter, God turned those plans around for his good and to encourage his faith that nothing is impossible with God (Genesis 50:20).

And when Peter recognised that God's angel had set him free, he headed straight back to the place where people were praying for him (Acts 12:12). That is, prayer brings about miracles; miracles which can encourage those who have been praying in order that they might continue to pray and pray time after time. It is my strong belief that when churches refuse to commit themselves to regular well-attended prayer meetings, then God will turn his attention towards those individuals who have made the appropriate sacrifices in their lives to pray every day.

That's right! When churches refuse to pray, God will turn his attention towards those individuals who commit themselves to seek God's face on a regular basis. As I have stated in this book before, the Holy Spirit is one of the most powerful keys to the kingdom of God. I also believe that

prayer is one of the most powerful keys that grant us an audience with God the Father. In fact it does not matter who prays, God is no respecter of people (Romans 2:11). God will answer prayers for those who may not be known by the rest of the popular church at large.

Although I have considered the subject of turbulence in my books before, I think it is important to remind ourselves of the principle of turbulence once again. So what is the principle of turbulence? Each year, around fall, lakes will go through a period of turbulence. That is, the lake will start to churn up, causing the silt on the bottom of the lake to rise back up to the top, leaving the clear fresh water at the top of the lake to sink the bottom. This leaves the lake in quite a mess until it settles down once again.

God has revealed to me that this principle of turbulence often happens in the body of Christ. Those who are at the tip of the kingdom, or people who think they are at the top of the kingdom, often go through a period of turbulence. The leaders end up at the bottom and the ones who have been quietly praying in the background end up on top. Therefore, those current leaders of our churches who do not motivate their members to prayer, can sometimes end up being side-lined by God. This is simply because they have become too dependent upon themselves and their structures, and less dependent upon God's ability to answer prayers.

Eventually Peter made his way back to the prayer meeting, in Acts 12:12. When Rhoda the servant came to answer the door, she was so excited when she saw Peter was standing there, that she ran to tell the others before letting him in (Acts 12:14). It is noticeable, from Acts 12:15, that those gathered to pray thought that Rhoda had seen Peter's angel.

I have never heard anyone preach on this particular aspect of scripture in the Book of Acts before. Nothing in scripture is there by accident, and this passage gives us a glimpse into people's thinking during the inception of the early church. Obviously, from this account in scripture, it was not uncommon for people to think that angels helped them in their day-to-day lives. Rhoda is not suggesting that she had seen Peter's ghost, but Peter's angel.

In today's church we rarely speak about other people's angels. We sometimes come across people who recognise that each Christian has an angel guarding them. And when we recognise that the number of angels attending God's throne are beyond count, then it is not unreasonable to accept that God can provide every Christian with an angel (Hebrews 12:22).

I was shocked recently when I heard a very famous Christian TV evangelist state that he did not believe God provided Christians with angels to protect them. I do not understand why such a prominent and respected Christian, who I love, would make such a statement; especially when he has

experienced countless miracles in his own life and in the life of those he prays for every day on TV. I am convinced that God has in fact provided every born again Christian with an angel to protect them, even though we may not be aware that they are with us every day.

Returning to Acts Chapter 12, Peter's friends let him into the house so that he could testify about exactly what God had done for him; including how the angel had released him from his prison cell (Acts 12:16). He told those in the house to let James, who was leader of the church, and the rest of the brothers and sisters know exactly what had happened to him; so that they too could be encouraged by God's supernatural intervention into his life (Acts 12:17).

Today, I think more and more Christians need to boldly testify about precisely what God has done for them in their lives; including when angels have been sent to help them find release from difficult circumstances. Such testimonies can encourage us that we serve a God of the supernatural. And if you have experienced supernatural interventions in your life, directly from God's throne, then start to testify before others about how great is our God.

As we conclude this fascinating account of the activity of this angel in the life of Peter, we need to recognise that this is not an isolated incident. As some would believe to the contrary, angels did not die out with

the apostles and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But here's the thing! We cannot pressurise people into accepting the role of angels in the life of Christians today; especially if they are full of unbelief.

People who do not accept the role of angels in the life of a Christian, probably do not believe that miracles are applicable today, or that people need to be filled with the Holy Spirit or that gifts are still in operation in the day-to-day administration of God's church. I for one believe that God is capable of doing much more for us today as we draw closer to him through our active prayer lives.

It may very well be that the people who do not accept the role of angels in our day-to-day lives do not have a very close walk with God to begin with; that is, they don't pray as much as they should. Today, do not be one of those people! If you want to see more of God at work in your life, then seek him in prayer each day; believe that he can do supernatural extraordinary miracles for you. No one is suggesting that we need a miracle every day, but if we have never witnessed a miracle throughout our entire Christian walk with God, then something has gone seriously wrong somewhere.

The more we depend on God, and the more we pray the greater the chances we will have of witnessing a miracle in our lives. Even God's daily provisions for us are miracles; just like the Children of Israel witnessed in

the wilderness (Exodus 16:35). And if we don't experience those provisions from God coming our way, maybe we have been taking God too much for granted. Nothing we have is due to ourselves. God brought us into the world with nothing and he will take us out of the world with nothing (Ecclesiastes 5:15). But, in between our births and our deaths, we are dependent upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living (Psalm 27:13).

It is my prayer that you will seek God and trust him to take care of more aspects of your life as we head towards the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. For those who don't believe in angels, when Jesus returns, they will have no doubt about the impact and role of angels in the affairs of humankind, simply because they will not only see Jesus at his Second Coming, but they will see the vast army of angels that are at his disposal; as we have already considered in this book.

Just because we don't believe in something does not mean that it is not true. We may never have seen the wind, but we have heard its sound in the tops of the trees (2 Samuel 5:24). We may never have seen the atmosphere, but it keeps us alive on planet earth. We may never have understood gravity, but it keeps us from floating off into outer space.

So let me finish this chapter with a thought! If you want to see more of God's supernatural power in your life today, then dare to believe

that God is a God of the impossible. Dare to approach your Christianity from a supernatural perspective, rather than only seeing God's kingdom in 2D. God is not a god of wood or stone. He is Spirit, he is all in all, he is everywhere all at the same time and nothing is impossible to him.

Ask God to open your eyes so that you too might see the vast army of resources that are at your disposal, and stop living in unbelief (2 Kings 6:7). Ask God to let you view his kingdom from his perspective, and not just from a human perspective; then your walk with God will grow in leaps and bounds as you discover that you serve the God of impossibilities.

Eighteen

Turn It Around

There will be times when the enemy will make a mountain out of a molehill, and stir up trouble on behalf of God's children here on earth. A good example of this happened when the apostle Paul was preaching in Jerusalem, where folks got stirred up over the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

When we briefly consider the events that took place in Paul's life, it is hard to understand why so much trouble was stirred up against him; to the point that he had to appear in front of various tribunals to give an account of the fact that he was simply preaching the gospel. Looking back over Paul's life, we can recognise that God was using him to write most of the books of the New Testament; therefore the greater the purpose of God in the life of a Christian, the more the enemy will stir up trouble.

In times of great difficulty God often uses angels to provide assistance to people, especially when they are at their lowest ebb. An example of this can be found in the Book of Acts, after the apostle Paul fell foul of the Sanhedrin. In Acts Chapter 21, Jews from the province of Asia

stirred up the crowds in Jerusalem; after they heard Paul preaching the gospel (Acts 21:27).

Events then took a turn for the worse for Paul, when he was dragged before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, accused of preaching that there was a resurrection after death. A plot was also hatched to kill Paul in Acts Chapter 23. Eventually he was transferred from Jerusalem to Caesarea, so that he might appear before the governor Felix in Acts Chapter 24. Paul remained in prison for two years until a new governor, Porcius Festus, succeeded Felix (Acts 24:27).

Eventually Paul appeared before King Agrippa, who was spending time in Caesarea, according to Acts Chapter 25. After hearing Paul's defence Agrippa sent Paul by sea to Rome to stand trial before Caesar. In Acts Chapter 27 Paul was put on a boat, which sailed to Italy; but that was not the end of the battle for Paul.

During the journey to Italy, Paul recognised that danger was ahead and warned everyone concerned (Acts 27:10-11). Nobody listened to Paul's warning! In Acts 27:13 a gentle wind began to blow across the sea, which eventually turned into a wind of hurricane force, known as the Northeaster (Acts 27:14). At some point during this storm, an angel appeared to Paul and provided him with some encouragement; particularly during a time when the boat was receiving a battering from the storm.

Paul stood up and told everyone to keep up their courage; no one would be lost except for the ship, which would eventually be destroyed (Acts 27:22). Paul then revealed to everyone that an angel had stood beside him and told him not to be afraid. The angel told Paul that he would stand trial before Caesar. He also told him that God would graciously prevent the death of everyone sailing with him on his journey (Acts 27:24). Paul also told everyone that he personally had faith in God's ability to save them from death; but warned them all that this particular ship would eventually run aground.

Christians do not realise that when they are faced with stormy waters, God is able to turn their circumstances around. He can turn their night into day, and their dark times will become light. In fact, sometimes we need to face difficult circumstances so that we might learn to trust in God and not in our own abilities.

If I had not gone through dark times myself, I would not have discovered God's supernatural power to help me. Paul faced difficulties so that he might depend more on God and less on himself. I am going to say something that you are not going to like! If you want to see more of God's provision in your life then ask for trouble; something my pastor used to say to me when I was a young Christian.

I never asked for trouble. However, trouble came my way and I learnt more and more to put my trust in God's ability to provide for me. As a Christian, I have faced troubles most of my life. However, as I have placed my trust in God through hard times, a refining process has taken place within me so that I might be changed from one degree of glory into another (2 Corinthians 3:18).

God's purpose for our lives is to refine us until we come forth as pure gold. In the past we may have often sung songs about going through the refiner's fire; there's a lot of truth to such songs. God indeed wants us to go through difficult times so that our flesh lives might be pruned away, and so that we might become vessels of honour fit for the purpose God has planned for our lives (2 Timothy 2:21).

If we want God to use us, then there will always be a cost associated with such a desire; the Potter's wheel is always available for business. We may not like the thought of being refined by life's trials, but God's ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8). Not every trial is a difficult trial; some trials we go through will not be noticeable, but all of us will face at least one big test throughout our lives, where we will need to depend upon God like never before.

When we go through various trials, there's one question that we need to ask ourselves. Do we believe that God will bring us through the

storms or not? Paul told the rest of the sailors on the boat that he was putting his faith in God, despite the fact that he knew more difficulties were on the way. When we reach the end of this chapter, we will discover that despite Paul's circumstances, God brought Paul to a place of blessing where he could continue serving God.

The trials of life that we face are not here to prevent us from serving God. Yet many Christians allow the circumstances that they go through to prevent them from drawing closer to God. They concentrate more on their difficulties rather than on God himself. Many times we have read Sunday school stories where Jesus calmed the waters, but we sometimes neglect to apply those stories to ourselves later in life.

God's word cannot fail; but our faith can waiver, as Peter's did in Luke 22:32. Jesus warned Peter that the devil had desired to sift him as wheat, but he had prayed that his faith would not fail. There comes a point in our walk with God where we need to exercise our faith in his word, and there's no short cut to this. We either believe that God will keep us through the storms or we don't; but we cannot have things both ways.

If our faith waivers, then we may end up remaining in the storm longer than necessary. And this is precisely what trials do, they bring us to a point where we need to trust God or sink. The key to experiencing our

circumstances turning around for us is when we say, *"I'm going to start believing God's version of events, no matter what the cost."*

I am convinced that Paul's circumstances were so bad that God had to send an angel to encourage him, so that he would not falter during his darkest hour. Faith operates best when we are surrounded by encouragement; whether it's through other people, reading God's word or prayer. Personally, I have discovered that when I go through intense periods of prayer my faith increases. As I have already discussed in this book, praying a single matter through with God over time has proved a most effective way of getting through trials more quickly.

The faith that God places within each of our hearts is only the size of a mustard seed (Matthew 17:20). This means God expects us to do something about that mustard seed sized faith within us. Some folks find that reading the bible increases their faith, and as I have just stated; some people discover faith grows through intense prayer. Whatever the case may be, God does not intend that seed of faith to remain as it is.

Because Paul's circumstances required immediate action, an angel was dispatched to encourage him. This allowed Paul to recognise that God was still with him, and that he had a purpose for his life after the storm was over. With the circumstances that come our way and the storms we may

face, God usually provides us with enough time to experience those circumstances changing through prayer.

I want to give you a further key to dealing with the storms of life. When God encourages us through prayer, those storms often get worse; as was the case with Paul. Paul was told that he would face Caesar in Rome but the boat itself would be lost. Imagine that! The only form of transport during the storm would itself be lost.

Sometimes God will allow us to face circumstances where the exit doors are locked, and there's no way of escape. When this happens it means that God has planned another way of getting us out of the mess we find ourselves in. The key that we think will open the door to let us out of the trials will no longer fit. The plan that we thought would get us out of financial difficulties, for example, won't cut it anymore.

The plans that we come up with to save us from the storm won't work, because they are our plans and not God's plans. That's why God was about to remove the boat Paul was travelling on; even though it was the only mode of transport available to him. In other word, God wants to take away your boat because it's not fit for purpose anymore. And when you let God remove the rug from under your feet, then he will supply you with something much better, something that will get the job done.

Now here's something interesting, never jump ship until God says it's time to do so. That means God wants you to continue in the storm until he has prepared a better boat for you to travel in. Listen to what Paul said in Acts 27:31 NIV, “ *Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved.* ” In other words, everyone had to remain in the boat in the storm if they wanted to be saved.

When God allows us to go through the storm, we cannot leave that storm until he says so. And the reason why God keeps us in the storm is because our faith has not grown sufficiently to deal with what is about to happen next. And here's where it gets even more interesting. In Acts 27:32 it says the sailors cut the ropes that held the lifeboats and let them drift away. In other words, they were cutting off their last means of escape from the storm.

I have already discussed a time when I went through financial difficulties in one of my previous books. But in a nutshell, when I was going through these difficulties, a financial institution came to my rescue with a plan to rid me of all my debts. I was so elated, until God spoke to me that very night. I suddenly felt that I was stepping out of God's will by accepting this financial help package.

The next day I had to turn down this offer of help, even though it would have changed my circumstances completely. Effectively, God was

showing me that I was to cut the ropes of my lifeboats and let them drift away. When I told this financial institution that I was not going to accept their help, they told me that I would not receive any further offers of help from them in the future. They told me that the financial package had been put together with the help of another charitable organisation, and that they were not legally able to offer help in the future should I change my mind; the ropes to the lifeboat had well and truly been cut away.

My financial circumstances did not suddenly improve, but God gave me the faith to sail through those difficult waters, even when I did not know where my next penny would come from. I literally had to put all of my faith in God to provide for my every need; including the money to put food on my table. But one day, God gave me an idea about how to budget my limited finances so that I was able to put food on my table every day.

During the storms of life we go through, it is also important to listen to the practical advice that people sometimes give us. For two weeks, the sailors on Paul's boat had not eaten any food, because they were under constant suspense. This is what Paul said to the sailors in Acts 27:34 NIV, *"Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head."*

There comes a time, during a storm, where we need to make certain that we take care of ourselves physically. Staying up all night

worrying about our problems is not an act of faith. Therefore, make certain that you get plenty of sleep, drink plenty of water and eat. In actual fact Paul broke bread and gave thanks for the food they were about to eat; that is, on the boat that was about to capsize (Acts 27:35).

Many times I have broken bread alone in my own home during times of difficulty, knowing that I was inviting God's special grace into my life to assist me on my journey. Now, I make certain to break bread in my own home at least once a month. As for Paul and the rest of the sailors, they themselves organised the ship so that it would run onto a sandbar; effectively they ran their own ship aground.

That is, rather than leaving themselves to the fate of the elements, they organised matters so that they controlled when the ship would hit the sandbar and run aground. That is, God had given Paul and the sailors some input into their own circumstances; they just did not sit around and hope for the best. They were then able to swim ashore, and not one of them drowned (Acts 27:44). Had they not let the ship run aground, it could have capsized at sea, where many of the sailors could have perished.

In Acts Chapter 28, we discover that Paul and the sailors arrived safely on the shores of an Island called Malta. Here the inhabitants welcomed them all with open arms. And it just so happened that while Paul and the sailors were on the island, they were welcomed onto the estate of

Publius. Now Publius was the chief official of the island, whose father was sick at the time (Acts 28:7-8). Therefore, Paul was at the right place at the right time, and was able to pray for him; then he recovered.

Clearly, God was organising the events that were taking place in Paul's life for good (Genesis 50:20). The enemy may have planned harm for us, but God has a way of using our difficult circumstances as part of the advancement of his kingdom. Difficult circumstances do not mean that we are out of God's will. On the contrary, difficult circumstances usually mean that we are right at the centre of God's will, despite the fact that the enemy may be trying to sink our boat.

The wind of difficult circumstances has a way of blowing us in the direction of God's planning for our lives. I know I keep repeating this, but God's plans are usually not our plans. I have met too many Christians who think that they have got God all figured out; I used to think this way too. However, when we recognise that God's the boss and when we start to let him take control of the Captain's wheel of our lives, then he will direct the ship we are sailing in to the port of his choice. Because Paul was used by God to bring help to the father of the chief of the island, they were honoured in many ways; they were even given the supplies they needed to set sail again (Acts 28:10).

As we conclude this chapter, we discover that Paul eventually completed his long journey and arrived in Rome (Acts 28:15) where he met with some of the brothers and sisters from the church; and he was greatly encouraged. God's plan for our lives is to bring us safely towards our destination, even though we may not know where that journey is taking us to in the short-term.

It's easy to think that because we are going through the storms of life, there's no light at the end of the tunnel, and that there is no encouragement waiting for us. Paul was no different to any of us, even though we might want to put him up on a pedestal. God does not use supernatural superhuman people; he uses the nobodies of this world to confound the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27). Paul himself would be the first person to tell you that he was a nobody, and that he was no different to anyone else; he was a chosen vessel just like we are.

Do not let the storms and trials distract you from God's call on your life. Recognise that God is with you every step of the way, and that you have not been left to chance. When Paul got to Rome, he was allowed to live in his own house with one Roman soldier guarding him. People from all over came to see Paul and he witnessed to them from morning until night (Acts 28:23). For two years Paul lived in his own rented property; he

welcomed visitors and proclaimed the kingdom of God without hindrance (Acts 28:30-31).

It is most likely that these were probably the final years of Paul's life on earth. While he was in chains, we know that he wrote many letters to the churches, which made up most of the books of the New Testament; which we stated earlier in this chapter. God provided for Paul through the most difficult of circumstances, and he will provide for us too.

God has a great plan for each of our lives, and when we are at our lowest ebb, God is able to send his angels to comfort and support us in our times of need. He will bring the right people across our paths, and he will encourage us in ways that we may never have thought possible. God is able to take our circumstance and turn them around for our benefit and for the benefit of the kingdom of God.

As I have already stated, nothing in the kingdom of God is by chance; everything works together for good to those who love him (Romans 8:28). So if you have been going through the storms of life and you don't know what to do, start praying that God will increase your faith. Start to trust that God knows what he is doing with your life, even when you don't.

Look after yourself when it comes to eating, sleeping and doing the common sense things that are part of everyday life. Remember, time is a gift and it's on your side; use it to seek God in the bible and let his will

unfold in your life from day-to-day. Yes, difficult circumstances are exactly what they are, difficult. But when you know and accept that God is on your side, then it won't be long before God turns your circumstances around for the glory and extension of his kingdom.

Nineteen

The Twenty Four Elders

In the final chapter of this book, we discover that the entire Book of Revelation shows us that angels play a prominent role in the affairs of heaven and earth. In fact, very little takes place in the Book of Revelation without the involvement of angels. For example, in Revelation 20:1-3 we find an angel coming down from heaven, who seizes satan, binds him and throws him into the Abyss for a thousand years.

It is only when we reach the Book of Revelation that we recognise the degree to which angels carry out God's instructions, whatever they may be; as we have already considered earlier in this book. We may not perceive the involvement of angels in our lives, but the Book of revelation provides a clear record that nothing takes place in heaven or on earth without their involvement.

What is also interesting is that throughout the Book of Revelation, the term '*Elders*' can be found. In fact, in six chapters of the Book of Revelation there is a reference to the elders in heaven. In Revelation 4:4 NIV it says, '*Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and*

seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.'

The questions that we need to ask ourselves today are: who are these twenty four elders; why are they seated around God's throne; and what is their function? Although this book is about angels, we also need to consider their function in relation to the twenty four elders seated around the throne, in order that we might gain a fuller picture of their role in the lives of God's saints.

The first question is who are these twenty four elders? First of all, these elders are dressed in white and they wear crowns of gold on their heads. Throughout the New Testament, references are made about various crowns that we might wear when we get to heaven. For example, in the Book of Timothy we are told that there is a crown of righteousness for those who have longed for the appearing of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 4:8). The Book of James tells us that if we persevere under trial, then we will receive a crown of life from the Lord (James 1:12).

However, the elders around the throne of God are dressed in white and they are wearing gold crowns. Garments of white indicate that these elders are most likely of human origin; they are unlikely to be angelic beings as is the case with the other creatures around God's throne. Gold

crowns may indicate that they have been given a place of honour in the courts of God.

I have heard some people state that these elders are the entire body of Christ seated around God's throne. There is no scriptural evidence for this, and it is my supposition that these twenty four elders are in fact twenty four individual people. Some have suggested that they represent the twelve patriarchs and the eleven apostles plus Paul. Again, scripture does not reveal the identity of these twenty four elders, but I am certain that once we reach heaven we will discover their true identity. All that we do know, to some degree of certainty, is that they are twenty four human beings; that is, they are not angelic beings.

The second question that we asked was, why are these twenty four elders seated around God's throne? The key word here is probably '*Elders*'. They are seated around God's throne because they have been given the position of elders to God in heaven. This question therefore fits in with the final question; what is the function of these elders in heaven?

The word elder historically means someone who is a member of a senate or a governing body. It is most likely that these elders in heaven have been chosen by God, from among humans, to act as a governing body in the affairs of heaven; which most likely also means that they have an input into what happens here on earth too.

As I have already stated in an earlier chapter of this book, there is unlikely to be any democracy in heaven; just an autocracy where God rules supreme. However, this does not mean that God cannot delegate authority to others, such as these elders, in the affairs of human kind. In Luke 10:1 Jesus delegated some of his authority to the seventy seven disciples, who he sent out to preach the gospel on his behalf.

Therefore, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that God has delegated some of his power, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, to these twenty four elders. If this is the case, then we need to consider why God might do such a thing. The answer most likely is that God has made man higher than the angels in the affairs of heaven.

Angels, as we know, are very powerful beings; currently God has placed human being a little lower than the angels (Psalm 8:4-5). But this state of affairs is only temporary. When we arrive in heaven we will be as the angels, we will not be lower than them (Matthew 22:30). Therefore, it stands to reason that in heaven the actions of angels will most likely come under the auspices of human beings.

This may sound fanciful to us now while we are still here on earth, but with the greatest respect to angels, they are not the heirs of God's kingdom, we are (Romans 8:17). This does not mean that angels are less than we are, it just means that we will inherit our rightful place in the affairs

of heaven once we get there; angels will be fully aware of this, even if many Christians are not.

Therefore, it stands to reason that these twenty four elders represent the authority that God has given to humans once we reach heaven. It is most likely that these specific twenty four elders represent the views and opinions of the rest of God's saints in heaven. Elders on earth have a tendency to take on authority within a church. They often take on the responsibility for a particular office or ministry.

In heaven I suspect that the function of elders is more to do with representing the views of everyone concerned, that is, before the throne of God, which would make sense. It would be very impracticable for every one of us to be providing input directly to God concerning how heaven should be administered. But it is more likely that God has a structure in heaven which allows the views of its occupants to share them with these particular elders.

Throughout the Book of Revelation, on the whole, these elders demonstrate humility, submission and reverence before God's throne. This is why it says in Revelation 11:16 NIV, *'And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God.'* This suggests that the elders are not governing heaven under their

own cognisance, but that they are in submission to the one who is all powerful; that is, God.

There is an instance in heaven where we find one of these elders conversing with the apostle John (Revelation 7:9-17). Here John had noticed a multitude of people in heaven wearing white robes and holding palm branches, as they stood before God's throne. One of the twenty four elders asked John a question in Revelation 7:13, "*Who are these in white robes and where did they come from?*" John did not know the answer to this question. Then the elder told John that these were they who have come out of the Great Tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, etc (Revelation 7:14).

Therefore, these elders are fully aware concerning what is taking place in heaven and on earth; including events that will take place during the Great Tribulation when many souls will turn to Jesus. These elders appear to be able to communicate information with whoever they please. But don't misunderstand what I'm saying here! There is no scripture to suggest that these elders communicate with anyone here on earth; except for the apostle John who was visiting heaven at the time.

However, once we arrive in heaven, it is most likely that we will be able to address these elders, simply because they will represent human

beings; and as we saw with the apostle John, they are knowledgeable concerning events taking place in heaven as well as on earth.

It is quite possible that there will be a structure of government among the human populations of heaven, similar to that on earth. We get some indication of this when Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, came to visit him in the desert (Exodus 18:13-27). Jethro discovered that Moses served as judge all morning and evening while he listened to everyone's disputes. Jethro told Moses that what he was doing was not good.

But here's the important point. In Exodus 18:19 NIV, Jethro said to Moses, "*Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people 's representative before God and bring their disputes to him.*" In other words, Moses was to appoint capable people, and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. They would serve as judges, and bring only the difficult cases to Moses (Exodus 18:21-22).

Now this is where Christians may have some difficulty with what I am about to say. God is capable of listening to the multi-millions of people who will inhabit heaven; but the question is, why should he? I am convinced that when we get to heaven, the Holy Spirit will be able to instantly provide any answers to the questions we may have in our minds. I also suspect that when a saint of God first arrives in heaven, they will have

more questions on their minds than those who have been living there over the centuries.

I for one do not want to be running after God every five minutes to discuss a matter once I reach heaven. This may sound strange to you, but I do not want to be pestering God about some matter or other every five minutes. I am certain that God has better things to do than pampering after me. Yes, I want to worship him, I want to bow down before him, and I want to visit him in his throne room. But this does not mean that I need to follow him around all day long finding out the answers to trivial questions.

I suspect that some Christian may get a surprise when they reach heaven and discover that God is not going to spend all eternity answering their questions. When I became a new born again Christian, I had lots of questions that I constantly asked God about.

Over the years, I have found that I hardly ever ask God about anything now. I trust him more, and I get on with the assignment that he has called me to; which is to write Christian books. I don't keep going back to God and saying, "*Are you certain that you have called me to write Christians books?*" I simply trust and accept the assignment God has given to me and get on with it.

I am certain that scripture gives us enough indication that God will have some form of structure that helps with the government of his kingdom

when we reach heaven. It may not be precisely as I am suggesting in this chapter, but there will probably be some form of administrative structure that governs the affairs of heaven throughout eternity. I am also certain that God sent Jethro to Moses, in Exodus Chapter 18, to provide him with some sound advice on how to administrate the body corporate of Israel; particularly at the beginning of their journey through the wilderness.

I don't wish to be flippant here, but some Christians are probably under the impression that when they get to heaven they will be a free spirit; responsible to nobody. Yes we will be free, but we will not be unaccountable. And neither am I suggesting that there will be a system of heavy shepherding in heaven. Peter told the disciples to make their own choices about the type of people they wanted to wait on tables for them; as long as those people were full of the Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:1-4). Nowhere in scripture is there any suggestion that God wants his shepherds to 'lord' it over other people (1 Peter 5:2-3).

We only need to consider the twenty four elders around the throne of God, and we can see that they know how to submit themselves to God; the hallmark of a true shepherd of God is someone who knows how to wash the feet of others (John 13:1-17). Yes we have all experienced some bad examples of shepherds on earth, who have not represented the true nature of Christ and his kingdom (Matthew 24:45-51). But the kind of shepherds that

will operate in heaven will embody the full compassion of Christ within them; in effect they will be the model of what Christ expects of his shepherd here on earth.

And here's the point, if I myself cannot love God's people fully like Christ did, then I never want to be a shepherd of God's flock. The elders in heaven represent the type of elders we need at the moment here on earth and in the body of Christ. Those who are full of love and represent the needs and views of everyone represented within God's church.

I want to conclude this chapter and this book by encouraging you with the following. God has an order in heaven; disorganisation does not reign as some might think. I am also convinced that these twenty four elders represent the fact that we may all be given some form of responsibility once we reach heaven. Angels will be subject to us; indeed we will be expected to judge angels in the fullness of time (1 Corinthians 6:3).

Therefore, we all need to consider what the important characteristics of leadership and God's governance in heaven should represent down here on earth; especially if we can learn to emulate some of these characteristics here on earth, and before we reach eternity.

I am certain that the first characteristic of an elder is someone who loves God's people with all their heart; someone who perceives Christians as their true family of God. An elder should be someone who has no desire

to bully other Christians or exercise unnecessary control over their lives. An elder should be someone who is totally committed to God, and has dealt with every aspect of addiction in their lives; and can encourage others how to find true freedom in the Holy Spirit. In other words, elders should practice what they preach; and we are presuming that such elders are truly born again.

An elder should be someone who knows how to get the best out of other people; someone who is able to release them into their own ministries without becoming jealous of them. Therefore, an elder should be someone who can recognise the gifts and abilities in other members of the body of Christ; someone who is able to help them move forward in God's purpose for their lives.

A true elder should be someone who knows how to protect God's sheep from the wolves, along with knowing how to provide the best food for them. When sheep are fed right, they won't need to go looking for food elsewhere. Finally, a true elder should not be someone who only promotes their own abilities within the kingdom of God, but is someone who knows how to walk in humility before the throne of grace.

There are many other characteristics of a good elder, far too many for us to consider in this book about angels. The point is, elders on earth should emulate the example of elders in heaven. They should consider the

example of what God is looking for in a good elder from Paul's Book to Timothy in the New Testament (1 Timothy 3:1-13).

Most of all, as we can surmise from the Book of Revelation, it is unlikely that God does not have some form of administration in heaven. It may be that we have never considered this subject of God's administration of heaven before now. However, it is worth recognising that scripture, including the Book of Revelation, does indeed provide us with an order and a form of administration that helps the wheels of eternity run smoothly.

God has not set up angels to work in isolation from human beings. Although we are a little lower than the angels for now, this will all change once we arrive on the shores of heaven. It is not beyond the bounds of our imaginations to accept that angels have been placed under the authority of the twenty four elders in heaven; those who are seated on thrones, indicating that they have been given authority in the administration and affairs of eternity.

So when it comes to the function of angels, and their role in the life of a Christian, it is important to conclude with this point. There is no such thing as a rogue angel; one who operates outside of the structure that God has provided within scripture. A true angel, one who has been sent from heaven to help an individual, works within the parameters of God's

administration, under God's guidance, led by the Holy Spirit and possibly agreed upon by the eldership of heaven.

So if you are ever visited by an angel, and he does not display the characteristics we have discussed in this Chapter, then it is unlikely that God has sent him to you. And when you hear someone testifying about the activities of angels that do not conform with the patten of heaven outlined in scripture, then it is most likely that such a person has been deceived by the evil one. And when such a creature provides instructions concerning something that cannot be found in scripture, no matter how convincing he may sound, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8).

Appendix A

Further Books By Christopher Roberts

(All Books Are Available from Amazon Kindle)

[amazon.com/author/christopherroberts](https://www.amazon.com/author/christopherroberts)

- **365 Days With God**
- **Heaven**
- **Lives Less Ordinary**
- **Deliverance**
- **Rapture**
- **Armor Of God**
- **100 Days With The Holy Spirit**
- **People**
- **100 Days With The Holy Spirit**
- **Sacrifices People Make**
- **One Thing**
- **College Christians & God**

**Christopher Roberts Can Be Found At
Facebook.com/USAChristianity**

zlibrary

Your gateway to knowledge and culture. Accessible for everyone.



z-library.sk

z-lib.gs

z-lib.fm

go-to-library.sk



[Official Telegram channel](#)



[Z-Access](#)



<https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Z-Library>