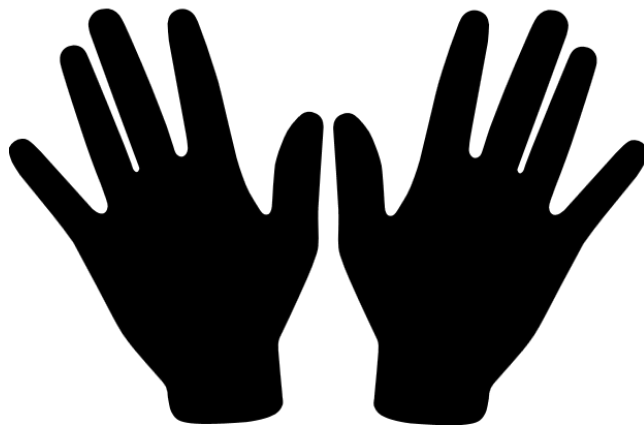
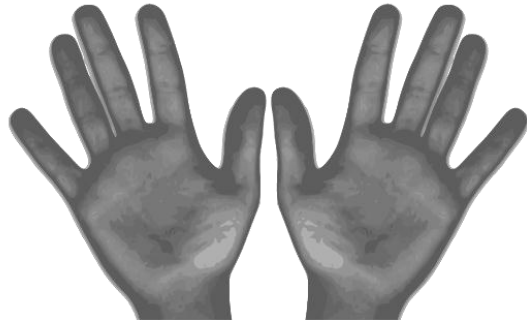


HANDS TOGETHER



Jim Smith

Introduction

I have been speaking about God's word for Nations ever since I started my prophetic ministry. What I soon discovered was that very few people really wanted to pray for their nations, and even less knew how to do it. I have watched the U.K. and now Europe slip slowly into godlessness, and to my deep concern, I now see the same process under way in Ghana. So I had the idea to write about praying for a nation, and as I have a commitment to both the U.K./Europe and Ghana, I thought I would write for both groups.

We should have been praying for our nations from the time we began to pray, but prayer is at a low ebb, and prayer for nations is at a very low ebb. Many have lost faith in the power of prayer, or have followed other ways - prosperity and success being two. Prayer meetings in the West are poorly attended, and such prayer as there is focuses on personal or local needs. The enemy loves this, and encourages it. If he can isolate us in our small corners, then he can have the wider field to himself.

But can we pray for nations? Of course we can, because God is Lord of all creation, including our Nations. Everything exists under his creative hand. We have the right and the power to speak and pray about anything which is part of his created order. It's not impossible to turn our nations round, and it's not too late - yet.

Chapter 1: Mizpah – a “Saving the Nation” experience.

Let's begin by looking at one Old Testament (O.T) passage, to encourage us to believe that God does answer prayer and can change the direction of a nation.

“Then all the people of Israel turned back to the Lord. So Samuel said to all the Israelites, “If you are returning to the Lord with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the Lord only.

Then Samuel said, “Assemble all Israel at Mizpah, and I will intercede with the Lord for you.” When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, “We have sinned against the Lord.” Now Samuel was serving as leader of Israel at Mizpah.

When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. When the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. They said to Samuel, “Do not stop crying out to the Lord our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines.” Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and sacrificed it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. He cried out to the Lord on Israel's behalf, and the Lord answered him.

While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the Lord thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Kar. Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the Lord has helped us.” (1 Samuel 7:2-11)

Let's look at this passage in some detail, to see how the Lord saved Israel.

V.2 “The people mourned and sought after the Lord.”

If a nation is going to be redeemed, first the Spirit of God has to move hearts. We see such a move in Acts 2:37:-

“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

God is certainly waiting to move our hearts, (Jer.33:3) and wants to. (Matthew 9)

“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.” (Jeremiah 33:3)

“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: 36-38)

Has the moment come for God to move by his Spirit in the hearts of the people of our lands, especially his people ? How would we know? Only if we see people “mourning and seeking the Lord.”

In other words, are there signs in the U.K./Europe and Ghana of people becoming aware of the seriousness of the situation, who are desperately sad for what is and might happen, and are beginning to seek the Lord for the way ahead? God is not looking for head knowledge, but for hearts breaking for what is happening. This is what God is looking for from his people in Europe. These words are taken from my word for Europe.

“Call out in the streets. Proclaim in the market place. “The Lord is looking for his own, for hearts broken by the shame and guilt of the land, hearts grieving for the spoiling, for the destruction of the good things I gave, hearts breaking in repentance, hearts longing for my return.

These hearts, shining like lamps in dark places, are the ones who will prepare the way for my return. But where are they? I call for them, but I hear no reply. I am searching but I cannot find them. The sorrow in my heart is so great it almost crushes me.”

V.3. “Commit yourselves to the Lord and him alone.”

If a nation is going to be saved, there is a very big challenge to God’s people, especially the intercessors. The commitment made by Christians in Ephesus made a big difference to their lives:-

“When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.” (Acts 19: 17-20)

Seeking after the Lord is a beginning, but only a beginning. If we are going to see our Nations turned round then there will have to be a new commitment from the people of God. Here we have a problem:-

- * So many people have a lukewarm faith.
- * So many people have a passionless faith.
- * So many have a shallow faith.

- * So many are in the kingdom for what they can get, not what they can give in service.
- * So many people are compromised in their faith.
- * So many, sadly, don't seem to care.

All this will have to end in a new ruthless commitment to a pure faith, where God's will is everything to us, and where we do what he says, when he says it and how he says it. This is going to be tough. Many of God's people are going to have to confess their sins, change their jobs, resign from positions in the church, and confess to their sinfulness - adultery, theft, cheating, deceit and falsehood. There has to be a deep cleansing of the people of God. In Ephesus, **"many of those who believed"** confessed, and turned their lives around. The process was painful, but the end result was thrilling: **"The word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."**

In my experience of 63 years of walking with the Lord, and 42 years in ministry, God's people will do everything they can to avoid this challenge. Yet if we avoid it, there can be no salvation for our lands.

V.3 "He will deliver you."

God can do anything – individually (1 Samuel 17) and nationally. (Luke 2:29)

"But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine." (1 Samuel 17: 34-37)

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." (Luke 2: 29-32)

It can be done! God has had thousands of years of practice in rescuing nations from the mess they have got into. David saw this in a personal way, and Simenon saw it in a global way.

The situation may be desperate, and it is desperate, but if we begin to mourn, seek after the Lord, and commit ourselves to new life in the Spirit, it can be done.

But **it is not automatic.** God did not save his own people in 587 before the Christian era, (B.C.E.) nor in Christian Era (C.E.) 70. If he doesn't see the kind of heart he needs to see in his people, he will not intervene. We have to appreciate that this is out of love, not out of anger. If the heart of the nation is wrong, God longs to change that situation - to put it right so that we can follow him again.

V.5. and I will intercede with the Lord for you.”

Prayer changes things, as it did for Peter - **“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.” (Acts 12:5)**

But what kind of prayer? Let’s look at the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane:-

“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. When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”

While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” (Luke 22:39-47)

Here we see the intensity of the prayer of Jesus, and it is a tough challenge to us:-

* **“If you are willing”**. The struggle in the Lord’s heart was between the will of God, and his own self will. His human nature was urging him to stop but the Spirit was urging him to be obedient to the Father. This same struggle will be fought out in us, as we begin to believe for our Nations, and begin to pray for them.

* **“An angel”**. The struggle was so great, that Father had to send spiritual help, in the form of an angel. This is a warning to us of the intensity of prayer which is needed to save a nation. We need to notice that the arrival of the angel didn’t stop the struggle.

* **“Sweat like blood”**. Even with the angelic help, the struggle was agonising.

* **The Struggle didn’t end with the victory in prayer**. Those who pray at this level must pray in Gethsemane, but will have to move on through the agonies until we cry out, with the Lord “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Those who pray for nations will finish up at the agony of the cross. Only there, as the blood is released, can we, and our Nations be saved. We have to plead from that position. Few want to travel this way.

V.7 the Philistines came up to attack them

The enemy fears our pleading, and will attack with all he has:-

“They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have

you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee. (Mark 1:21-28)

The enemy attacked Jesus, both in the desert temptations, and as he ministered, as we can see in the story in Mark chapter 1. We must expect this to happen. How can we protect ourselves? We have to look to the power of the blood of Jesus. It's vital that we understand the power of the blood. This subject can be found in chapter 5.

V.8 “Do not stop crying out to the Lord our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines.”

The challenge here is so simple. We have to cry out to the Lord, and put all our hope in him – that he will move in grace and power for us. This might not look too bad when things are going well, but the Israelites had to continue to trust God's mercy when the enemy was at the gate – it's not so easy then. We find ourselves in a similar position. We should have been crying out decades ago, but we didn't. Now the enemy is at the gate. But we have to continue to throw ourselves on the mercy of God. Everything else has failed us. Only his grace can rescue us. It's going to be a bumpy ride.

V.9 “and the Lord answered him”

God can do it. God will do it if he sees in us the desire for the salvation of the Nations. As we start to think about saving our Nations, 1 Samuel is an encouragement. God does want to save Nations, and he can do it. This should add good fuel to our prayers, to our study and our thinking. But at the same time, there is a great concern here – God will only do it if his people show serious signs of understanding where they are, and how they must act in confession and repentance. At this point my optimism drains away.

We have not just got to move the heart of God, we have got to move the hearts of the people of God, and traditionally that has been far harder. But if we can't do it, then the future looks very dark.

Chapter 2: Biblical guidelines to praying for a nation - any nation.

Prayer changes things, and this is the encouragement we have already received from Samuel. On the basis of that encouragement, what are the principles which we have to use, on which to build our prayer for the Nations? It's easy to avoid this step. We naturally want to get on with prayer, but good foundation principles lead to good and lasting action.

Zechariah

1. 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 issue of more effective prayer, 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 - **but effective prayer is seldom quick.**

2. 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. There is a whole session devoted to this later in the course.

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.”)

3. Few or many? “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

Stepping aside from Zechariah for a moment, we might ask how this process works.

It works through God’s people - few or many.

“The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord. Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

The Lord said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.” Then Abraham spoke up again: “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?”

“If I find forty-five there,” he said, “I will not destroy it.” Once again he spoke to him, “What if only forty are found there?” He said, “For the sake of forty, I will not do it.” Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?” He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

Abraham said, “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?” He said, “For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it. Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?” He answered, “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.” (Gen.18:20-33)

“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.” (Acts 12:5)

Few, many or any? This is an uncomfortable question. “Few” is no problem with God. He never has dealt in quantity, being more interested in quality. “Many” is great when it happens, and certainly delights the Lord. But “Any?” I once led an intercessory school in a very large church. When the meeting started there were only eleven people there. I was shocked, but the Lord said to me “You are fortunate I could find eleven.” Is this true? In this massive church, were there only eleven people who were serious about intercession? Recently in Ghana, in seven weeks of ministry, I only found two groups who were serious about intercession for the Nation. I suspect if I had asked the Lord about this he would have said “You were fortunate to find two.” My fear is that very few people care about the destiny of nations. We are hovering between “few” and “any.”

4. 4:6 “Not by might...” (N.T. Matt 16:24.Mark 8:34.Lk.9:23)

“So he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.” (Zech. 4:6)

“Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34)

Those who live in the Spirit, and pray in the Spirit, must achieve victory by the Spirit.

This is easy to write, but very hard to do. If we want to live **“by my Spirit”** intercessory lives, then we are living by a very tough standard. As we battle at depth, all our weaknesses will be shown. No one enjoys this experience, and we have to do a lot of repenting and changing of our lives as we fight for our Nations. This is a step which many like to avoid - perhaps that is why there are so few people who want to pray for their Nations. The price of such prayer is very high.

In fact, experienced intercessors will tell us that in the end, we will be pushed to cry out “My God, why have you forsaken me?” The isolation and loneliness will strip away all our ability and strength. Zechariah would teach us that far from being defeated, **this is a victory**. Only then can we allow the Spirit to move freely through us, to heal and restore.

5. 12:10 “spirit of grace and supplication.”(N.T. Heb 10:19-29)

“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.” (Zech. 12:10)

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body.” (Hebs.10:19)

This is the other side to Zechariah 4:6. We are longing and praying for the outpouring of the grace of God in the person of the Spirit. We need a new Pentecost. (Acts 2) Nothing else can save us now, so let’s be bold in our praying and ask for Pentecost. Sometimes we are too timid! We will not be alone in making such bold demands. The Spirit himself helps us to pray. (Romans 8:26) We will know we are making progress when we see a move of repentance:-

“They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.” (12:10)

Repentance will be needed, not only by the intercessors but by many more, even those who are currently very shallow believers. Understanding this position is going to be very painful.

5. 13:1 Fountain to cleanse. (N.T. Hebs. 10:22)

“On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.” (Zech. 13:1)

“Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience.” (Hebs.10:22)

Of all the principles we are learning, and for all the things we will experience in this “Hands Together” journey, there is only one principle that matters. By his death, the Lord has forgiven all our sin, even the ones which have brought our Nations to the brink of spiritual blackness. The cross has made all things possible. We must pray with this positive attitude, even as the darkness closes in. God can, if he is so moved, turn every situation around.

Nehemiah

Now we can confirm some of those principles from Nehemiah, and add to them.

1. 1:4 “I sat down and wept. (N.T. Luke 19:41)

“The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah:

“In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.” When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.” (Neh.1:1-4)

“As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.” (Luke 19:41-44)

When Nehemiah heard of the plight of his nation his emotions were deeply touched. He felt God’s sorrow. We can feel God’s sorrow because:-

* We are made in the image of God. (Gen.1:26) If we want to know what God is like, we can look to ourselves.

* We are emotional people. We feel as well as think.

* We have feelings, so God has feelings.

When it comes to deep issues, feelings are always involved - his and ours. So to begin to see the state of our nations, and to intercede, we have to enter into God's heart, and let his feelings touch us. We cannot intercede from any other position. Some cultures find this easier than others. Western nations, and especially England, find this difficult. Africa finds it easier.

Either way, we have to enter into his heart and feel his feelings, as Nehemiah did when he wept.

2. 1:6 "I confess." (N.T. Gethsemane: Matt 26:36-39)

"Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses." (Nh.1:6-7)

"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." (Matt 26:36-39)

Nehemiah confessed, even though he did not take part in the situation which led to the fall of the nation of Israel. This is a powerful challenge to us. Many say to me that the problem is not of our making so we cannot confess and repent of such things. But this is not biblically true. Nehemiah offered the confession of identification. Jesus, sinless as he was, offered the sacrifice of identification. If the curses are going to be broken, the chains broken and our nations set free, there has to be confession and repentance. Who else can do it but us?

3. 4:8 "They all plotted." (N.T. Mark 3:6)

"So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart. But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat." (Nh.4:7-9)

"Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand "Stand up in front of everyone." Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.

He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.” (Mark 3:1-6)

As we try to learn how to pray for God to move for our nations, we are not going to be unopposed. Attacks will come from without and within. We have to learn to expect this, and overcome the enemy. (More of this in a later session.)

Jesus - Nations can fall

“As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.” (Luke 19:41-44)

The destiny of Jerusalem has always been the indicator of what would happen to the Jewish nation. Jesus wept over it, seeing in its pride the fall of the nation which God had called to serve him. But what is the issue - what is the principle? This nation did not know the “kairos” of God, the time of its visitation. There is a moment when God wants to show his power to redeem, but if we miss it, it has gone forever. This has a terrible consequence - look at the warning in Lamentations:-.

**How deserted lies the city, once so full of people!
How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations!
She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave.**

**Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are on her cheeks.
Among all her lovers there is no one to comfort her.
All her friends have betrayed her; they have become her enemies.**

**After affliction and harsh labour, Judah has gone into exile.
She dwells among the nations; she finds no resting place.
All who pursue her have overtaken her in the midst of her distress.**

**The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to her appointed festivals.
All her gateways are desolate, her priests groan,
her young women grieve, and she is in bitter anguish.**

**Her foes have become her masters; her enemies are at ease.
The Lord has brought her grief because of her many sins.
Her children have gone into exile, captive before the foe.**

**All the splendour has departed from Daughter Zion.
Her princes are like deer that find no pasture;
in weakness they have fled before the pursuer. (Lamentations 1)**

Jesus – “All authority”

“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matt 28:18)

Let's finish with the principle on which all principles rest - the Lord reigns! He is love, and wants only the best for his creation. So restoring the nations, of which he is the head, can only be a blessing and a joy – to him and to us.

Chapter 3. How to pray for a Nation: The spiritual struggle

Prayer is spiritual struggle. In this chapter, we are looking at that struggle - the nature of the opposition, and how we might bind the strong man and be victorious in prayer.

1. Know our enemy

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.” (Eph.6:10-13)

In this passage, Apostle Paul outlines the struggle we will face, especially as we try to pray for a Nation. The struggle is against everything - **“the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world”**, in other words, everything that is in the world is against us. This is very challenging. Is the entire secular world against us? Ultimately, the enemy seeks to control through the secular world, so we have to say a regrettable “yes.” We also struggle **“against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”** All that is evil in the heavenly places is aligned against us, but we can draw comfort from this:-

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

2. Know his strategies

Our enemy is beaten:-

“When you were dead in your sins and in the circumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”(Col 2:13-14)

He is beaten, but he is not a fool. He has method in his opposition to us. His plan, (Rev 13) is to be God, and to do that he has to destroy the only group who can obstruct his plans - God’s church. In this process he is persistent and enduring. Personally, I give him little thought or little time. He lost at Calvary! Even so, we must be alert. **(“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”** 1 Peter 5:8) Here are some of the strategies he uses against us:-

*** Domination. (Dan.3:4-6)**

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

“The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name.” (Rev.13:15-17)

One of the enemy’s strategies is domination. He wants to show himself as all powerful and God’s people as weak and ineffective. Nebuchadnezzar had this strategy, and in Revelation 13 we see it in its ultimate form. It is true - we so often feel weak and helpless. But faith conquers all, although not without a cost:-

“Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” (Dan.3:16-19)

*** Deceit. (Gen 3:1)**

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” (Gen 3:1)

“Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” (Matt 4:8)

“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44)

“And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.” (2 Cor.11:14)

The enemy is a deceiver and a liar, as these verses clearly show. God did not say that Adam and Eve could not eat from *any* tree. Satan owns nothing, so he could not give the kingdoms of the world to Jesus. He likes to be seen as an agent of good, but his light is false - a deception to those not able enough to see through to the evil behind it. In all these things, he is acting according to his nature - he is a liar. We need to remember this, as we face his trickery in the world today, and as we pray for Nations.

*** Destruction. (Rev 9:11)**

“They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer).” (Rev.9:11)

When David challenged Goliath, this is what he said: - **“What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?”** (1 Samuel 17:26) He clearly saw that the nature of the spiritual battle was destruction - either him or Goliath. The enemy is out to destroy God’s church and God’s people. We must not have any doubts about this – and set our hearts on victory: - **“But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (1 Cor. 15:57)

3. Know his methods against praying people.

It would be nice if the enemy always appeared like Goliath - in public and in a battle situation where the issues were clear. Unfortunately we do not often face the enemy in this form. He has other strategies he uses against us - and they can be very effective.

*** Isolate. “I only am left”**

This is his strategy - isolate and destroy. Elijah had this problem, (2 Kings 19:9-13) and the Lord’s answer was to show him his power. We are never alone – the power of God is with us. We have to learn the lesson which Elisha’s servant had to learn:-

“Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed, “Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” (2 Kings 6:16-17)

*** Dishearten. Paul at Corinth**

It is very easy to lose heart, and when we do, we become ineffective. But when we have to battle on day after day, with no apparent success, things go against us and others seem to be doing well, it is easy to give up. Perhaps that is how Apostle Paul felt when he arrived at Corinth. Imprisoned, beaten and expelled from Corinth, chased out of Berea, hardly a great success in Athens and now in Corinth on his own, he must have felt fairly low. But the Lord encouraged him:-

“One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent.” (Acts 18:9)

So let’s give the Apostle the final word here:-

“Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.” (2 Cor.4:1)

*** Made to feel irrelevant. Micaiah ben Imlam**

It’s really hard when we are made to feel irrelevant because people don’t believe what we are doing is of any value. That’s what happened to the prophet Micaiah:-

“The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, “There is still one prophet through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah.” (1 Kings 22:8)

We have to remember that God does not treat us in this way:-

“Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:7)

*** Give up. Psalm 107**

The writer of Psalm 107 writes:-

“Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away.” (Ps.107:4)

This is the danger for intercessors. The constant attacks of the enemy, the tiredness, the sense of being without value or worth, the rejection of others - all these things drain us. It’s good to recognise this feeling, and then counter it with these words from Apostle Paul, who knew all about despair, tiredness and apparent defeat:-

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 3:12-14)

3. Gather our weapons

*** Spiritual armour**

Most intercessors know of the spiritual armour in Ephesians:-

“Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in

place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Eph.6:13-17)

This is mostly defensive armour, but in defence a soldier is ready to attack. Here is a brief look at the armour we will need:-

- * **Truth.** This word means “Something which is trustworthy.” This describes the Gospel.
- * **Righteousness.** This can be God’s righteousness in us, or our righteous lives lived in the power of the Spirit.
- * **Gospel of peace.** We are prepared to speak, live and act on the Gospel. We are ready to move at God’s command, to challenge and overcome the spiritual opposition.
- * **Shield of faith.** The shield was probably the “scutum”, a shield like a door, covering the whole man, and used to provide not only individual protection but used with a group, to provide group protection, and a powerful weapon of advance. The Apostle teaches that our “**shield**” is our faith - individually and as a group. This beats back the enemy’s attack, putting out his “**flaming arrows,**”
- * **Helmet.** With his head protected, the soldier feels safe in battle. In the same way, the believer’s’ certainty of salvation gives confidence during spiritual struggles.
- * **Sword of the Spirit.** In the spiritual battle, we have the promise and power of the word of God, strengthened by the Holy Spirit. We are not without offensive weapons.

It’s interesting that we often end our teaching of the Ephesian armour at verse 17, but verse 18 is really important for the intercessor: - “**And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.**” As we pray, we are always ready to receive divine strength, and always ready to attack.

* **The power of the blood of Jesus**

“You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” (Hebs.12:23-24)

The whole of chapter 4 is devoted to this subject, so we will leave our teaching on the blood until then.

4. Direct our prayer

Prayer has to be specific, directed towards God, and ask clearly for what it wants. Bartimaeus was very clear in his prayer: - **“Jesus said, "What can I do for you?" “The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see.”** (Mark 10:51) In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us to make specific requests to him:-

**“Father, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation.”** (Luke 11:2-4)

Specific prayer is like a sword - it thrusts to the heart of the need. The enemy cannot avoid the thrust, or the effects of the thrust.

For more examples of specific prayer - Acts 12:5; Matthew 14:30; 1 Samuel 7:8.

Chapter 4. How to pray for a Nation: The heavenly places

Serious prayer does not take place in the physical realm! It does of course, but the physical is only the framework for our prayer, which must take place in the heavenly places. Many intercessors never get beyond the earthly, so their prayer fails to hit home as it should. Here is a brief look at the spiritual world in which we pray.

Elisha: Opened spiritual eyes. 2 Kings 6:8-17

Let's begin with the experience of Elisha's servant in 2 Kings 6: 8-17. The king of Aram was determined to destroy the prophet Elisha. So he sent a force of soldiers to surround the city where Elisha was staying. When Elisha's servant got up in the morning, he saw the soldiers surrounding the city, and he was afraid. This man had not grasped the significance of the spiritual world in which his master lived. Many of God's people are like him – faithful godly people, who have failed to grasp the significance of seeing things in the spiritual world first. This has stopped effective prayer in so many intercessors.

Elisha was a man of the spiritual world. He saw nothing to fear in earthly troops, knowing of the heavenly army which surrounds God's people. (Ps 91:19) So he prayed, **"Oh Lord, open his eyes that he may see."** Elisha wanted to encourage his servant to enter the spiritual places, and as he had prayed, so it happened:-**"Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all round Elisha."** (v.17) The servant entered the spiritual world, and we must learn to do the same.

The spiritual world is open to us, and from it we draw strength, understanding and courage – **"those who are for us are more than those who are with them."** (v.16) In these difficult days, we need, more than ever, to both hear and understand the truth in these words.

Daniel: Opposition is to be expected. Daniel 10:4-14

In Daniel, we read this unusual story:

"On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold round his waist. His body was like chrysalides, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground. A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said, "Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you." And when he said this to me, I stood up

trembling. Then he continued, **“Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.”**

This story is only unusual to those who are not familiar with the heavenly places. For in the spiritual world, there is intense opposition to the ways of God, the things of God and those who want to work with God. Satan has been defeated by the cross of Jesus, but even in defeat, he is still a dangerous enemy, and he still tries to hinder God’s ways. In the heavenly places, we must expect opposition. In fact we will feel it and see it at its strongest in the heavenly places, and there we have to claim again and again the victory of Jesus.

Gideon: God reveals his plans. Judges 7:8-16

Having seen most of his army disappear, Gideon was a little afraid, and who can blame him? So the Lord reveals his plans: **“During that night the Lord said to Gideon, “Get up, and go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands. If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah and listen to what they are saying. Afterwards, you will be encouraged to attack the camp.”** So he and his servant went down to the outposts of the camp. The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley. Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream:-

“I had a dream,” he was saying. “A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianites camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed.” His friend responded, “This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Josh, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands.” When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he worshipped God. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, “Get up! The Lord has given the Midianites camp into your hands.” (Judges 7: 9-15)

God has his plans, and he is willing to reveal them to us. These plans can be known by us as we spend time in the heavenly places. God does this because he wants to help us. This isn’t a personal experience for personal satisfaction, but it is part of God’s purpose to strengthen faith and guide us in his ways.

Isaiah’s vision: Isaiah 6

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, 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.” (6:1-4)

In the call of Isaiah, we relearn some things we already know, and new experiences are opened to us. For those who want to move in the spiritual places, this is a key passage, combining so many truths:

*** We can go in**

There was no doubt in Isaiah’s mind. He didn’t have to make any intellectual decision. He was just there, and so can we be, any time. In fact we have an even better access, than Isaiah, because Jesus has made the way for us.

*** Worship is often the key**

Isaiah was caught up as he waited on God and worshipped. In fact we can go a little further and say that it was as he joined with the worship of heaven, that he was caught up into the spiritual places. Heaven is full of worship (Rev.4:8-11), and when we begin to worship, we can pass from the earthly to the heavenly places.

*** We feel things**

This is such an exciting revelation. We don’t pass into the heavenly places in some cloud! We go there with our whole personalities. Isaiah shows us that we can know, and be known. We can see and be seen. We can feel. This last is so vital. Our emotions and feelings are such a crucial part of our life experience. Without them we might as well be a computer! We feel. Isaiah felt his sinfulness: **“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.” (v.5)**

Others have felt things – Jeremiah felt his youth, (Jer.1:6), Jonah was afraid (Jonah 1:3) and the writer of Revelation was overwhelmed. (Rev.1:17). Why should we be any different?

*** Only God can enable us to stay**

As soon as Isaiah began to move in the spiritual places, he became aware of his sinfulness. Archbishop William Temple once wrote, “The nearer I get to God, the more of a sinner I feel.” This is just what Isaiah felt, and we will feel it too. For him, cleansing came through the touch of the burning coal, and the announcement of God's forgiveness. For us it comes because of the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:7). Not only are we invited into the heavenly places, we can stay there. We don’t have to feel uninvited guests. Our place there is secure, because of Jesus.

*** We have a part to play**

God needed someone to serve him - that's what Isaiah heard, and that was the call to which he responded. We are not just spectators in what goes on in the spiritual world. We can be contributors. God could have fulfilled Isaiah's commission himself, or sent angels. But he wanted Isaiah. God wants to use us, in the spiritual as well as in the earthly places. So let's not take our seat when the match begins. We are expected to be on the pitch!

Jesus: Baptism

"As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matt 3:16-17)

By now we should be getting used to these images. In this passage **"heaven was opened"** and this is what we have come to understand. The Spirit descends in the form of a dove (see Gen.1:2) and God's voice speaks. (See 1 Kings 19:9) This passage confirms for us that in the spiritual world, we see and experience things.

Jesus: The Transfiguration and Gethsemane

These two incidents are key ones for understanding what happens in the heavenly places, and our experience of them. **"After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters— one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" (Mark 9:2-7)**

"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 22:41-44)

In the Transfiguration, Jesus is seen speaking with two great men of the Old Testament. We have the same access that they have -in fact we have greater access. The very least in the Kingdom is greater than John the Baptist. (Matthew 11:11) What better and more positive invitation can we have to move in the spiritual places? The doors are wide open.

Gethsemane offers a balancing view. We have the access, but it is going to be very hard to keep that access open, to pass through it, and to stay in the Spirit. Even Jesus had to have divine strength to maintain his link. There are so many encouragements for us:

- * If it was hard for him, then we don't need to feel so bad if it is hard for us.
- * If he needed strengthening, then we can also ask for it.
- * The struggle is not going to pass away. We are going to have to stand firm in faith if we are going to move in this area. (Exodus 14:13)
- * Victory is ours! (Romans 8:37)

I have always felt greatly encouraged by the angelic teaching of this passage. Angels are created to serve. (Hebrews 1:14) Their function is to assist us as we serve God. They have no intermediary function as such. Much angelology has strayed into this mistake - the Mormons in excess. Basically, because of the cross, we don't need anything except the Holy Spirit. I can speak directly to the Lord any time I want. But the battle is hard, and the Lord has provided this additional strength for me. God is merciful and generous, and wants to help us as much as he can. Angels are another revelation of that love, and here in this passage we see them working totally within their calling - they assist. We do not worship them, nor depend on them. But their assistance is a blessing to us - helping us to do the will of God.

Jesus: The Resurrection

The resurrection narratives underline much of what we have learnt already, and I'm not going to repeat the lessons already learnt. But there are some things which are new.

*** Doors shut**

"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" (John 20:19)

From reading this passage, and to it we could also add the walk to Emmaus (Luke 24:13ff), it seems that movement between the physical and the spiritual world doesn't have any boundaries or restrictions from the spiritual side. Jesus comes and goes, and nothing stops his progress. So it would appear that we will not have this ability in the physical, until we have our resurrection bodies. (Philip's experience is interesting. Acts 8:39-40). It's good however, to have our expectation and imagination stretched. There are many amazing experiences awaiting us in the spiritual world which can be ours today. We should be excited, and look forward to ever new and deeper revelation.

*** Do not hold on to me**

"Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father." (Jn.20:17)

Here is another great encouragement – we will recognise people in the spiritual world. Those who teach that we become spirits, floating round in some great cloud are missing the point. In the Christian spiritual world, we know and are known. Yet Mary did not immediately recognise Jesus. How are we to understand this?

What Mary saw was the resurrected body of Jesus - that body which we will all receive when the new heaven and the new earth is established. (1 Cor.15:35-44) This body will, if we understand the Bible, contain all that is really us, and apparently even our physical appearance. Yet it will not be our current bodies, but our perfect whole new post resurrection bodies which will have subtle differences. We don't have to worry about this. As soon as Jesus spoke, Mary knew who he was. Only Jesus has this resurrected body at the moment. The rest of us have to wait on his time. In the meantime, let's do in the spiritual what the Bible encourages - fix our eyes on Jesus. (Hebs.12:2)

*** Jesus: The Ascension: Acts 1:11**

“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11)

Basically the angels said to the disciples, “Haven't you got work to do? Are you going to stand here forever?” We may move in the spiritual, and one day we may live there until after the final resurrection, but our work is here on earth as well. We may look with spiritual eyes, but we have work to do. Let's move in the spiritual, and get on with the tasks which are before us here on earth. This way, we get the best of both worlds.

Chapter 5. How to pray for a Nation: The power of the blood

The most powerful weapon we have as intercessors is the power of the blood of Jesus. This seems obvious, but is so easily overlooked. So let's study the theology of the blood, and then see how we might use it to break the enemy, and release our Nations.

* Some of this material is based on "Releasing the power of the blood", which can be downloaded from www.visionworld27.org

The history of the blood

The murder of Abel

1. Blood carries the essence of life.

Two men prepare a sacrifice for the Lord. (Gen 4:1-5) Cain brings fruits of the soil, but forgets that God has already cursed the land. (Gen 3:17) Abel brings an animal sacrifice. The Bible teaches:-

"For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." (Lev 17:11)

In other words, blood carries the essence of life in it. So to make an offering which involves sacrifice and the shedding of blood is something very powerful. The fruits of the earth have no blood and so no life in them.

2. Innocent blood demands justice.

"Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." (Gen.4:8-10)

Now we see another issue concerning blood. It is much more than just an issue of sacrifice - *blood has power in itself*. Cain murders Abel, but the blood cries out from the ground for justice and vengeance. From this point on, we have to deal with the two issues which this passage has exposed to us:

* **Blood is to do with life and sacrifice.** "The life is in the blood" will finally bring us to the sacrifice of Jesus.

* **Innocent blood has the power to damage the spiritual flow of blessing in any heart or any nation.** It has to be dealt with, or we are forever trapped at the moment of its spilling. The blood of Abel stands as a great warning to subsequent spiritual history. It was innocent blood, and it remained unrepented of. Cain did not repent, but only complained at the unfairness of

God's punishment. Lamech (Gen 4:23-24) did not repent either, and so the shed blood, unrepented of, passed down the generations.

Passover – the power of the blood

“On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn— both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.” (Ex 12:12-13)

Moving on many centuries, we begin to see the power of the blood from God's perspective. The great plague of the firstborn must have looked very frightening from a human perspective. But there was a way to prevent it entering the house - by sprinkling the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of the house. This blood *“spoke”* to God, being enough to turn away his judgment.

This is a big development in our understanding of the blood, and its power. Even animal blood, offered within the covenant setting, could be effective.

Covenant - the guarantee of the blood

“Moses got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.” Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.” (Ex 24: 3-8)

Moving on many more years, we come to this covenant, which is sealed with the sprinkling of blood. The blood marked out this event, protecting it from Satan's attack, and making it, in effect, everlasting. The new sanctuary was also sealed with blood, (Ex 29) making it an acceptable place for the Lord.

Blood -the pollution

Before we move on to the New Testament, we must consider this verse: **“Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it.”** (Num. 35:33) In many ways, this verse needs to be considered along with one we have already looked at: **“What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground,”** (Gen 4:10,11)

Despite all our teaching about the blood, and despite all the animal sacrifices, the issue of pollution and justice remains unsolved in the pre Christian era. **Animal blood cannot atone for**

innocent human blood. The innocent blood of so many people continues to cry out to the Lord for justice and revenge. The land is polluted. No amount of Temple sacrifice or of following the Law can change this principle. With this in mind, let's turn to the New Testament teaching.

Jesus - the perfect sacrifice

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

In order to deal with the blood, a better blood was needed. That blood was the blood of Jesus. There are many biblical verses to support this:-

*** He was "the lamb of God."**

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

*** He was the perfect offering.**

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21)

"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." (1 Peter 2:22)

Now let's look at the theology:-

1. We must identify with the blood, and it must identify with us.

To make the blood effective, Jesus teaches us that we have to be identified with that blood:-
"Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." (John 6:53)

The blood also has to be identified with us: **"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God." (Mark 14:22-25)**

2. The blood showed its power at the death of Jesus.

"At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people." (Matt 27:51-53)

The blood was so powerful that it established its control over sin, (the curtain was torn) over nature, (the rocks split) and over death. (The tombs were opened.) The sacrifice of the blood

was complete. A greater sacrifice than that of bulls and goats had achieved its mission. The Church soon began to understand this truth.

3. The blood of Jesus was the perfect sacrifice.

The New Testament writers teach extensively about the blood. Here are a few key examples:

* “and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” (Col 1:20)

* “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.” (1 Peter 1:18-21)

* “When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (Hebrews 9:11-14)

* They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (Rev 12:11)

Summary

This is a lot of theology to absorb, and I encourage people to struggle and get hold of it. Fortunately, it is easily summarised:

* The blood of Abel began a very sad line of theology. The innocent blood of Abel, unrepented of, continued to cry out down the centuries. Much more innocent blood was added, all crying out for justice and revenge.

* The blood of animals could not appease this blood. The life which was in this innocent blood was the life of humanity, not the animal creation. But which human could possibly atone for all this blood?

* Jesus had the purer, sinless blood of humanity and divinity. He could offer the pure sacrifice, and he did at Calvary. His blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

* At his second coming, all this innocent blood will cease crying out. His better word will end it all.

Using the power of the blood today

We are living in the time between his death and his return, so innocent blood can still cry out, and in that crying, damage a nation's soul. I have read people who tell me that this is not the New Testament message. But there is no division between Old and New. The Old says that unrepented blood stains the land. It did when those words were written, and it still does today. This will never end permanently until the second coming of Jesus. The Old Testament tells us that the blood has to be dealt with by the one who spilt it. Fortunately, in the New Testament we learn that Jesus is willing to stand in that place. He can deal with the spilt blood. But his blood has to be brought to bear on those situations which still harm us today.

So what can we do?

1. Be identified with the blood.

“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” (1 Peter 1:18-19)

Through the breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup, in whatever form, we identify ourselves with the “better blood.” This releases power into the spiritual world. We should not hesitate to go to places where there is spilt innocent blood, and break the bread together. We can go to key places in the Nation and break the bread together. Don't let the “father of lies” whisper that this is a waste of time. When we identify with the blood in this way, power is released - to forgive, to release, to break down and to build up.

2. Repent and bring the sin to the blood.

“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” (2 Chron. 7:14)

We have to follow the example of Nehemiah, taking the sin of the nation as if it were ours, and bring it to the cleansing of the blood. We need to seek out those sins which are binding and holding back the nation. We must look into our history and find where sinful events took place, and especially where these led to the shedding of innocent blood. Then we can repent for them and bring them to the blood. This is very important where there is innocent blood. That blood is crying out for justice and revenge. We have to cover that blood with the blood of Jesus, which cries out for forgiveness and mercy. Again the enemy will mock these things. That is because he is afraid of them.

3. Expose evil

“Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.” (2 Cor. 11.14)

Part of our prayer function is to expose the lies of Satan – especially the one which says that he owns the nations, and there is nothing we can do about it. He doesn't want to read this:-

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” (Col2:13-15)

However, this is going to be costly. The more we try to expose him, the more he will resist and come against us. But these attacks are only signs of his fear.

We expose the evil which led to the shedding of the blood, and carry out acts of repentance for that spilling. This is what Cain should have done. We must not make his mistake. We also have to accept that repentance leads to new attitudes, forgiveness, restoration and a turning to a new future, more blessed and free from the past. These things are easy to write, but have proved very hard to do. The human spirit resists repentance, or looks for an easy repentance which bears no fruit. Finding the blood opens the door to a healing process - but a very painful one.

Chapter 6. How to pray for a Nation: Repentance and Loosing

Repentance

In the stories of Cain and David, Peter and Judas we see the choice which the human spirit has to make when things go wrong. We either repent, and begin again, or sink into anger, self-justification and disaster.

Cain and David

Cain

“Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.” Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let's go out to the field.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” “I don't know,” he replied. “Am I my brother's keeper?”

The Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.” (Gen 1: 1-10)

Cain showed no understanding of what he had done. He was angry, because he felt his punishment was excessive. Lamech (Genesis 4:19-24) followed the same line, and this line of justification has destroyed so much of God's creation. There is an alternative, fruitful and creative, but very tough. Repentance is tough, because it goes against our self-will, and is violently opposed by the enemy, who doesn't want us to be free.

David

Like Cain, David had made a bad mistake. He had committed adultery and murder. (1 Samuel chapter 11) Psalm 51 is his response:-

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak

and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.” (Ps 51:1-12)

David had the right idea – he confessed, he threw himself on God’s mercy, and believed that a merciful God would forgive him. This is the “type” of what Jesus would do by his blood.

Judas and Peter

Cain and David are mirrored by Judas and Peter in the New Testament. Judas was filled with remorse, not repentance. He may have walked with Jesus, but he did not know the heart of Jesus. His mind was shut to the possibility of forgiveness and new beginnings. The result was disastrous.

Judas

“Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor. When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.” “What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.” So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.” (Matt 27:1-5)

The word translated “repent” in English New Testament is the Greek word “metanoeo.” Metanoeo means, “To perceive afterwards, to change one's mind and purpose.” This change is always for the better, and shows a change of moral thought. It doesn’t just mean “to repent of”, or “to forsake sin”, but also to change one's mind regarding it. Metanoeo leads to a genuine change of heart and life from worse to better.

Judas got a long way. He began to repent as he realised that he had “betrayed innocent blood.” (Gk: “paradidōmi” – “to give into the hands of another”) But then he turned away from repentance. He threw down the money, (the Greek word “rhiptō” shows that this was an act of petulance) and destroyed himself. Peter started in the same way. He had also betrayed innocent blood. But he went down a different path.

Peter

Peter doesn’t always seem to be the brightest of the disciples, but at least he understood the heart of Jesus, understood what he had done, and started his journey to repentance:-

“Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. “You also were with Jesus of Galilee,” she said. But he denied it before them all. “I don't know what you're talking about,” he said. Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, “This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.” He denied it again, with an oath: “I don't know the man!” After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away.” Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, “I don't know the man!” Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.” (Matt 26 69-75)

A pattern of repentance: Psalm 51

It's always risky to try and make a list of steps to repentance, because it is very much a question of putting our heart right before God, and living in a new way. It is not following a list of rules. But Psalm 51 at least outlines the general direction we need to take:-

“Against you, you only have I sinned.” (v.4)

It is against God we have sinned. Accepting this is the starting point for true repentance. However, it is the hardest point for us to find.

“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” (v.7)

Once we know our sin, we need the cleansing of God, which comes through the blood of Jesus — “The blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin.” **(1 John 1:7)**

“You desire truth in the inner parts.” (v.6)

As we are praying and thinking about these things, the enemy will do all he can to spoil our repentance. He knows he must, because repentance is such a powerful and life giving moment for us. While we are repenting, we need to hear words of truth from the Bible, to counter the lies of the enemy. Words like:-

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart O God you will not despise.” (Psalm 51:17)

“Cleanse me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.” (Psalm 51:7)

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”(1 John 1:9)

“Create in me a pure heart.” (v.10)

Repentance has to result in a new way of living. We cannot repent and continue in the same way as before. Once the grave clothes were removed, Lazarus had to live again, and in a different and more powerful way. (John 11:1-43)

What does God expect as we repent?

* A commitment to a new way of life. Even though we do not know what this might involve, we must be willing to let the Holy Spirit make the changes. Working out this new way of living is easier if we think, pray and talk with others.

* A willingness to pay the price of repentance, and the changes it will bring personally, in church life, and beyond.

Binding and releasing

How do we bring people, people groups and nations to the point where they can be released into repentance? This is the work of the intercessors, and we need to know how to do it, or at least how to pray so that such releases can take place. This may look a big job, but it's not hopeless. Many nations have been turned round throughout history, and have risen up from deep bondage. Let's begin with this story:

“On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.” The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?” When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.” (Lk.13:1-10)

It's clear from this passage that the enemy “binds.” The Greek word is “deo”, which means “to bind, fasten with chains, to throw into chains.” This is Satan's plan, and is clearly spelt out in Revelation 13:-

“He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.” (Rev 13:16-17)

Part of the work of the intercessors is to discover what is binding individuals, groups, towns and Nations. It is in knowing exactly what the binding issues are which enables us to begin to pray

for release. Satan binds, and Jesus releases. Jesus removes the chains, the bondages, the weights which burden and tie us down. Jesus “straightens up” (Lk.13:13) situations, so that they can be released and made new. We have the power to “straighten up” every situation which is binding our nations, and we can make the situations new and full of hope and potential. This we do by prayer, repentance and releasing the blood. This all seems so straight forward, and indeed it is, so what is the problem?

Satan has bound the intercessors, so that they are not praying in a powerful and positive way for release, and Satan has bound the church, by blinding its eyes to the truth that prayer matters, and prayer changes things.

So what can be done?

*** For the Nations to be forgiven, first, the blood needs to be on the gates.**

“Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them “Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning. When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.” (Exodus 12:21-23)

The blood needs to be on the gates of the Nations. We have to pray this into reality, and we have to act on it. When we dedicated our base in Ghana we held a Christian Passover. We killed a goat, and then we sprinkled the blood of that goat onto the gates of our base. In this way, we drew on the power of Exodus 12, and in sign language, we put the blood of Jesus onto our gates. We did this in the physical realm, but it was effective in the spiritual realm. I have often wondered whether a similar act has to be carried out on the gates of our nations – a physical sign of a heavenly reality. May be we do not kill a goat (!) but by breaking the bread and sharing the cup we could do the same thing.

But even if we do not do it physically, we have to do this spiritually, and then set a guard at the gates of the nation.

*** For nations to be free, we have to “loose” situations.**

We have to find the chained up situations and people, and loose them by the power of Jesus. This requires insight by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that we can find out where the chains are. They may be hidden deep in the past, but they cannot hide from the Spirit, and they cannot hide from us.

*** For nations to be free, we have to deal with innocent blood.**

To save a Nation the intercessors have to repent, release the blood onto the gates, and loose bound situations. We have to cleanse the land from the spilling of innocent blood. We have, by

the Spirit's inspiration, to find where innocent blood was shed, and then call down the better blood of Jesus, so that the innocent blood cannot disrupt our prayers for the release of power, and the loosing.

More material

For those who are interested, there is other material available:

Fighting for the soul of Ghana

Prophet Jim shares how he sees Ghana today, and the tough fight which faces God's people in the days which are to come

The failure of prophetic leadership

Prophet Jim writes here about the necessity of having good prophecy in a nation, and the terrible consequences which come when that stream, becomes polluted. A very challenging read!

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