

The failure of prophetic leadership



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But which of them has stood in the council of the Lord to see or to hear his word?

I have been a prophet for nearly 30 years, and have had the chance to see the effectiveness, or otherwise of prophetic ministry in many countries. In the 21st century, treatment of prophetic ministries is very varied, but mostly very apathetic. Many will not even consider the possibility of such a ministry, and those who do treat it very lightly, and usually very dismissively.

Does this matter? From a personal point of view it is probably not catastrophic. Ignoring prophetic words or visions may set us back a few months or years, but there are other ways of discovering God's will, and the Lord may choose to speak in a different way, although that presumption has always struck me as a bit risky – suppose he doesn't choose to speak another way? But many, may be most are prepared to take the risk. So be it.

Whole national prophetic leadership fails?

But what happens when the prophetic leadership of a whole nation fails? What happens if the Lord either stops speaking prophetically or the prophets themselves lose their way, and drag the people of God into the wilderness? This surely would be catastrophic, and indeed it is catastrophic. But it is usually compounded by an even greater catastrophe - the people of God no longer have any prophetic leadership of value to help them, and they don't even know it. Once the prophetic leadership at the national level fails, there is no good prophetic example to follow. God's people then follow the rubbish, without knowing it, and without any pattern of true prophecy which can help them back onto God's path. This is truly catastrophic, and while it will not show itself straight away, will eventually weaken a nation spiritually to such an extent that it will be weak and vulnerable to any attack of the enemy.

Ghana - a lost leadership?

To this situation Ghana is rapidly coming, or has indeed already come. What has happened, and is there any way out, or is the situation now irrevocably lost?

This was one of the many revelations I received from the Lord, which is part of what he is trying to say to us:-

I saw the Lord. He was so weary and tired. "Lord" I asked, "why are you like this?"

“Look” he said.

I saw a man, a very bright and powerful man, calling to God’s people - “Come and follow me, and I will give you all that you want. You can have peace. You can have power. You can have wealth. Come - my way is easy, and you will receive all the blessings of an open heaven. Come – I have come from God to lead you into a joyful path.”

The people of God listened to this man, and all began to follow him. “Good” they said. “Now we can have all we want.”

But the man was a liar. He did not lead the people to joy, but led them into a barren and hopeless wilderness, where there was no water of life, and no presence of God.

“Help” they cried out. “Get us out of here.”

They went to their leaders, but every leader had followed the lie, and now were as lost as the people. The people were angry with God, and said “Why have you let this happen to us?”

The vision faded and I was on my own with the Lord. I looked at him, and suddenly I was tired and weary. He took my hand, and together we walked away.

What has gone wrong? Let’s look at Jeremiah 23, where I have highlighted the parts of this chapter which show us what has gone wrong.

Jeremiah 23

¹ “Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and ***scattering the sheep*** of my pasture!” declares the Lord. ² Therefore this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: “Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,” declares the Lord. ³ “I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. ⁴ I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing,” declares the Lord.

⁵ “The days are coming,” declares the Lord,
“when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch,
a King who will reign wisely
and do what is just and right in the land.

⁶ In his days Judah will be saved
and Israel will live in safety.

This is the name by which he will be called:
The Lord Our Righteousness.

⁷ “So then, the days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when people will no longer say, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,’ ⁸ but they will say, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the descendants of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.’ Then they will live in their own land.”

⁹ Concerning the prophets:

My heart is broken within me;
all my bones tremble.
I am like a drunken man,
like a man overcome by wine,
because of the Lord
and his holy words.

¹⁰ The land is full of adulterers;
because of the curse the land lies parched
and the pastures in the desert are withered.

***The prophets follow an evil course
and use their power unjustly.***

¹¹ ***“Both prophet and priest are godless;
even in my temple I find their wickedness,”***
declares the Lord.

¹² “Therefore their path will become slippery;
they will be banished to darkness
and there they will fall.

I will bring disaster on them
in the year they are punished,”
declares the Lord.

¹³ “Among the prophets of Samaria
I saw this repulsive thing:

They prophesied by Baal
and led my people Israel astray.

¹⁴ And among the prophets of Jerusalem
I have seen something horrible:

They commit adultery and live a lie.

They strengthen the hands of evildoers,
so that no one turns from his wickedness.

They are all like Sodom to me;
the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah.”

¹⁵ Therefore, this is what the Lord Almighty says concerning the prophets:

“I will make them eat bitter food
and drink poisoned water,
because from the prophets of Jerusalem
ungodliness has spread throughout the land.”

¹⁶ This is what the Lord Almighty says:

“Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you;
they fill you with false hopes.
They speak visions from their own minds,
not from the mouth of the Lord.”

¹⁷ They keep saying to those who despise me,
‘The Lord says: ***You will have peace.***’

And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts
they say, ‘No harm will come to you.’

¹⁸ ***But which of them has stood in the council of the Lord
to see or to hear his word?***

Who has listened and heard his word?

¹⁹ See, the storm of the Lord
will burst out in wrath,
a whirlwind swirling down
on the heads of the wicked.

²⁰ The anger of the Lord will not turn back
until he fully accomplishes
the purposes of his heart.

In days to come
you will understand it clearly.

²¹ ***I did not send these prophets,***
yet they have run with their message;

I did not speak to them,
yet they have prophesied.

²² But if they had stood in my council,
they would have proclaimed my words to my people
and would have turned them from their evil ways
and from their evil deeds.

²³ “Am I only a God nearby,”
declares the Lord,

“and not a God far away?”

²⁴ Can anyone hide in secret places
so that I cannot see him?”

declares the Lord.

“Do not I fill heaven and earth?”

declares the Lord.

²⁵ “I have heard what the prophets say who ***prophesy lies in my name***. They say, ‘I had a dream! I had a dream!’ ²⁶ How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds? ²⁷ They think the dreams they tell one another will make my people forget my name, just as their fathers forgot my name through Baal worship. ²⁸ Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?” declares the Lord. ²⁹ “Is not my word like fire,” declares the Lord, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”

³⁰ “Therefore,” declares the Lord, “I am against the prophets who steal from one another words supposedly from me. ³¹ Yes,” declares the Lord, “I am ***against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare,*** ‘The Lord declares.’ ³² Indeed, I am against those who prophesy false dreams,” declares the Lord. “They tell them and lead my people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least,” declares the Lord.

False Oracles and False Prophets

³³ “When these people, or a prophet or a priest, ask you, ‘What is the oracle of the Lord?’ say to them, ‘What oracle? I will forsake you,’ declares the Lord.” ³⁴ If a prophet or a priest or anyone else claims, ‘This is the oracle of the Lord,’ I will punish that man and his household. ³⁵ This is what each of you keeps on saying to his friend or relative: ‘What is the Lord’s answer?’ or ‘What has the Lord

spoken?' ³⁶ But you must not mention 'the oracle of the Lord' again, because every man's own word becomes his oracle and so you distort the words of the living God, the Lord Almighty, our God. ³⁷ This is what you keep saying to a prophet: 'What is the Lord's answer to you?' or 'What has the Lord spoken?' ³⁸ Although you claim, 'This is the oracle of the Lord,' this is what the Lord says: You used the words, 'This is the oracle of the Lord,' even though I told you that you must not claim, 'This is the oracle of the Lord.' ³⁹ Therefore, I will surely forget you and cast you out of my presence along with the city I gave to you and your fathers. ⁴⁰ I will bring upon you everlasting disgrace— everlasting shame that will not be forgotten.

Now let's look in detail at the various issues which I have highlighted in this passage.

*** The prophets follow an evil course and use their power unjustly. "Both prophet and priest are godless; even in my temple I find their wickedness," declares the Lord. (v10-11)**

The Lord does not hold back as he attacks the failed prophetic stream. Here's the first criticism - the prophets are following an "evil course." I have listed the various shades of meaning of "evil" from the Hebrew concordance. If we just read the list through, I think we will be shocked.

- Bad, disagreeable, malignant.
- Bad, unpleasant, evil (giving pain, unhappiness, misery).
- Evil, displeasing.
- Bad (of its kind - land, water,).
- Bad (of value).
- Worse than, worst (comparison).
- Sad, unhappy.
- Evil (hurtful).
- Bad, unkind (vicious in disposition).
- Bad, evil, wicked (ethically).
- In general, of persons, of thoughts.

Of deeds, actions

- Evil, distress, misery, injury, calamity.
- Evil, distress, adversity.

- Evil, injury, wrong.
- Evil (ethical).
- Evil, misery, distress, injury.
- Evil, misery, distress.
- Evil, injury, wrong.
- Evil (ethical).

How can anything good come from such a leadership? Yet God's people do not realise the danger into which they will be brought by this "evil" prophetic ministry. (God's words, not mine.) The result is that this stream is worse than evil - it is "godless", also translated "profane." Here is the meaning of "profane" from the Hebrew concordance:-

- To be polluted.
- To be profane, be godless.
- To pollute.
- To make profane, make godless, cause to be defiled, be corrupt.

The Lord looks at the prophetic stream in Jeremiah's day, and finds it evil and profane. How has such a thing happened to the gift which was meant to lead, direct, encourage and comfort God's people?

We get a hint with the word "power"

- Strength.
- Might, valour, bravery.
- Might, mighty deeds (of God).

That which was meant to be used for the service of God, to strengthen and encourage God's people, to break down strongholds and uplift the name of God was being used for personal gain. This is a danger which surrounds the life of any prophet. We have access to great power, but we have to remain humble and servant hearted. If we do not, we begin to use the power for ourselves. The result of this is that we become evil and profane. It's a high price to pay, but many pay it for the position and honour they get. But what they fail to see is that such use of power corrupts the users, and destroys God's people.

*** They prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray. And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah.” (V13-14)**

The Lord leads. (“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. Ps.23:1-3.) This should be the mark of the true prophetic stream. We are to lead into still waters. This doesn’t mean that sometimes the path will lay through very troubled waters (Matt.26:36-46) The prophets do not offer an easy ride, but “still waters” reflect the nature of God - his stillness, his certainty, his reliability, his guarantee of the Spirit’s leading – **“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.”** (Jn.16:12)

The Bible says **“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?”** (Matt.7:9) The answer appears to be the prophetic stream of Ghana. The prophets have “led Israel astray.” They have “lived a lie.”

Nothing better describes the prophetic stream in Ghana – it has “lived a lie.” If I have heard “all is well” once, I have heard it a hundred times. It seems that the prophets know no other revelation. It is a lie, but one so easily spoken, easily shared and easily believed. After all, who does not want to know that “all is well?” We all want ease comfort and security. But these things cannot be found in a lie. Only the truth brings security, hope and encouragement. Only truth brings in the kingdom, and only truth can be a lasting foundation for the kingdom. Jesus himself said “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:5-7)

The lie **“strengthens the hand of evildoers.”** Those who should have been challenged , those who should have stopped following their destructive ways - those who are bringing the nation down get encouragement and strength from the lie – after all, they live and function by the lie. The prophetic stream should be giving God’s people the courage to challenge all that is evil in Ghana, breaking the strongholds and lifting up the Lord. The prophetic stream lives to do just this, yet it is perpetuating the lie, and encouraging those who live by the lie to continue and flourish.

Who gets the blame for this? Everyone! The prophets become an offence to God. It will be worse for them than for Sodom and Gomorrah at the judgment:

“I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of Judgment than for that town” (Matt 10:14)

That was for the town of Capernaum, and it will also be for those in the prophetic stream who have led the people into the desert to die.

But God’s people cannot avoid their share of the blame. If they had only **“lifted up their eyes”** (John 4:35) they would have seen the danger their nation was, and is facing, and would have started to seek for truth. Then the true prophetic stream could have started to flow, the people could have been led forward, and God would have been able to spare the nation that which will now surely come on it.

*** This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They keep saying to those who despise me, ‘The Lord says: You will have peace.’ And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say, ‘No harm will come to you.’ (v 16-17)**

From leading astray we move on to **“fill you with false hopes.”** How do they do this?

Visions from their own minds.

This has always been the bane of the prophetic experience. Prophets are often lonely, and are desperate to belong. God’s people want to hear nice things, and reward those who deliver them with warmth and affection. The result is that prophets speak what the people want to hear. They don’t see this as filling with false hope, but that is what it is. Anything which does not flow from the heart of God through a heart open to receiving and speaking those things will lead the people astray. Deep in their spirits prophets know that they are not speaking purity and truth. But they bury that feeling.

God’s people do not need to be so misled. The same Spirit in the mouth of the prophet is the same Spirit which is in the lives of the hearers. The Spirit will testify to the truth, or otherwise of the prophetic word.

Not from the mouth of the Lord.

A prophet has no choice. He sees, he hears and he speaks. There must be no interference, no change, no adjustment - he speaks as he hears. When a prophet fails to do this, he no longer speaks for the Lord. The problem is that prophets will not recognise this truth, and continue to speak. God’s people find

it hard to accept that prophets can speak from their own selves, but that's because God's people do not appreciate the agony of the prophetic call, or the pressure they put on the prophets to say things which are encouraging. Naturally, no one wants to receive hard things. But if that is what God is saying, then so be it.

*** They keep saying to those who despise me, 'The Lord says: You will have peace.' And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say, 'No harm will come to you.'**

Now we come to the heart of the misleading, and notice where the Lord puts the responsibility – on the people. The people who **“despise”** the Lord, who refuse to change but follow their stubborn ways - to such a people the prophets are almost forced to say “God is with you” or pay a price which may be too high for many of them. But the people are only treating the prophets as they have treated the Lord:-

**“Stand at the crossroads and look;
ask for the ancient paths,
ask where the good way is, and walk in it,
and you will find rest for your souls.
But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’” (Jer.6:16)**

But this does not absolve the prophetic stream. The stream was put in place for just such circumstances - to break the waywardness and stubbornness of the people, at whatever cost. Micaiah ben Imlah would have agreed.
(1 Kings 22)

“No harm will come to you.” What a terrible abrogation of prophetic responsibility. I feel this for Ghana. Harm is certainly coming. The enemies of God are rising up in the land - other faiths, materialism, an increase in the gap between rich and poor, a weakening of commitment, the losing of a generation - all these are signs that harm is coming. The prophetic stream is flowing in another direction, and my prediction is that it will, or may be already has, swept God's people into the desert, where they will be so desperately struggling for their survival, that they haven't the time or energy to confront the rising strongholds of the enemy.

To say this has cost me a great deal, and still is costing me a great deal. So be it.

*** But which of them has stood in the council of the Lord to see or to hear his word?**

To understand what is being said here, we need to look at the story of Micaiah ben Imlah. Here is the relevant text:-

Micaiah continued, “Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left. And the Lord said, ‘Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?’

“One suggested this, and another that. Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the Lord and said, ‘I will entice him.’ “By what means?’ the Lord asked.

‘I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,’ he said. ““You will succeed in enticing him,’ said the Lord. ‘Go and do it.’

“So now the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The Lord has decreed disaster for you.”

Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah went up and slapped Micaiah in the face. “Which way did the spirit from the Lord go when he went from me to speak to you?” he asked. Micaiah replied, “You will find out on the day you go to hide in an inner room.”

The king of Israel then ordered, “Take Micaiah and send him back to Amon the ruler of the city and to Joash the king’s son ²⁷ and say, ‘This is what the king says: Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely.’” Micaiah declared, “If you ever return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me.” Then he added, “Mark my words, all you people!”(1 Kings 19:19-28)

Micaiah received his message as he waited in the presence of the Lord, in what Jeremiah calls **“the council of the Lord.”** The word to the prophet comes from the heart of the Lord. The prophet, who waits on the Lord, receives his message, and then prepares to share it. This can be a very costly process for the prophet. Access to the presence of the Lord, for the prophet, is usually through Gethsemane, and can often lead to Calvary. That was certainly true for Micaiah - his life was on the line for the word he was to bring.

Receiving from the Lord for the pure prophetic stream is hard. It demands a high level of emotional commitment to the prophetic relationship with the Lord. It demands the willingness to feel the pain and hurt in the heart of God as the message is given, and the willingness to share, without changing, which often brings the aggression of the people of God against the prophet. But this is the mark of a pure prophetic stream - prophets who are prepared to suffer, prepared to feel the pain of God and the hostility of the people, even to the laying down of life. God's people can have confidence in such a stream.

But it is rare. Few prophets want to swim in such a turbulent river. Lacking love and support, they turn aside from the harshness of truth, and bring words of comfort where there are really none to give.

God is saying to the prophetic stream in Ghana: - "You have spoken peace where there is no peace. You have not stood in my presence. You have not sacrificed your lives to your calling. You have not been pure prophets to the people. You have not lived out your calling in integrity. You have not stood in my presence, and you are not speaking for me."

If I was a Ghanaian Christian I would be deeply troubled by these statements. But most are not, because they do not have examples of the pure prophetic stream. So they cannot tell the falsehood which is among them. They follow the lie because they do not see the truth. (I will come to the truth of a pure prophetic stream later in this material.)

*** I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message;**

One thing which strikes me is the harshness of the Lord's words to those who have polluted the stream. In this he is absolutely right. Those who have led the people astray were not "sent." I run many teaching sessions for prophets and those who claim to be prophets. I always ask them this question - "Tell me about your call to this ministry." I am astonished how few can relate a calling experience. Often they have a "feeling that I am called" or "I feel led into this ministry." But true prophets are called into their ministries. It is a mark of the genuineness of the ministry.

Yet the Lord says to those who have misled **"I did not send you."** In other words, these people "feel a calling to ministry" or "feel led to speak." The authentic word of the Lord is not in them, because they are not sent. "Yet" is a dangerous word here. Those who have polluted the stream know that they lack the true call, "yet" they still claim to speak for the Lord. How can any

human live with such a lie? To know, deep in the spirit that they do not have the hallmark of pure prophecy yet they still say “Thus says the Lord.” - how do they do it? This is a terrible crime, and will attract a high penalty. Yet they still do it.

That is bad enough, but the greater offence is in God’s people, who let them get away with it. The people are without excuse. The word says “Test the spirits!” (1 John 4:10) yet many of God’s people are too lazy to test. It’s so much easier to take the food from the spoon, rather than ask where has it come from. I believe that false prophets are easy to identify. The same Spirit which they claim also lives in me. Truth will show itself.

If these prophets, who are not sent, just kept themselves to themselves, that would at least limit the damage they are able to inflict. But they get national ascendancy, and from that position they pollute the nation.

*** Yes,” declares the Lord, “I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare..”**

We should not be surprised at this statement. The prophets are speaking lies in the Lord’s name, which is close to the sin against the Holy Spirit. What else can the Lord do but be against them, but what a terrible situation. The prophetic stream was, among many other functions, supposed to oppose evil. So prophets could expect to be opposed by Satan. But opposed by the Lord? Who would ever want to be in such a position?

But once the prophetic stream fails, then it will find itself opposed by the Lord. What hope can there be for such a stream, or for the people who have followed it? What we have here is an example of the law of unintended consequences. The people of God in Ghana have followed prosperity, and have followed what they have wanted to hear. The prophets have given them what they wanted to hear. So what is the problem? Everyone is happy - except the Lord, who then opposes the very ministry he created, and as a consequence, the people he loves. This is acutely painful for the Lord, and not exactly wonderful for the people.

The consequence? The enemy has great freedom to advance in the nation, and to begin to drag it down.

The true prophetic stream

Jeremiah has made it clear what a failure of the prophetic stream is and what it means. We could also take an extensive look at Ezekiel 13, where the prophet Ezekiel outlines the true nature of false prophecy, but let's move on to see what a pure prophetic stream might look like.

1. True stream - Bearing the Father's heart

The true prophet lives close to the heart of God, and reflects that heart. Let's look at Jesus, to get a glimpse of that heart:-

*** A compassion for towns and cities:-**

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. (Luke 13:34)

*** A compassion for people:-**

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Matthew 9:38)

*** A heart that knows love:-**

Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." (Mark 10:21)

*** A heart that knows joy:-**

"But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms round him and kissed him." (Luke 15:20)

*** A heart which knows agony and pain:-**

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and

troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”(Matt 26:36)

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. (Luke 22: 39-44)

*** A heart which knows loneliness and separation**

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matt 26:36-41)

8 A heart which just cannot give up:-

“How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, Israel?
How can I treat you like Admah?
How can I make you like Zeboyim?
My heart is changed within me;
all my compassion is aroused.
I will not carry out my fierce anger,
nor will I devastate Ephraim again.
For I am God, and not a man—
the Holy One among you. (Hosea 12:8-9)

The prophet must live his life within this heart, and it becomes his heart. He feels as God feels, and becomes, in many ways, a window through which God's people can see God's true love and compassion for them, or a mirror by which that true love is reflected.

The prophet will suffer for being in this position. When God's people become wayward, or turn away from the path, God hurts and the prophet hurts. God is rejected and the prophet is also rejected. But this is the nature of the true prophetic stream. It bears the sorrows and the joys, and goes on caring and loving, even through the judgment times. God's people draw strength and hope from the true prophetic stream. It is deep, enduring, full of love, and able to lead through the times of plenty and the times of hardship, because it is not influenced by either. Through the prophetic stream, God's people can become like the Samaritans: -

“Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.

They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.”(John 4:39-42)

I hesitate to share my own experiences, but two come powerfully to mind:

I was in the spirit, and I saw the Lord. He was beaten, broken hearted and crying. “Lord” I asked “who has done this to you?” “My people crucify me daily” he replied. This experience has become mine also. As I walk in the true stream, I am daily rejected insulted and ignored. I am not unaware of the risk of being killed. This is the reality to the prophet of allowing the pure stream to flow. This is the father heart or God. This is what I am to demonstrate, at whatever cost, to God's people.

One day I was preaching in a large church. As I spoke a hard message, some people began to cry. I said to the Lord “I must stop. I am hurting your people.” But as I looked, I saw that he was crying as well. “If you do stop, you will hurt me” he replied. This experience went on for nearly an hour. More people cried. I wanted to stop, The Lord cried, I carried on. After this message I was sick for a week. A high price has to be paid for the true stream on all sides

2. True stream - Tester of metals

The people of God have a standard to live up to. We see it clearly in 1 Peter 2:9:-

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

We have to live to a high standard of holiness, and we must not sink below it. How can we keep to this standard? It is one of the functions of the prophetic stream to test the standard – to be a tester of metals. Jeremiah tells us this:

I have made you a tester of metals and my people the ore, that you may observe and test their ways. (Jer.6:27)

How does the prophetic stream fulfil this function?

1. Amos and the plumb line.

This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord asked me, "What do you see, Amos?" "A plumb line," I replied.

Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer. The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam." (Amos 7:7-9)

The function of a plumb line is to make sure that the wall is straight and true. A crooked wall is a disaster. It will fall, and anything built on it will fall as well. God's people must be true to the "straight line" which God sets. I came across this comment recently on this verse:-

"Notice that the wall had been built true to plumb. The standards that God applied at the end had been there from the beginning. In other words, we serve a God who is not arbitrary. He equally applies law and grace to all that He does. Since this is the nature of God, how can we live up to this standard?"

Only through the one where the law and grace met perfectly - Jesus Christ. He became the plumb line for all humanity. He is the wall that is straight and true, and in Christ we have the resources needed to live according to God's standard.

The function of the prophetic stream, and of the prophets who make it up, is to be a prophetic "plumb line". The prophets walk in the right way, living in truths which will bring God's people into the paths of holiness – into that straightness which God has planned for us and is expecting from us. What the Lord is saying is "I give you myself, and I give you my word. Model yourselves against these. But I also give you the prophets - measure yourselves against them as they walk with me."

2. Micaiah and manipulation

The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, "Look, the other prophets without exception are predicting success for the king. Let your word agree with theirs, and speak favourably." But Micaiah said, "As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me." When he arrived, the king asked him, "Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or not?"

"Attack and be victorious," he answered, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand." The king said to him, "How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?"

Then Micaiah answered, "I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the Lord said, 'These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.'"

The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Didn't I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?" (1 Kings 22: 13-18)

The kings of Israel and Judah had a very impure prophetic stream. The so called "prophets" told the kings exactly what they wanted to hear. When Micaiah came in, the pressure was put on him by the false prophets to confirm their word. This pressure is always on the pure prophetic stream. God's people are wayward sheep. They are always looking for the easy path, and when prophets tell them what they want to hear, they are glad, and exalt those prophets.

This is where the stream divides. Those prophets who want adulation and recognition will always prophesy good things. But the pure prophetic stream

measures the situation against the “plumb line” of God’s revealed truth, and insists that the people adhere to that line. That is just what Micaiah did. He spoke the truth, and as a result was thrown into prison. True prophets accept this as part of the cost of being a plumb line, a tester of metals.

It’s worth reading the story to the end. Micaiah was proved exactly right. The pure stream had spoken truth and demanded allegiance to that truth. It had proved right - but we do not read of Micaiah being released from prison. Those prophets who move in the true stream can expect no thanks for what they have done. Again, prophets accept this as part of the privilege of being God’s prophets. But it always amazes us that God’s people would prefer anything else but the pure truth. From our point of view, we test the metal not to judge it, but to prove its purity. If it is impure, it can be fixed! But if it will not recognise its impurity, then what will happen? We know only too well what will happen - there is always a consequence for disobedience.

3. Nathan - there’s a price to pay.

Polluting or ignoring the prophetic stream has consequences, as King David discovered.

The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

“Now a traveller came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveller who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”

David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”

Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the Lord

by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'

"This is what the Lord says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'"

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."

Nathan replied, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the Lord, the son born to you will die."

There is always a price to pay for choosing to ignore the Lord and his "straight line." David saw his error and repented, but there were consequences, which could not be ignored or undone. Why would anyone prefer to follow the failed stream? Basically because God's people are at best naïve, and at worse wilful. They cannot or will not see the consequences of the failed stream. It is giving them what they want to have, and saying what they want to hear. Sadly it is also leading them to destruction.

4. Isaiah - the straight line of holiness.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

**"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory."**

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” Isa 6:1-7

Holiness is a very big issue for the prophetic stream. Isaiah’s commission was born into it, and he, above all prophets, insisted that we be a holy people. To be holy means to be distinct, separate and morally pure. Jesus himself was described as holy:-

“So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” (Lk.1:35)

Like him, we are to be holy. God’s people have struggled to understand holiness, but it is easy. If we want to live holy lives, we just have to live lives modelled on that of the Lord. Be like him, asking ourselves in all circumstances “What would Jesus do?” and then do it!

Prophets have to live holy lives. We have to do more than that - we have to live radical holy lives. We have to be consumed with being like Jesus, of being reflections of all that he is, and all that he expects. This makes prophets uncomfortable people to have around, but that doesn’t make us wrong. We test the holiness of God’s people, primarily by having our lives tested daily by the holy Lord we serve. Moses, Samuel, Nathan, Haggai, Jesus - all challenged the people when they fell from the standard of holiness expected of them. Why?

An unholy people cannot reflect the gospel or Christ, and as a consequence the world grows darker, the enemy grows in strength and the kingdom does not come.

This is why holiness matters so much. The lack of it causes severe damage to the work of God. But so often, God’s people react in human and not spiritual ways to the Tester of metals. They do not want the painful process of the testing of their holiness, so they either pretend everything is alright, or shoot the messenger. This pressure forces many prophets to stray from the radical edge of holiness to which they are called. They begin to soften, to prevaricate, to allow themselves to be persuaded to “calm down” or “cool down” or “be reasonable.” It’s then only a matter of time before the stream of pure prophecy, which is by nature holy, becomes polluted. God’s people like this -

they can then settle into a comfortable existence. What they don't realise is that this comfort leads to spiritual lassitude and ultimately spiritual death.

5. Jesus – all or nothing

“Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:43-69)

Jesus was a very uncomfortable person to be around, because he demanded absolute commitment. He demanded one hundred per cent or nothing. Having spelt out this truth to the Jews he turns to his disciples and says, in effect: - “Listen. I demand everything. Are you prepared to give everything, without question, without holding back? If you are not, now is the time to leave.” Many were not prepared for this commitment, and left. So he turned to his closest friends and supporters and said “And you? I ask the same question and I make the same demand. It's all, and I mean all, or nothing.”

Jesus tested their faith, demanding everything from them. If they were not prepared to give everything, then he wanted nothing! Radical isn't it? But this is our faith. Jesus gave everything for us, and all he asks is everything back - unquestioning commitment, surrender of everything, total commitment.

The “Testers of metals” are always challenging God's people about their commitment, because commitment so easily grows weak. But God's people will not face this truth about themselves, so they try and hide behind works, events, meetings, gatherings, social action and a multitude of other things which hide the basic nature of the truth - that their commitment is not one hundred per cent. We all struggle with the totality of commitment – it is part of faith. But so often God's people will not face the truth about their weakening commitment, and ignore, silence, ridicule, reject or destroy those who challenge their disobedience. Lack of total commitment is disobedience - that's how prophets see it.

6. The weakness of the church

As we look at the letters to the seven Churches in Revelation 2 and 3, we see the tester of metals at work in a very clear way. Each church is subject to the prophetic eye, its faults exposed, the solution suggested, and the promise which accompanies change given. How many of these faults might a prophet find in the church today? If he had the courage to expose them, what would happen to him? But in these two chapters, it is the church which suffers for its failure to follow the prophetic stream, not the prophets. But my feeling, backed up by thirty years of prophetic experience, is that it is the prophets

who suffer today. Those who are not willing to suffer start telling God's people what they want to hear - and the stream is polluted.

3. True stream - The pilgrim leader

There have always been desert times in the journeys of God's people. Sometimes God puts them there to refine (Mark 1:12), sometimes they are just unavoidable and sometimes we bring them on ourselves. (Numbers 14)

The wilderness times can be a blessing, but they have one massive built in danger - we get lost in them. God's people were blessed in having Moses to lead them. We are blessed by having Jesus to lead us. (Mark 10:32) The biblical truth is that we do need leading through them, and a key part of that leading is the responsibility of the prophets. Haggai had it exactly right, when, seeing the bewilderment and lostness of the people he pointed out their failure and the way ahead.

Old and New testaments testify to the vital nature of prophetic leadership - here are two of many passages to reflect on:-

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. (Ps 23: 1-3)

They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. (Mark10:32)

There are huge dangers in the desert places:-

* **Babylon:** - The pressure to try and do things in our own strength, so that we exalt ourselves:-

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." (Genesis 11:1-4)

* **Egypt:** - We prefer the apparent comfort of compromise and slavery to the challenging freedom of the spirit.

As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!” (Exodus 14: 10-12)

* **The golden statue:** - The enemy shows such power, and a little compromise is all he is asking for.

Then the herald loudly proclaimed, “This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.” (Daniel 3: 4-6)

* **The fall of Jerusalem:** - Failure to hold true to pure faith brought even Jerusalem down. It’s so hard to remain pure and committed in the dryness of the desert.

On the seventh day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He set fire to the temple of the Lord, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down. The whole Babylonian army, under the commander of the imperial guard, broke down the walls around Jerusalem. (2 kings 25:8-10)

* **Moab:** - It’s impossible to go on in the face of the power of the enemy. So we stop where we are, and, spiritually, we die.

Then the Israelites travelled to the plains of Moab and camped along the Jordan across from Jericho. Now Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites, and Moab was terrified because there were so many people. Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the Israelites. The Moabites said to the elders of Midian, “This horde is going to lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field.”

So Balak son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, sent messengers to summon Balaam son of Beor, who was at Pethor, near the River, in his native land. Balak said: “A people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the land and have settled next to me. Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the country. For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed.” (Numbers 22: 1-6)

The prophetic stream is so vital in the desert. It counters all these dangers with simple truths:-

*** I lift up my eyes to the hills— where does my help come from? (Ps.121:1)**

*** And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Mt 28:20)**

*** If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. (Ps 139:8-10)**

*** He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. (John 10:2)**

*** What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)**

But not only does the prophetic stream “say” it does as well. The prophets enter the desert with the people, suffer with the people, even die with the people - just as long as God goes before, and the people are safe.

The failed prophetic stream and Ghana

One day, a man and a woman came to stand before the Lord.

They were full of confidence.

“Who are you?” the Lord asked.

“We are the church in Ghana” they replied.

“We have done many great things in your name. We have praised you, we have spoken about you and we have spread all over the nation. We are known

as a powerful and praise filled church. Everyone tells us that the Spirit moves in us. We honour your name.”

The Lord was quiet, and the man and woman looked at each other, and they wondered why the Lord did not thank and bless them. So they said:

“And we learnt to heal the sick. We collected money - lots of money - and raised up buildings for you, and works in your name. We wrote songs, books - we made DVD’s - all for your glory.”

Still the Lord was quiet. So they continued:-

“Our nation lives in peace because of our prayers. Look at all the lands around us. We know that we are special.”

The Lord began to cry, and the two people were amazed. Everything they had said was good. Surely this was what the Lord wanted to hear?

Then the Lord said “and where is your child?”

They were now really amazed. “What child?” they asked.

“The one I trusted you with. The one which was so precious to me. The one you were to care for, nurture and raise up?”

“But Lord” they replied, “we don’t know what you are talking about. We have no child”

“Yes you did” said the Lord. “I trusted a very precious child into your hands. “

“What is this child called?”

“The child was called ‘Ghana.’ You were to take care of it, help it grow, protect it from harm, crown it with glory and make it strong. This was your sacred trust. Where is the child?”

The two people had no answer to give.

I have been a prophet for nearly thirty years. I have worked in 60 different countries, and have been involved with thousands of leaders, and hundreds of churches. I have seen at first hand on countless occasions the works of God and the move of the Spirit of God. I write this not to exalt myself. I work for the “Serving Africa Mission”, and service, not self-promotion is at the heart of our work. But I mention it because I find that many in Ghana do not realise the position of experience from which I have the privilege of speaking.

From this position, it seems clear to me that the prophetic stream in Ghana has not reflected the father heart of God to the people. The prophets have not understood this essential element of their calling. They are young, and have no good example to follow or to teach them. This is no excuse for them, because I have found that almost universally they do not want teaching. Most of them believe that all they have to do is claim prophetic privilege, and they will know everything. It has taken the Lord thirty years to shape my life into that of even an ordinary prophet, let alone a special one. Yet I hear and see Ghanaians claiming all sorts of special privilege on the basis of no or little experience.

However the fact remains that the prophets are young and inexperienced, untested and unable, or unwilling to suffer for their calling. So God's people have had no example to help them. In fact it is worse than that - they have had bad examples of men who have claimed that the path to service is lined with wealth and ease. Such men end up having works- even big works, and in their bigness the people begin to believe. But in the Kingdom, size means nothing. It is quality and service which matter. Those who build their lives on these principles become godly leaders of the people.

Ghana is beginning to slide spiritually, and there is no father heart of God in the prophets to warn, or prepare. What can be done?

Restoring the prophetic stream

Is it possible to turn this situation around? With the Lord, there is always a chance of new beginnings. The prophet Zechariah can set our feet on the right path:-

Zechariah 1:3 "Return to me." (N.T. Romans 5:6)

"Therefore tell the people: This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Return to me,' declares the Lord Almighty, 'and I will return to you,' says the Lord Almighty." (Zech. 1:3)

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." (Rom.5:6)

Only God has the answer to the state we are in. I see many programmes, books, DVD's and mp3s on the things of God, and it's good to have them. But they must not hide from us this key principle - **it is to him that we have to come and learn what to do.** We are in a big mess. We have to return to the Maker, to find out how he wants things put right. It may take time to get to understand what he wants.

Zechariah 3:4 “I have taken away your sins.” (N.T. John 3:16)

“Then he said to Joshua, “See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you.” (Zech.3:4)

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

This is an uncomfortable principle. It makes us ask these questions – “Why are we in a mess?” “Whose fault is it?” I have asked these questions in hundreds of teaching and ministry sessions, and I have found that mostly, God's people will blame almost everyone but themselves.

But if we have got in a spiritual mess, we are the ones to blame.

We are the ones who have to accept the failure, and come in repentance to ask for forgiveness.

Here, let’s rejoice that we come to a forgiving God, who has made provision for our forgiveness already. The work is done - we only have to come again under the blood, confess (1 John 1:8-9) and then the way is clear for progress. But if we avoid this step, then no progress can ever be made. God is holy, and we must be cleansed daily.

(1 John 1: 8-9: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”)

This is just a beginning. There is much more to do. But at least it would be a start.

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Other material

“Fighting for the Soul of Ghana.”

In this material, Jim Smith writes about the true state of Ghana, and how the situation might be reversed. While it is written with Ghana in mind, the principles can be applied to any nation.

Hands Together

In this material, Jim Smith outlines how we can pray effectively for our Nations.

The call of a prophet

In this material, Jim Smith looks at how prophets are called, and how they should live and exercise their ministries.

This material can be downloaded from our website:

www.serving-africa.org

It can also be obtained from our mission base in Ghana.

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