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## Introduction to the Theme: Christ in the Old Testament

In this series we are studying the subject of Christ in the Old Testament. In the first Study we look at how Jesus opened the eyes of the two disciples on the Emmaus Road and revealed how he was predicted right throughout the Old Testament. The Second Study is on the Old Testament prophecies of the coming Christ. The Third Study must be on the Trinity because to fully understand this subject we must remember that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God. Too often naive Christians trace the history of Jesus from his birth at Bethlehem.

All but one of the other studies concentrate on what is called a Christophany so let me explain what we mean. Jesus is first seen in the Old Testament as the person who appeared as “*the Angel of the Lord*” in his sudden confrontation with Sarah’s maidservant, Hagar (Gen 16:7). Thereafter, he continued to appear intermittently throughout the earlier books of the Old Testament. These real occurrences, initiated by God, were characterized by the fact that they were convincing revelations of his person and work, as much as they were also fleeting, but audible and clearly visible appearances. He came temporally in the form of a human, much before his final incarnation as a babe in Bethlehem, yet this same “*Angel of the LORD*” is called and is addressed often as “the LORD/*Yahweh*” himself (Gen 12:7; 17:1; 19:1; etc.).

This “*Angel of the LORD*” was a title that stood for his office, but it did not describe his nature. The Hebrew word for “angel” (*mal’ak*) had the basic idea of one who was “sent,” a “messenger.” Of the 214 usages of the Hebrew term used for “angel,” about one-third of them refer to what is labelled by theologians as a “Christophany,” a temporary appearance of Christ in the Old Testament. It is certain, however, that this special angel of the Lord is divine, for Hagar “...gave this name to the LORD, who spoke with her [as the Angel of the LORD]: ‘You are the God who sees me,’ as she observed, ‘I have now seen the One who sees me’” (Gen 16:13).

Other instances of Jesus’ appearances in the Old Testament can be seen representatively in Genesis 22:11, 15, where it was the Angel of *Yahweh* who spoke from heaven to Abraham when Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac and stopped him from proceeding. Again, it was the Angel of *Yahweh* who appeared to Moses in the flame of fire in Exodus 3:2. Throughout the dialogue at that burning bush, it was also declared that he was no one less than “*Yahweh*,” who spoke at that time, causing Moses to hide his face from him (Ex 3:6). Later, it was the same Angel of the Lord who appeared to the wife of Manoah (Judges 13:2-25), the mother of Samson, whom she reported to her husband was indeed

a “man of God” that had appeared to her. When Manoah asked for the “Angel of the LORD” to also appear to him as he had appeared to his wife, the Angel repeated the appearances and his conversations to him, after which he ascended in the flame of the altar (Judges 13:20), implying the sacrifice was in worship of the Lord himself! Moreover, this “Angel” is regarded as a “Redeemer,” who saves Israel from evil (Isa 63:9).

How can readers of the Old Testament doubt that these sample instances, along with a host of other such descriptions in the earlier Scriptures, were anything less than pre-incarnate appearances of our Lord Jesus in real flesh, even if it was in those days only a temporary incarnation for the immediate needs of the people until he would come and take on flesh permanently? Oftentimes Jesus came to earth to help his people in their distress and their need for direction. The only examples of the Angel of *Yahweh* turning against Israel occur in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21, where the Angel is the agent of God’s punishment of David, because he disobeyed God and conducted a national census.

May the Lord bless these studies to you and may he make himself more real to you.

John James

## Study One: Jesus – The Best Teacher on the Subject

### Reading: Luke 24:13-25

There is no finer teacher on whether Christ is to be found in the pages of the Old Testament than the teaching of our Lord Jesus himself. He it was who said in John 5:39, *“You [Jewish people] diligently study the Scriptures [which at that time were the 39 books of the Old Testament]. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.”* That should settle the question. But even more famously, Jesus rebuked Cleopas, and that other unnamed disciple, as they walked along the road to Emmaus on that first Easter Sunday, *“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the [Old Testament] Scriptures concerning himself”* (Luke 24:25-27).

English has many vivid phrases to indicate the breaking into the mind of something new: “the penny dropped”; “it all clicked into place”; like a flash I saw it”; “the scales fell from my eyes”; “it suddenly dawned on me” and so on. That’s what happened on the road to Emmaus. The two disconsolate disciples trudged the seven miles, puzzled first by the rumours about Jesus and second because of the amazing ignorance of the stranger who joined them. “You mean you haven’t heard?” They needed a threefold encounter.

#### 1. They needed an Explanation, Luke 24:21

*“But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”* The idea of Jesus as the possible Messiah had taken a terrible blow by the events of the preceding 48 hours. The stranger was not exactly polite, *“How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken”*, 24:25. He called them stupid, then as the miles ground out he gave them a crash course in Messianic theology. *Genesis, Exodus, the historical books, the prophets – especially Isaiah’s servant songs* (Isaiah 42:49-53). He covered the ground expertly, on and on and still the penny didn’t drop, still it didn’t dawn on them. Stupid and dim they certainly were (but then so were all of the disciples when you think about it). It’s so easy for us to scoff, yet how many Christians today have grasped the same overview of the Bible. It grew towards dusk. *“Stop, have a meal with us.”* There was more to do, so he did it. Jesus was making this vital connection with them.

#### 2. They needed a Manifestation, Luke 24:28-31

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly

evening; the day is almost over." So, he went in to stay with them. He was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

Hardly had they sat down to eat when it happened. He picked up the loaf, gave thanks, broke it and handed them pieces. The alarm bells went off in their heads...and he had gone. *"I don't believe it"* they said to each other. *"We must have been as thick as two short planks!"* Seven miles back in the dark and you can just imagine the excited conversation! *"Of course, now I realise it all fits together."* Why didn't they recognise the sign? They weren't likely to have been in the Upper Room with the twelve on the Thursday; perhaps it was the memory of Jesus feeding the 5,000. The simple four-fold sign which would lie at the heart of Christian worship for centuries to come; taking, thanking, breaking, giving. The great symbol that makes present Jesus' death – and they took and ate to be at one with him and each other.

When the two disciples sat down for their evening meal, they didn't recognise their guest was the risen Lord. But Luke hints at an important truth here. The worship of the first Christians centred on the breaking of bread together. Whenever they met in this way the Lord was with them. They might not recognise the fact that they couldn't see him. But he was there among them. When you worship together with other Christians, do you deliberately make time to remember and realise that the Lord is always present with you even though you may not always feel his presence in any direct way?

### **3. They needed a Celebration, Luke 24:32-35**

They asked each other, *"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"*. They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, *"It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."*. Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Through the darkened streets of Jerusalem, banging on the door, the lock is turned. *"We've seen him. We've talked. He broke bread with us."*. *"Yes, we know, Simon and Peter have seen him as well."*. *"It all fits together – he's alive!"*. Christ has died, Christ is risen. Hallelujah!

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why did it take so long for these two disciples to recognise the presence of Jesus with them?
2. What evidence is there for the resurrection of Jesus?
3. What is your favourite Old Testament Scripture in which you can identify the Christ present before the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem?
4. Think of someone you know who finds it difficult to believe in the Lord Jesus. How can you help them draw on the resources that this story describes?

## **Study Two: Predictions of the Coming Christ in the Old Testament**

### **Readings: Psalm 16:8-11; Acts 2:30-31**

The Scriptures in their original form were entirely accurate and free from error. Take for example the predictions in the Old Testament relation to the Person of Jesus. There are over 300 prophecies relating to his birth, life, miracles, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension that were accurately fulfilled all within 33 years in which he lived. It has been computed that the chance of over 300 prophecies being fulfilled in the life one person within 33 years is 1 chance in 83 billion!

In our Old Testament Reading we read of King David who predicted the resurrection of Jesus back in 1000 B.C. as he, too, saw what was ahead, namely, that Jesus would not be "*abandoned ... to the grave, nor [would he] let his Holy One see decay*" (Ps 16:8-11; Acts 2:30-31). Therefore, it is not unexpected that we, too, should find Jesus present in the events and the predictions found in the Old Testament.

It is only right that we should find that Jesus was both actually present in the Old Testament and accurately predicted, and that he would come first as our Saviour, and then in a later second coming, would appear as the King supreme over all the earth. Such an unusual state of affairs is possible because he was, he is and he is the One to come. But sad to say, all too many miss both his real presence in the Old Testament narrative and the numerous predictions of both his first and second comings. To remedy this, we have a series of studies in places where he appeared in a Christophany in the Old Testament times. But for now we will sample some of the numerous predictions of his comings.

### **Old Testament Predictions of the Coming Messiah**

In addition to the real presence of Jesus as the Angel of the Lord God, few will dispute that there are at least six direct Messianic predictions in the Pentateuch: Genesis 3:15; 9:27; 12:2-3; 49:8-12; Numbers 24:15-19; and Deuteronomy 18:15-18.

Eve was promised in Genesis 3:15 that a male descendant from her line would crush the head of the serpent, i.e., the Devil himself, and win completely over evil, as the prince of evil, Satan, would be finally vanquished. Then in Genesis 9:27, God would come and live in the tents of Shem, the Semitic peoples. But which one of the Semites did God intend: the Arabs or the Jewish people? Abraham settled that question, for God called him to go from Ur of Mesopotamia to Israel, and he was to be a blessing for all the nations on earth in Genesis 12:3.

This promise could be narrowed down even further for the tribe of Judah. Son number four of Jacob would be the one God would invest with the sceptre of ruling and the one from whom the line of Messiah would descend (Gen 49:8-12). In fact, this coming one from Judah would be “*A star [that would] come out of Jacob, a sceptre [that would] rise out of Israel*” (Num 24:17). Moreover, the Messiah *who would come would also be a “prophet”* (Deut 18:15) as well as a “*king*” (Ps 72).

If the book of Job is to be placed in the period of the patriarchs (c. 2100 – 1800), as we believe he is to be placed, then there are four texts in Job that should be added to the six in the Pentateuch. There Messiah is called an “*angel*” and a “*Mediator*” (Job 33:23-28).

Add to these 10 direct Messianic prophecies another five from the times both prior to and during the Davidic period. He is seen as the “*Anointed*” one in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and the “*faithful Priest*” in 1 Samuel 2:35-36. But the most outstanding text by far is the Davidic Covenant text found in 2 Samuel 7 (repeated in 1 Chron 17) and elaborated on in Psalm 132, which pointed to the dynasty/house of David as the place where God would originate his throne, dynasty and kingdom forever. The promise given to King David was so astounding that David cried out in 2 Samuel 7:19 that “*This is the law for [all] humanity.*” In other words, God had just now conferred on David an enlargement of the promise he had originally made with the patriarchs.

There is not enough space to relate how eleven Psalms celebrate the person and work of the coming Messiah, but even though he would be rejected (Ps 118), and betrayed (Ps 69, 109), die and be resurrected (Ps 22, 16), he would come as Conqueror and Enthroned Ruler (Ps 2, 110), as Planner and Groom (Ps 40, 45), and as Triumphant King (Ps 68, 72).

In addition to the previous 15 direct references to the coming Messiah, there are some 39 predictions of the Messiah in the Old Testament prophets. A sample of these announcements before they happened would include these facts.

- First, it was predicted that Messiah would be born of a virgin (**Isa 7:14; cf. Mt 1:33**).
- His birthplace would be Bethlehem (**Micah 5:2; cf. Mt 2:1, 6**), and
- John the Baptist would be his forerunner (Isa 40:3-5; Mal 3:1; cf. Mt 3:3, Mk 1:3; Lk 3:4-6).
- It was further announced ahead of time that Messiah would enter Jerusalem [what turned out to be Palm Sunday] in Triumph as the crowd shouted “*Hosanna*” (Zech 9:9-10; Ps 118:25-26; cf. Mt 21:9; Mk 11:9; Lk 19:38; Jh

12:13). But in less than a week, he would be betrayed [by one of his own disciples, Judas, as it turned out] (Ps 69:25; cf. Acts 1:20).

The Messiah's side would be pierced (Zech 12:10; cf. Jh 19:37), and he would suffer vicariously for the sins of the world (Isa 53:6, 9, 12; cf. 1 Pt 2:21-25; Rom 4:25). Even more dramatically accurate was the fact that Jesus would be killed with the "wicked" ones (Isa 53:9a, note the plural noun in Hebrew) [as he hung between two thieves], yet he would be buried with the rich one (Isa 53:9b, note its singular form in the Hebrew). Messiah would be raised to life.

The Prophecies of David and Isaiah are clear. Look at:

- Psalm 16:10 and compare Acts 2:24;
- Psalm 22;
- Isaiah 53:5,8-10

However, that was not the end of the matter for the predictions about Jesus in the Old Testament, for Messiah would return to earth a second time (Daniel 7:13; cf Mk 13:26; Lk 21:27), and he would one day rule in the city of Jerusalem as King of kings, as the nations would go up to that city to be taught in his ways, never more to "train for war anymore" (Isa 2:3-4).

As far as the case for the Messiah in the Old Testament is concerned, the relationship between the Old and New Testaments is one of strong continuity and a progressive revelation. What a gracious, revealing God, and what a wonderful gift of a Saviour who has come to earth once, but who is due to return once more in all his fullness and glory!

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. What did you find most surprising about this study? Each share.
2. What Old testament Scripture predicting the coming of the Christ is most meaningful to you? Each share.
3. What does this study have to say to you and to your group about prophecies concerning the second coming of Christ?
4. Think about someone that would be helped by this study and pray for ways in which you could share it with them.

## **Study Three: The Holy Trinity** **Readings: Genesis 1:26-27; John 14:6-17**

We cannot consider the subject of Christ in the Old Testament without having a good grasp of the doctrine of the Trinity. This doctrine (God being three in one and one in three) is difficult because it tries to define things that cannot be fully explained in human words. The word 'Trinity' is not found in the Bible, but the truth certainly is.

It came out of centuries of struggle by the early church to grasp the implications of Jesus' teaching about himself, God the Father and the Holy Spirit: it was finally approved at the Council of the Nicaea in AD 325.

*"It is the distinctive and all comprehensive doctrine of the Christian faith. It makes three affirmations: that there is but one God, that the Father, the Son and the Spirit is each God, and that the Father, the Son and the Spirit is each a distinctive person."  
(Illustrated Bible Dictionary: IVP, pg 1597)*

Belief in the trinity distinguishes Christians from the Jews and Muslims who accept God as revealed in the Old Testament but see Jesus only as a man. It also distinguishes believers from the Unitarians, Jehovah Witnesses and other sects who do not accept the Trinity.

As part of his final teaching to his disciples, Jesus explained something of the relationship between his Father, himself and the Holy Spirit.

See John 14:6-17 – fill in the gaps...

- Jesus is the ..... to the Father (v6)
- to see Jesus is to ..... the Father (v9)
- Jesus ..... with the Father's authority (v10)
- the Father is ..... Jesus and Jesus is ..... the Father (v11)
- yet Jesus will ..... prayer in his name; he will do it (v14)
- at his request the Father will give the ..... (v16)
- who will live in us, as we ..... him (v17)

### **Old Testament aids to understanding:**

Deut 6:4 'Hear O Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one'. The most frequent word for God in the Old Testament is ELOHIM, used more than 2800 times,

always a plural word with a singular verb as there are three persons who always act as one. Now compare Isa 9:6 and Isa 10:20-21. In the first reference, the Son, Jesus, is called Mighty God; in the second reference, Jehovah (Lord) is also referred to as Mighty God. See also Isa. 43:10-11 where Jehovah is called the only God.

### **Illustrations to help understanding**

No illustration is totally adequate, but the following may help. I am a Father, husband and Minister all at the same time. When I am a Father to my children I don't stop being a husband to my wife or a Minister to the church. I am all of them at the same time and it is the whole of me that is each of them. In a sense I am three in one. It is me, myself, that is all three, it is not a matter of disguises or roles at different times in different places.

- One moment of time is past, present and future but just one moment.
- Man is a body, a mind and a spirit but one.

'Great is the mystery of Godliness!' God doesn't ask us to understand: he sets the truth before us and asks us to believe. Let us not forget that God is unfathomable, too deep to fully comprehend. We cannot fully understand ourselves, so how can we ever hope to fully plumb the depths of such a great God.

God is personal. He is not three Gods, nor three parts of one God. He is one being who exists in three ways. The one is three and three are one. Where you meet one, you meet all three; the mind of one is the mind of all three and when one acts all have acted. You cannot separate the three persons except in thought for they are three aspects of the one Godhead, one being.

It is because God is three in one that we can say GOD IS LOVE. If it were otherwise we could say that God is loving, but not that he is love. God is a fellowship within himself: each person pouring out himself in love upon the others, the one creative source of all life and love and being. It is this perfect fellowship of love that we are to share in Christ (John 17:21-26). We are bidden to:

- pray in the power of the Holy Spirit
- keep ourselves in the love of God
- look continually for the mercy of the Lord Jesus (Jude 20-21)

We may not be able to understand the Trinity, but we may know:

- the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
- the love of the Father and

- the fellowship of the Holy Spirit: the rest is an eternal mystery.

**In summary:**

**1. There is one God**

NOT three Gods NOR three parts of God  
(Deut 6:4, Mark 12:29, Is 44:6)

**2. God exists in three persons: the three persons of the Trinity are so clearly united that one person is in another and with another and always act as one (Gen 1:26)**

The Father purposes it (Gen 1:1)  
The Son says it (Gen 1:3, John 1:3)  
The Spirit does it (Gen 1:2)

**3. There is a particular order of relationship**

The Father is first (John 5:26-27, Eph 1:3)  
The Son is second: he is begotten of the Father and is sent by him  
(Ps 2:7, John 3:16)  
The Spirit is third: he proceeds from the Father and the Son (John 14:15 & 26:20-22)

**4. The order of relationship does not imply that the Father, the Son and the Holy spirit do not possess true and equal divinity.**

The Father is God (1 Cor 8:6, Eph 4:6)  
The Son is God (John 1:14 & 20:28)  
The Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4, 2 Cor 3:18)

## Questions for Discussion

1. What experiences have you had of talking about your faith with members of sects, e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons?
2. What would be your answer to someone who pointed out that the word 'Trinity' is not used in the Bible?
3. What does being baptised 'into the name (character) of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit' say about our relationship with God?
4. The Trinity is in John 14:16 & Luke 11:13. Is this a reality now?
5. Discuss the relevance of the illustrations given above.

## **Study Four: The Purposes of God in the Christophanies**

### **Reading: Hebrews 11**

One of the primary purposes of God in the Christophanies must have been for God to reveal himself in a personal and visible manner. The Christophanies were to reveal God and his will for humankind. Naturally no revelation can take place apart from the recipient giving attention to and understanding the ideas conveyed.

The question of why God became a man and took on human form has for centuries been a leading subject of Theological discussion. This of course refers to the incarnation of Jesus born of the Virgin Mary, but the question must also be asked about the pre-incarnate appearances as well. Some have argued that God spoke to and through the prophets so why the necessity of a visible nature of the revelation? One of the obvious reasons is that the Lord *desired* to manifest himself in a personal and visible manner.

Another purpose in the Christophanies was to meet the special needs of particular individuals. As we will see in the study of the Patriarchs it was usually at some strategic point in their lives and God's help was needed to correct or guide in some personal, temporal or emotional situation.

For example, God came to meet the needs of some:

#### **For fellowship:**

- Adam and Eve – Genesis 3:8
- Enoch – Genesis 5:22
- Noah – Genesis 6:9
- Abraham – Genesis 18
- Moses – Numbers 12:8

#### **For encouragement:**

- Hagar – Genesis 16:7-13; 21:14-21
- Noah after the Flood – Genesis 8:15-22
- Isaac – Genesis 26:2,24
- Jacob – Genesis 35:9-13

#### **To warn or to announce Judgement**

- Adam and Eve – Genesis 3:9-19
- Sodom and Gomorrah – Genesis 18:20-33
- Balaam – Numbers 22:22-35

#### **To call into service or to commission them**

- Moses – Exodus 3:2-6

- Joshua – Joshua 5:13-6-5
- Samuel – 1 Samuel 3:10

Another purpose and value of these Old Testament appearances of the Christ is that they help reveal a more complete picture of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament dealing primarily with Christ's Ministry as a member of the human race, provides glimpses back to creation and ahead to the consummation. The human form theophanies, however, fill in the great expanse of His Ministry throughout Old Testament times as he appeared in bodily form again and again.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. God is always present with his people. Do you really believe this? If we do what difference should it make to the situations we are faced with at the moment?
2. Why do you think God appeared to the Old Testament believers in human form?  
What difference did it make to them?
3. Why is there no need for the Lord to appear to believers today in human form?
4. How does the Lord speak to us today and provide his wisdom, guidance and encouragement?
5. What in this study spoke to you most clearly? Each share.

## **Study Five: God Meets Abraham – A Friend of God**

### **Reading: Genesis 18:1-33**

Very few Bible passages are explicitly clear regarding the form of God's manifestation in the Christophanies. The following six studies are the passages which plainly teach that God appeared in a clearly discernible human form. Today we study Abraham at a strategic point in his life.

#### **Unexpected Messengers 18:1-13**

The three men who came into view that hot day and stood opposite Abraham as he was relaxing looked like ordinary travellers, but there was more than ordinary politeness, even by Eastern standards, in Abraham's eagerness to welcome them.

First, he ran despite the heat, to detain them and then bowed down before them to pay his respects, particularly to the one whom he recognised as their leader. He knew it was the Lord who appeared to him that day. Notice how Abraham indicated how favoured he would be if "**my Lord**" (Hebrew *donai*) would accept his hospitality. He would provide water for hot tired feet, rest in the cool of the shady tree and some light refreshment. All this he promised on the spur of the moment. The offer being accepted he mobilised his household to prepare a meal fit for a king. Abraham waited on table and served his guests.

*"Where is Sarah your wife?" (v9)* A Surprising question because these "strangers" knew her name. She was in the kitchen but was listening to what was being said and was staggered to hear that at her age she was going to have a child! No wonder she laughed! However, the guest not only knew her name he even read her thoughts for this was no ordinary visitor. The LORD draws attention to her unbelief by asking, Abraham the question, *"Is anything too hard for the LORD?"*

The Lord's time had come to fulfil his promise and to answer their prayers. Delays are not denials! He would return at an appointed time and Sarah's son would be born, despite her unbelief.

#### **Unceasing Ministry of Intercession 18:16-33**

This powerful example of the man of God at prayer illustrates the mystery of interceding for others with the living God, whose sovereign purposes have already been disclosed. Is it permissible even to want to change any detail of God's Purposes? This story shows us how to pray.

The Lord's message concerning Sarah, safely delivered, the visitors prepare to leave but as Abraham travelled along the road with them it became clear they were heading for Sodom where his nephew Lot and his family lived. It was time

for the Lord to reveal his plans for Sodom to Abraham. The fact that the Lord was willing to share this secret information with him confirmed his status as a prophet. (see Gen 20:7).

The "*outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah*" (v20) is not spelt out. Even so no judgement would be given until the Lord had satisfied himself that the reports were accurate (see v 21). He will not act on hearsay he looks for evidence and intends to examine all the facts. here we learn that the Judge of all the earth sifts all the evidence before pronouncing judgement. How presumptuous we are when we question God's judgements.

Abraham has his own impression of the state of affairs in Sodom. He watches as the two men, referred to as angels or messengers in 19:1 walk on towards the doomed city and stands himself standing in the presence of the Lord. It was an invitation to respond in intercession, as well as to enjoy his company. The Bible is clear it is the Lord who prompts his people to pray (Galatians 4:6) and one of the purposes of disclosures about events still future is to supply an incentive for intercession, for a loving God not blind fate is in control.

Despite his intimacy with the Lord, Abraham never becomes familiar. Though a man stood before Abraham, by divinely given insight Abraham called him Lord and seemed to have no problem in discerning that this *Man* was the ultimate Judge of all men, the one true God.

Read verses 20-33 in the group at this time and notice the development of pleading with and then the ultimate acceptance of God's will.

This episode in Abraham's walk with God has so much to teach us about prayer. Notice how honest he was with the Lord and yet retained real humility. Abraham built his prayer on what he knew about God's Character and argued on the basis of God's integrity. God cannot deny his own character.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What have you learned in this study about:
  - A. The Sovereignty of God?
  - B. Human Responsibility?
  - C. The place of Prayer?
2. Is it permissible ever to want to change any detail of God's Purposes? Explain your answers to each other.
3. Share of occasions when you have questioned God's judgements. How did you resolve the issue?
4. God is love but what about his Anger? Can a loving God ever be angry enough to destroy a community? See Romans 1:18-32. Discuss.

## Study Six: God Wrestled with Jacob – Fighting with God

### Reading: Genesis 32:22-32

Jacob has been revealed, as the one through whom the promises made to Abraham and Isaac would be fulfilled. Yet, we have seen:

Jacob **resisting God**. (God's purposes have been revealed to him through his mother and he tries to speed up God's purposes to resist God's timing and to do things his way).

Jacob **running from God** because of his deceitful character. He has cheated his brother Esau out of his birth right and blessing and is now afraid and runs away. Nevertheless, even while he is running, he encounters God's grace.

Jacob **reflecting on God's purposes** for 40 years, Jacob has been away from the land of Canaan, living with his Uncle Laban, collecting two wives, other lovers and eleven children, not forgetting the amassing of a fortune. In all of this he has been in the school of life and reflecting on God's sovereign purposes, but he is not yet where he should be, so we notice:

Jacob **returning**. The earlier part of Gen 32 he is preparing to meet with Esau, and he does the only wise and he prays. He is absolutely petrified. His scheming is still evident as he devises a strategy, whereby if he is attacked by his brother they are in two camps. Now he is at the brook Jabbok where we discover:

Jacob **wrestling with God**. He renames the place Peniel. This was the third occasion and culminating point of His meetings with God. The first was Bethel, named by him because he was assured of the divine presence. The second was Mahanaim (Gen 32:1-2) where he was confronted by God's power. The third was here at Peniel where he was led beyond the ideas of God's presence and power to that of aligning himself with God's purposes. Notice the key verse Gen 32:30 *"So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'It is because I saw God face to face and yet my life was spared.'"*

The "face" of God is used constantly in Scripture as a symbol of God's favour, God's friendship and God's fellowship. It is the equivalent of eye's meeting in love and surrender. But God desired and purposed to bring Jacob into this position of special relationship. This is a place where we all need to come to, a place where we stop our resisting, merely reflecting, running, wrestling and simply giving in to God.

## **1. Peniel is the place of change Genesis 32:24-28**

Notice the scene begins with Jacob wrestling with God, refusing to submit to Him. However, the scene ends with Jacob now clinging to God's messenger and refusing to let go, until he is blessed. What a transformation! We perhaps should ask, who is this man that he is wrestling with? There is no doubt that he was wrestling with the very person of God in human form. The transformation was two-fold:

### **A change of nature Genesis 32:24-26**

Jacob is now seeing things differently. And because he is thinking differently he is seeing differently, and his decisions are different. Look at Gen 33:10. In meeting with Esau, no longer does he want to take, but give and Esau accepts. Here is the change of desire, a change of attitude, a change of affection. and Compare 2 Cor 3:18 "And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with an ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

It is as we spend time gazing and meditating on the loveliness of our Lord that this process of change takes place. That from this time onwards there was a very distinct change in Jacob and although the old nature was still there, Peniel had its effect and exercised transforming influence. There is nothing like fellowship with God to totally change our nature.

### **A change of name Genesis 32:27-28**

The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob", he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and men and have overcome." The Bible says the *word 'Israel' means 'You have struggled with God and have overcome.'* Literally, it means 'the conqueror' and in Old Testament thought it became to be 'the Prince'.

Jacob had been a loser; he had lost his home, his family, his land, and now he was coming home, no longer a loser, but a winner. What name, what reputation have you got? God can change it. We need to come to that place today - not, resisting, running and wrestling with God, but relaxing in His presence and allow Him to do what He wants to do.

## **2. Peniel is the place of courage Genesis 33:1**

*"Jacob looked up and there was Esau coming with four hundred men." And V.3 "He himself went out ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother."* Like Jacob we have to meet our Esau's of whom we are afraid. We strive, plan, struggle and all to know purpose, but when we see God's

face and hear God's voice things change. Power from man, comes from power with God. Hebrews 13:5 & 6 "God has said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake, therefore we may say with confidence the Lord is my helper, I shall not be afraid what can man do to me?"

Power with people comes from power with God. We have what may be a crisis today; but first of all, we pray, and the victory is gained, we wonder who will roll away the stone, but find that it has already gone. Fellowship with God gives insight and foresight, peace and patience, calm and courage in every emergency which enables us to become, "*More than conquerors*" over every foe. Just as the power of God came by surrender, so also will power of men come by willing self-sacrifice on their behalf.

Not only was Jacob submitting to God, he was submitting to Esau – that took courage too. He had to face the sin of self that he always manipulated to avoid. Self is the greatest enemy to blessing from God, and for influence with others. Jacob's pride had been broken. Jacob saw the illegitimacy of the blessing he had stolen from Isaac and now begs for God's authentic blessing. He was facing his past, for Jacob, the Esau meeting is a moving scene. They embrace, they weep, and they outdo each other with kindness. Moving though it was, their reconciliation was lacking in one way. They failed to address the sins, which had divided them all those years ago.

Their humble gesturing and generosity were all well and good, but without talking, repenting and forgiving each other, their relationship could never go onto deeper things. It appears that Jacob and Esau never did establish a closer relationship. We need to go further than they did, if relationships are to be truly healed.

### **3. Peniel is the place of consecration Genesis 32:29**

*"Jacob said please tell me your name."* But he replied, *'Why do you ask my name' and then he blessed him there.*" Jacob came to an end of struggling and commenced clinging and the blessing quickly came. The Lord does not reveal a new name to him but did bless him in His own sovereign way. Blessings must be obtained from God in the right way, or not at all. Our supreme need is the grace of God and this is not only independent of but opposed to all that is merely earthly and human. Just as salvation is of God by grace, so is every other spiritual blessing derived in the same way. Whether we think of the individual believer or the community of God's people, all grace comes through fellowship with God.

It is strange to observe that one of the lingering consequences of this blessing of God was a permanent limp, because of his hip (v.31). However, this was not so

much a disability as a sign of His nobility. V.32. To this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon, and touch the socket of the hip, because the socket of the hip was touched near the tendon. This was not the law. You won't find this written anywhere else in Scripture, but it is still observed to this day. Ask a Jew why? Because Jacob was privileged to meet with God face to face. The blessings of God always carry a stigma.

**The providence of God has a stigma** *"Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated"*. The world hates that message.

**The provision of Jesus has a stigma.** The fact that we can only be saved through trusting in the blood of the cross. The world hates that message.

**The power of the Spirit carries a stigma.** On the day of Pentecost, the believers were either said to be drunk or mad. The world couldn't understand God's way of doing things and so they wrote it off.

Today, to identify with this God carries its own stigma. That is why the Apostle Paul says, *"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation."* Peniel was the place of consecration. Here while Jacob was prepared to accept the blessings of God, no matter what the stigma was. The question is, are we?

## Questions for Discussion

1. Jacob was a complex character and not very nice.
2. Discuss “Jacob have I loved Esau have I hated” (Malachi 1:2).  
What does this teach us about Divine Election? What is the group’s view of it?
3. Have you ever wrestled with God’s will for your life?  
How did the matter end? Each share?
4. What is God’s purpose for our life?  
Compare Ephesians 2:10, Romans 8:28-9 and 12:2
5. What do you understand about “The blessings of God always carry a stigma”? What experiences have you had of it?

## **Study Seven: God Stood in Balaam's Path – A Foe of God**

### **Reading: Numbers 22:21-41**

The story of Balaam reveals that he is a remarkable character. He first appears as a man of integrity who tried to obey the Will of God literally.

It is interesting that he is first forbidden and then allowed to go in response to the invitation of King Balak. The only satisfactory explanation is that whilst he wanted to do the will of God he was enticed by the offer of money. Peter has an interesting comment about him, "... *the way of Balaam son of Bezer loved the wages of wickedness.*" 2 Peter 2:15.

As he went on his way there was a Supernatural intervention as the Angel of the Lord first seemed to deny his way ahead but then it was granted but with a limit set on what he could say. Now if Balaam had really wanted to do God's will he would have turned back but his hesitation is seen in his words "*if it you are displeased I will go back*" (V34).

The story provides a remarkable illustration of the working out of an abiding principle. We are made to work out our deepest desires while all the time the Lord works towards changing that internal condition.

Circumstances are overruled for the development in outward manifestation of the inward truth. Balaam loved being hired to do wrong and so long as that love remained within him he was driven on, even though the sin of his action was revealed by the Divine intervention.

He returned to Balak and in so doing showed an external obedience to the will of God in declaring to him that he could only speak the word that God put in his mouth. Underneath he was still motivated by his love of money. He attempted to compromise between obedience and this love.

The graphic imagery in this story is unforgettable but they were truths more for Israel's ears than Balak's. Let's now consider in a little more depth the characters in the story. Each of them has important things to say to us in the Twenty First Century.

### **The Anxious King 22:3**

Here we see the King of Moab was "*terrified*" at the advance of the Israelites. Fear and anxiety is the curse of our age. Like so many his fear was groundless. God had told Moses not to harass the Moabites—see Deut. 2:9,18. It was Spurgeon who said, "*anxiety does nothing to rob tomorrow of its sorrows; it only robs today of its strength*". We have something to learn from Balak—so much

anxiety is wasted emotional energy and unnecessary mental torture. Consider what Jesus said about anxiety—see Matthew 6:25-34.

### **The Avaricious “Prophet”**

Balaam thought that he could make a small fortune by telling Barak the things he wanted to hear. The King would gladly have given half of his wealth to get rid of what he thought was a problem. Balaam thought he could do what he liked but he had not considered the Sovereignty of God. His Pagan ideas about those pseudo-deities he usually had dealings with concentrated on the most appropriate offerings to make to them, the right way to placate or humour them and the best places to stand in order to obtain their favours and meet the client’s requirements. Given the right treatment, such gods could easily be flattered, controlled or subdued. But Israel’s God could not be bought or cajoled into doing anything that mere humans may want or not want. He had declared his plans for his people and neither an anxious king nor a greedy soothsayer could thwart them. Balaam was a voice that God was determined to use, nothing more, and he could do little to prevent it. We have something to learn from Balaam. We must not arrogantly assume that, given appropriate spiritual formulas, right prayer— language or sufficient intensity in our belief mechanism, God can be persuaded to do something to his wise purposes.

### **The Astonished Donkey.**

The animal had never spoken before and would never do so again. It too was an instrument in the hand of God. It was the Lord who opened the dumb donkey’s mouth (22:8) and the blind seer’s eyes (22:31). By means of this brilliant story, the Lord presented the people with an encouraging message and some great doctrinal truths. A list of fine theological propositions might decay in the dust but the story of a donkey that spoke would last forever. The donkey plays a part in a great drama that Dr Doolittle would be proud of! When God wants to announce great themes, influence multitudes, change lives and shape destinies, he will use whoever and whatever he wishes—a pagan king, a greedy soothsayer even a donkey. This compelling story is not about what humans plan but about what God purposes and achieves. In the unfolding of his will he can use anything or anybody to achieve his righteous ends.

## Questions for Discussion

1. This story is a masterpiece of ancient Israel's narrative art but what does it say to communicate God's word in the twenty-first century?
2. Discuss your opinion of all the characters in this story.  
What do you make of Balak, Balaam and the donkey?  
What does this story tell us about the Lord's sense of humour?
3. What does the scripture say about:  
Anxiety? Avarice? And the way God deals with us?
4. What has this story said to you? Each share

## Study Eight: God Instructs Joshua – A Fighter for God

### Reading: Joshua 5:13-6:5

The purpose of this study to challenge people to a life of faith and to move from a life of mediocrity, to come face to face with the person of Jesus Christ and to bring our lives under his authority. You see Joshua was already involved in the purposes of God, but he had to learn that he had to bow the knee in submission to King Jesus.

#### 1. The challenges that concerned him. 5:13a *“Now when Joshua was near Jericho.”*

Two challenges were before Joshua. They were to mobilise the army and to master the enemy. Let us unpack that:

**To mobilise the army.** This involved bringing some 2 million people into the centre of God’s purposes. That is our task. We are challenged to discover, to develop and to release the gifts of all of God’s people that we might be the mighty army of God;

**To master the enemy, 5:13a** *“He looked up and saw ... Jericho”*. Jericho was an impregnable city but beyond the city there was the whole nation of Canaan. This was not just a conflict, it was a campaign. A battle is a single engagement, but a campaign is a series of concerted military operations directed towards a single objective. The sooner we get this campaign view of life the better because it gives unity to all events and experiences. Were life issues determined by a single battle and we lost the battle how terrible it would be for all of us. But this is not so. We may lose battles yet win the campaign. And this view of life not only unifies the experiences of each of us, but it unites all Christians in a common objective. So, a campaign cannot be fought by an individual. It was not Joshua that conquered Canaan but all Israel as with conflicts throughout the Christian ages. It is not the responsibility of a few individuals however distinguished, but of the whole church of God. The Bible is plain that we have a three-fold enemy: the world, the flesh and the devil.

**The world** conspires against us and we are told not to love the world. We must be careful to understand what is meant by the world, the cosmos. The world is God’s creation and God made everything good. The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof. But cosmos acquired a moral sense. It began to mean the world apart from God. It means human society insofar as it is organised on wrong principles and characterised by base desires, false desires and standards. That is why the world persecutes the church – because it is against God.

**The flesh.** That is our own humanity that militates against the Spirit. It is the downward pull of our old nature. Left to our own devices we will disobey rather than obey God.

**The devil** is against us and he needs to be resisted. Christians are at war and this is the challenge that should concern us. We too must mobilise the army of God and master the enemy that is ranged against us.

## **2. The Commander that confronted him. 5:13-15**

Joshua was alone prayerfully contemplating what the next step should be when suddenly there appeared before him *“a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand.”* Joshua challenged him asking if he was for Israel or against them. He got the reply that he was the commander of the Lord’s army. This was an event of profound importance and you ought to consider the following carefully. The man who appeared was a warrior; that Joshua was prepared to fight. Joshua knew of only two sides – for and against; and that the man announced that he was more than man; that he was none other than the commander of all God’s angelic hosts and for the conflict now about to begin he had come, not merely to direct the army of Israel but to fight for it and with it. Every part of this incident is relevant to the church of God and to the individual Christian.

**Who was he?** It was Jesus or course. Angels never accepted worship. God in Christ appears in many aspects to his people and always in the manner most suited to his circumstance and need of the hour. To Jacob he came as a wrestler; to Moses he appeared in a flame of fire and to Joshua he appears as a warrior.

To the afflicted he is the God of comfort; to the depressed he is the God of hope; to the lonely he is a friend; to the storm-tossed he is an anchor; and to the longing world he is the Lord who meets our every need; and in all these and many other aspects he is here today because our needs are many. We need to learn this lesson however, but Joshua’s first concern was not Jericho but Jesus. Before we can surmount our Jericho’s, we have to submit to Jesus.

**What did he want?** Submission! Before he could serve he had to submit! The Christian life is to BE a life of activity and conflict but if we are to fight in his strength we must submit to his authority. The church today is humming with activity but achieving little. The Church is busy but not obedient. So Joshua submits. **V14** tells us that he fell face down on the ground in reverence and asked him, *“What message does my Lord have for his servant?”* I am sure Joshua was expecting something great. Instead the Lord tells him to take his shoes off! That is something a soldier would never do. Before God uses he proves the most

important area of the Christian life is obedience. But not just any obedience, it is an inward obedience, a submission. How is it with you?

### **3. The Communication that comforted him. 6:2**

“Then the Lord said to Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.”

This was the promise of victory. Notice here is the secret to abundant living. We should think not so much ‘what is my responsibility’ but ‘what is my response to his ability’! Two matters emerge from this message from Jesus to Joshua:

**The Victory promised.** Observe “*delivered*” is in the past tense but the city had not been attacked. It was still shut up, it was impregnable. This is a flaming arrow through our intellect! You see, what was a problem to Joshua was not to Jesus. Compare the story of David and Goliath in which David declared “*The battle is the Lord’s*”. He had discovered the secret of victory. In 1 Cor. 15:57 the Apostle Paul had discovered the same secret,

*“Thanks be to God who gives us the Victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Calvary is our ground of victory against the world, the flesh and the devil and because Calvary is a finality Pentecost can be a reality!

**The Strategy provided, 6:3-5.** Now you read those verses and it seems like madness. But it worked! God’s ways are not our ways. Our weapons are not carnal, but rather, the weapons of Divine Power!

- The message of the Cross
- The witness of Christians
- The means of Grace

If only we would believe him, we would do exploits!

In warfare, almost everything depends on strategy; the movement of troops, or ships, or planes so as to engage and defeat the enemy at the place, and time, and in conditions most advantageous. If such tactics are necessary in worldly warfare do we not suppose we can dispense with them in the spiritual realm, in an age-long conflict of right with wrong, of truth with error, or holiness with sin? The truth is we need to bring our lives under the authority, into absolute submission to our Commander, the Lord Jesus Christ. He has a strategy, but he will provide for every step of the way.

What is the challenge facing us today? The Commander Jesus is here, wanting to fight our battles. The communication is the same as it’s always been, “*I have given you...*” Dare to believe him.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What does the appearance of the Lord as, “*a man with a drawn sword in his hand*” (Josh.5:13) tell us about the Character of God?
2. If God requires the surrender of our feet, what other parts of the body does scripture speak specifically about making available to God. Find verses for these examples; ears, eyes, mouth etc...
3. Who is in charge of your life’s battles? Discuss what it means to live under authority.
4. God gave no reason for Israel needing to march around Jericho over seven days. Are you conscious of orders God has given you but do not understand the reasons? What should be our attitude in such situations?
5. God did not grant Israel immediate victory over Jericho without the process of obedience and patience. What can we learn from this about our own involvement in reaching people for Christ?

## **Study Nine: God Motivates Gideon – God’s Faltering Leader**

### **Reading: Judges 6-11-23**

Gideon is a great character! As a flesh and blood person, as a believer and a servant of God he develops before our eyes and his personal story has lessons for us. That is right and proper – but remember the background of it all; The nation of Israel was torn between the destructive power of the heathen nations in and around Israel’s Promised Land, and the authority of the wise and loving judge who is Israel’s God; and this at such time when they are not protected or cushioned against these ultimate realities by intervening authority figures like Moses in earlier days or David in later ones. The lessons that Gideon has to learn are the lessons that Israel as a whole had to learn. The battle is the Lord’s, but God needs someone that will lead his people, someone to take the initiative! The Lord came to Gideon which seems to be a strange choice. He appears to be a coward (hiding away) but his influence for God lasted 40 years. In this study we observe Gideon moving from being a nobody in obscurity to a man of greatness and lasting influence and observe three marks of his influential leadership.

#### **1. His concern for the Glory of God: Judges 6:12-13**

We see his concern in his response, *“It is not right.”* We are the people of God, suffering, persecuted, impoverished. There is no glory for God while his people suffer! Notice his motive; God’s glory as compared with, *“What’s in it for me”*. God wants leaders whose motives are right and concerned about his glory. Leadership begins with motivation and Gideon’s was right, it was concerned for the glory of God. His concern for God’s glory was brought about by two causes:

**The condition he saw amongst God’s people. Compare verses 6 and 13.** Israel impoverished was not right. Gideon was asking God *“Why is this so?”*;

**The conviction he held concerning God’s power, verse 13.** Gideon could not reconcile the oppression of God’s people with God’s power. The taunts of the heathen, *“Where is your God?”* touched him to the quick.

#### **2. His consent to the purpose of God**

His concern and right motives are not enough. Action was required.

**The task assigned him,** verses 13 and 14. Gideon said, *“Why is it like this?”* God said, *“You do something about it.”* Compare **verses 12 and 15**, God sees us not as we are but as we can be.

**The test applied to him,** verse 25. Compare verses 26 and 27 – Gideon did it. It did not matter when he did it, it had to be done. Something needed to be

removed and something needed to be offered and he did both. Before God uses a person, he proves that person.

### **3. His control by the Spirit of God. Judges 6:34-35.**

Gideon had 32,000 men following him. What a responsibility.

**The secrets of spiritual leadership**, seen in verse 34 *"The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon"*. Compare Acts 1:8. The story of the reduction from 32,000 to 300 men leads to a miracle that will be traced to God's Power and not Human Energy. This is the key note of the story. God says to Gideon, *"The people with you are too many"* (7:2). Too many? The object was to reduce Gideon's army to a force, not of a particular kind, but of a particular number. A small corps of crack troops is precisely what God does not want. The 300 are meant to be not an elite but a group so inadequate that when the battle is won (God declares) it cannot be a case of Israel saying, *"By our own hand we are delivered"* (7:2). Rather, the Lord said, *"I will save you"* 7:7

**The sequel to spiritual leadership.** Judges 7:13-25. The power of the enemy is routed, victory is experienced. You do not need to be a clever theologian, just controlled by the Spirit of God so that when he says, *"Cut"* you do so. When he says, *"Trust"*, you do so. This defies the intellect. The story of Gideon is the story of the Lord coaxing along a reluctant leader who really is diffident, modest and shy and who needs to have his confidence built up step-by-step by a patient, loving but determined God. God is looking for leaders like Gideon.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Motivation is seen to be crucial in the story of Gideon.  
What is your motivation for serving the Lord?  
What concerns you about the state of the Church and the Nation?
2. What is the significance of “the task assigned to him”  
i.e. The removing of the idols in his father’s house.  
What does that say to us about where our Ministry and Mission ought to begin?
3. *“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord”*  
*Zechariah 4:6.* What relevance does this verse have to the story of Gideon and the reduction of the size of his army? How might this be applied to us today?
4. What does this story have to say about the Mission of the Church?

## **Study Ten: God instructs Manoah and His Wife About Samson**

### **Reading: Judges 13:3-23**

The story of Samson has always had a great fascination to all people; it has inspired music to be composed, films to be made, operas to be performed. The secret of its popularity and fascination is its humanness. It begins as many episodes in the time of the Judges "*and the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord...*" 13:1. The Book of Judges is the story of the deterioration of the Nation of Israel. The history of the nation has been described by four 'R's'; Rebellion, Retribution, Repentance and Rescue. Now that is a very simplistic way of summing up history, but you should see the point. But while for Israel the process has been one of steady decline for God it has been one of persistence in preserving and directing his people. It is fascinating to see how every event in the present study follows a *cause-and-effect* sequence from one or other of Samson's three recorded relationships with women (14:1-2; 16:1; 16:4). Each time he cheerfully falls for a quite unsuitable girl, and each time the Lord harnesses the young man's self-indulgence for his own purposes and makes sure that a string of consequences brings about, as ever, his long-term judgement. However, the way that the Lord prepares the next Judge and deliverer is through his appearing to Samson's parents. Observe:

#### **1. The Destiny of Samson - Judges 13:3-5.**

Here is the story of the privilege of having Godly parents. Manoah's wife was barren but then God intervened and called Samson from the womb. Compare Jeremiah 1:4-5, "*The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."*" Of course, this general truth is true of every born-again child of God. We are children of destiny, see Romans 8:29.

Observe two elements of the destiny of Samson:

**The course was made known** - Judges 13:1&5. God's angel (A Christophany) appeared in a Danite home in the village of Zorah to announce to the couple the birth of a child who would be a deliverer of Israel. Compare Luke 1. We shall bear the parallel in mind; it is something more than mere coincidence (as the chapter unfolds so does the character of these two whom the Lord has chosen). They provided a Godly background. Samson was to be a deliverer after 40 years of persecution. We as the people of God have the answer to the godlessness and hopelessness today for we are children of destiny and have a message of freedom to declare.

**The Conditions Laid Down** - Judges 13:5, "Because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines." We are called to be a separated people.

## **2. The Ministry of Samson - Judges 15:20.**

His was a Spirit empowered Ministry – observe the elements in such a ministry:

**The Blessings Enjoyed** - Judges 13:25, 14:6, 14:19, 15:14. For twenty years the Holy Spirit came on him and Samson was a great man of faith. That is why he is included in Hebrews 11, the honours list of the New Testament;

**The Battles Endured** - Judges 14-16 are a record of how Samson was attacked from within and without;

**He was attacked from without** – He married a Philistine and they hated him for it. Day and night, they attacked him! Judges 15:14; 16:2,9,16;

**He was attacked from within** – His wife conspired against him (14:15-16) and notice this was on their honeymoon! The men of Judah, 3,000 of his own people (15:11). And then Delilah –16:16. The very ones he might have expected to help were now opposed to him. Enemies always want to attack. Christians should expect it. We are at war. Jesus said, "*If they hated me they will hate you*". Jesus came and lived the only perfect life ever and yet they crucified him. But what must have been most painful for our own Lord was that his own friends turned against him, they all forsook him at the hour of greatest need.

## **3. The Tragedy of Samson—Judges 14:1-2; 16:1,4**

The tragedy of Samson is that he allowed himself to fall in love with a Philistine again and again and him a Nazirite, one who was to be separated unto God. The tragedy was not that he loved but that she was a Philistine. But the greatest tragedy was not even what he did but what he allowed to be done to him. He was robbed of his strength. He knew where his strength lay. It was in obedience to God. But being worn down he tired under the constant stream of pressure and he fell. Observe:

**What Samson allowed to happen** - Judges 16:15-17. He allowed himself to be robbed of the secret of his strength which was his separation to God and complete obedience;

**What Samson assumed would happen** - Judges 16:20. He assumed that God would be there in power just when he needed him. Look at Psalm 19:13.

#### **4. The Victory of Samson - Judges 16:21**

What a picture – this great man grinding at the mill. He was at rock bottom, strapped and chained to a wheel. No better than a beast. Visualise it for a moment. Perhaps you are there? Are you at rock bottom? Have you sinned? Have you dishonoured your calling and your God? Well listen to this, *“Where sin abounded there did grace much more abound.”* Look at v28-30; tragedy turned into victory. Hallelujah! Your disappointments are his appointments. There were two things involved in Samson’s victory:

**Penitence moved him**, 16:28 and *compare v22* is very significant, *“The hair on his head began to grow again”*. Obedience was returning. I believe the heart of obedience was beginning to beat again. The tears of penitence were beginning to fall again. The prayers of power were beginning to ascend again. I imagine as he ground the corn, soaked and salted with his tears that he cried *“Lord, remember me...strengthen me”*

**Omnipotence mastered him**, 16:23-29.

As he prayed God moved him. God was in control again. *“If we confess our sin he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness”*. 1 John 1:9. They were a mocking crowd that day, not only mocking Samson but Samson’s God. Look at verse 23: Dagon was worshipped. God’s honour was at stake and Samson was moved to act one final time for God’s Glory to be restored to the nation. Then look at verse 29 and learn from this story that it doesn’t matter how long you live but it matters desperately how you live! It doesn’t matter what you have done or how much longer you have to live, it matters desperately how you act in the time that is left.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Samson is listed among the Giants of Faith (Hebrews 11:32). How do you reconcile this with his repeated moral failure? What qualified him for his inclusion?
2. Manoah and his wife were believing parents that had a wayward child. What does this say to parents today? What lessons can we all learn from their example?
3. *“Keep your servant also from wilful (presumptuous) sins; may they not rule over me.”* Psalm 19:13. What relevance has this verse to Samson’s story and to us?
4. Repentance is a great Gospel word. How do you understand it? What does it mean to you. Pray together for a Spirit of repentance to visit the Church.

## Study Eleven: What About Melchizedek?

**Readings: Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 110; Hebrews 5:1-10**

Melchizedek is certainly a type of Christ and is referred to in the readings above and again in Hebrews Chapter 7. He is described as the King of Salem which is interesting because Jesus is the King of Peace which means the same. Christians throughout the ages have wondered about the real identity of this "*Priest of the Most High God*" who pronounced blessings on Abraham.

I have included this study amongst the Christophanies because many Christians would expect it as they think of him in that way. However, there are a number of reasons why he should not be considered in that way. **Two facts stand out namely, Melchizedek was the king of a city Gen. 14:18 and he performed a religious ceremony Gen. 14:19-20.**

**Salem was an actual city**, probably Jerusalem, as found in Psalm 76:2. Since Theophanies in human form were always temporary and fleeting it would be unusual for God to have visited Abraham while posing as the king of a Canaanite city. Also, in none of the identifiable Christophanies was the one who appeared connected in any permanent way with life on this earth.

**When Christ appeared in human-form theophanies he never performed a religious ceremony.** Yet Melchizedek was titled "*priest of the Most High God*" and brought bread and wine, the elements of a completed sacrifice, while he pronounced the blessing on Abraham.

Furthermore, all that we know about Melchizedek from the book of Hebrews confirms this view that he should not be considered a pre-incarnate visit of the Christ.

- Hebrews 7:3 declares, in essence, that he had no recorded genealogy some mistake this to signify that he was eternal in nature. However, Hebrews 7:6 states that he did have a genealogy, although it was not traced through Abraham
- This identification would also destroy the argument of the book of Hebrews. *Christ is better than angels (1:4) better than Moses (3:3) and better than Melchizedek (7:22)*. This would not be so if Christ were Melchizedek.
- Then again look at Hebrews 7:3 Melchizedek "... *like the Son of God*" which means he was like a copy or facsimile. Again, this would not be true if he were the Christ, for why should the text say he was *like* Christ if he actually were the Christ.
- "*Melchizedek remains a priest forever*". How could this be true if he were the Christ for it conflicts not only with Aaron's priesthood but also with Christ

himself. How could Christ be an eternal Melchizedek and at the same time exercise the Ministry of Jesus Christ on earth?

- Finally, the often-repeated statement (Psalm 110:4; Heb.5:6 6:20; 7:11,21) that *Christ is a priest after the order of Mechizedek*” clearly differentiates Christ and Melchizedek.

**The identification of Melchizedek is also different from all the other Christophanies.** The characteristic pattern of the human form theophanies is not found in any of the Melchizedek accounts. That is he was never identified as Deity, as was normal in all of the other Christophanies. There was not introductory phrases such as "The Lord *appeared*" (Gen.12:7) or "The Lord *said*" (Gen.13:14) or "The angel of the Lord *said*" (Gen.16:9) which is so common in the Christophanies around the Genesis 14 passage. Neither was there any recognition of Abram's part that he had seen God as at other times (*e.g., Gen.18:25*).

The omission of any textual indication of a Christophanic appearance seems almost conclusive in itself that Melchizedek was someone other than a deity.

### **Who then was this Melchizedek?**

Josephus the Jewish Historian of the time of Jesus says simply "He was the king of the city of Salem". This too was the opinion of the early Apostolic Fathers and also of the reformers of the 16th Century like John Calvin.

I believe the view that Melchizedek was not a Christophany is the only position that can be held based on sound exposition and exegesis of the passages of Genesis 14 and Hebrews 7.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Melchizedek is a strange character, right outside the biblical covenants, but clearly on intimate terms with God. Can there be other such people? Tucked away in Pagan cultures, unknown and ignored?
2. Melchizedek is the “king of Salem (Peace)”. He lives in complete harmony with God and his world—and yet he is surrounded by war in Genesis 14. How can we live out biblical peace, in a world of conflict?  
Is it possible? How?
3. These days Jerusalem “*The City of Peace*” is particularly ill-named. What would Melchizedek, King of Salem, say to those involved in the conflict around that City today? What would his counsel be?  
Pray together for the peace of Jerusalem.