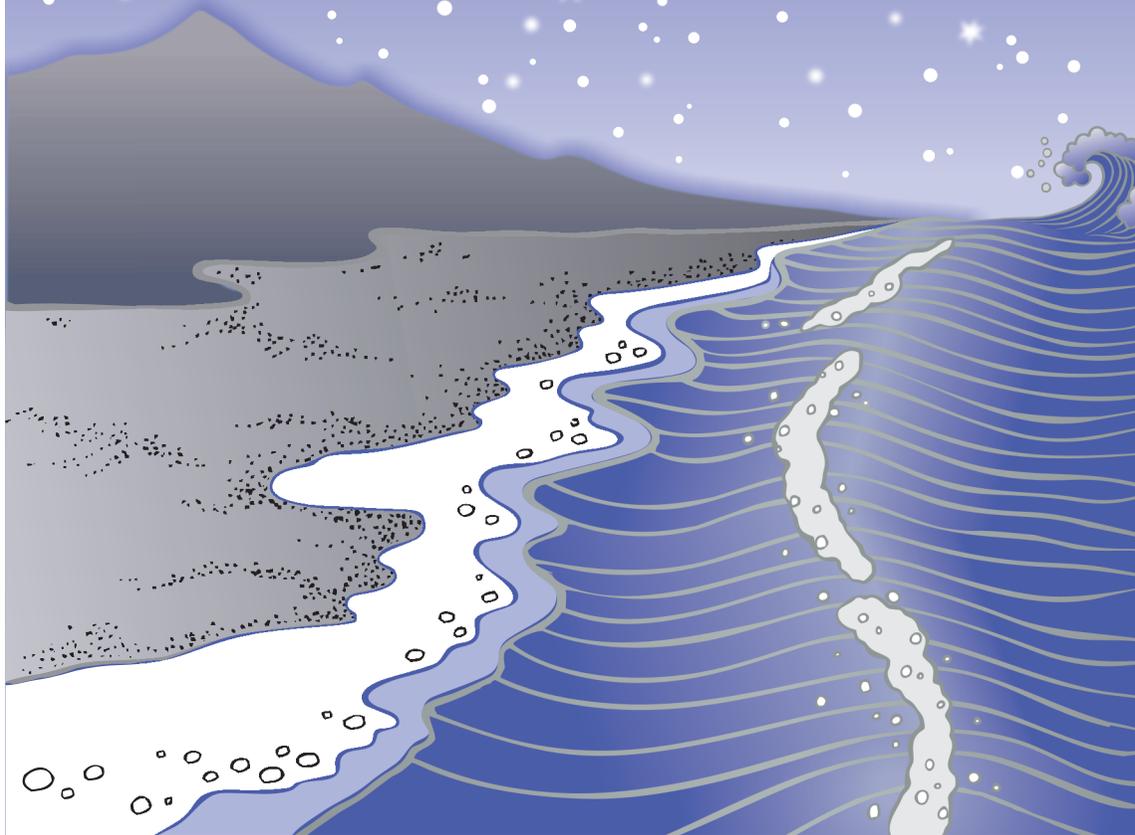


# Bible Characters

Volume II



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# Ahimelech





# Ahimelech (1)

*(July 31, 1990 — Discussion of Co-worker Sis. Elsie during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

*Now David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech was afraid when he met David, and said to him, “Why are you alone, and no one is with you?” ... “And he inquired of the LORD for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.” ... And the king said, “You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father’s house!”*

(1 Sam. 21:1; 22:10,16)

Ahimelech was a mighty man who helped David in gaining his kingdom. He was also a martyr who sacrificed himself and all his father’s house to protect David. (See 1 Samuel 22:17–19.) His extraordinary offering revealed that he was a fully dedicated person who served God even to the point of death. In these last days, God’s children should imitate Ahimelech to realize the kingdom of Christ.

Ahimelech could have such an offering because he knew who the anointed one of God was. Moreover, he had the trait of “respecting God’s anointing.” He knew that God had anointed David through Samuel the prophet, and that David was God’s anointed one even though he had yet to sit on the throne. Although Saul was still on the throne, he had been rejected in God’s eyes. So Ahimelech could foresee what would become of David in the near future, just as how God beheld the future of the house of Jacob. (See Numbers 24:17.) In other words, Ahimelech did not see David as a fugitive with a disheveled appearance. Instead, he knew that since David had been anointed by God, he would ultimately gain the kingdom.

Saul was jealous of David and was determined to kill him. His pursuit

forced David to become a fugitive. He sent out many messengers to look for David around Judah. In such a tense situation, people would try to stay far away from David, much less give him any assistance. However, Ahimelech was not the same. He received David. At the same time, he was afraid when he met David because he also had weaknesses of the natural man. Moreover, on that day, a servant of Saul named Doeg happened to be present. (See 1 Samuel 21:7.) Doeg was an Edomite — an enemy of God’s people. He was also the chief of Saul’s herdsmen. But Ahimelech still came out to meet David regardless of the enemy watching him. He put himself completely on the altar of death, and was ready to die.

According to Saul’s commands (the evil laws of man’s kingdoms), Ahimelech had committed the crime of “concealing information and helping a criminal escape,” and made himself more guilty by giving David food and a sword. Ahimelech knew that such open violations of the king’s order would cause him his life, but he disregarded it. His ministration to God was not under the influence of man’s rule, and the evil laws of the tyrant had no affect on him. God’s will was the only criteria in his life. Knowing that David was accomplishing God’s will and bringing in His kingdom, Ahimelech risked his life to help and protect David. This is what we mean by going through thick and thin, in life and in death with the vessel of the era in God’s will.

Priscilla and Aquila, the couple mentioned in Paul’s letter, risked their own lives for Paul. (See Romans 16:3–4.) They were willing to offer their lives for the anointed one of God. This serving is most commended by God because it is an offering according to God’s will. (See 2 Corinthians 8:5.) This is exactly the serving of Ahimelech, who dedicated his life for the anointed one of God. He did not only serve God on the position of death (the position of offering) but also died for God’s will, which was a meaningful and valuable death. This is the path of offering. If we are willing to sacrifice ourselves for God’s will, the practical way is to risk our

lives for God's anointed one — to give our lives to the vessel of the era, the one God has chosen.

*“Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found.” And the priest answered David and said, “There is no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women.” Then David answered the priest, and said to him, “Truly, women have been kept from us about three days since I came out. And the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in effect common, even though it was consecrated in the vessel this day.” So the priest gave him holy bread; for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread in its place on the day when it was taken away.*

(1 Sam. 21:3–6)

Ahimelech respected God's anointing so much that he gave David whatever he wanted, including the bread and the sword. He offered in time according to the needs of God's anointed one, showing that he was able to catch up to the new and living leading of the Holy Spirit. According to the law, only priests could eat the showbread. (See Leviticus 24:5–9.) And according to Ahimelech's office, he had the power and every reason not to give David this bread. But if Ahimelech had rigidly followed the laws, David would have starved and died.

Ahimelech did not purposely disobey God's laws but had no other choice but to give David the bread in the spirit of respecting God's anointing. This is an exceptional case because there was no other bread except for the showbread. Ahimelech did not serve not according to customs but with the spirit.

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus even mentioned of what Ahimelech had done. Please read Matthew 12:1–4, “At that time Jesus

went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, ‘Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!’ But He said to them, ‘Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?’ ”

Through these words of the Lord Jesus, we can see that God did not condemn Ahimelech for what he did. In the Old Testament, people who offended the laws could be put to death. Yet Ahimelech gave David the sacred bread when David was in need. He was not abusing his authority as a priest, but was paying a high price of risking his life to help David. He must have been trembling in fear because he knew that he would not escape the judgment of the laws if God had pursued him. But he was willing to take the risk — I’d rather die, so that David might live. This showed the respect he had for God’s anointing and his willingness to give his own life for God’s anointed one. Therefore, by giving the showbread to David he put himself on the altar of death.

*And David said to Ahimelech, “Is there not here on hand a spear or a sword? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king’s business required haste.” So the priest said, “The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, there it is, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it. For there is no other except that one here.” And David said, “There is none like it; give it to me.”*

(1 Sam. 21:8–9)

David asked not only for bread, but also for a sword. This request seemed to be too much to ask for, and it was like asking for the impossible. How could a priest have swords? How could there be a sword in the holy temple? But it so happened that there was a sword. The Bible says,

“For there is no other except that one here.” Yet Ahimelech did not say, “I am so unlucky. You’re asking for the only sword we have here.”

Ahimelech knew that God was demanding of him through His anointed one, and that He wanted him to hand out all he had. However, Doeg’s presence made the situation even more unfavorable for Ahimelech. Helping David, a fugitive, was bad enough, what more giving him a weapon. If Ahimelech was unwilling to lay down his life for David, he could have lied: “How could I, a priest, have a sword?” He should have played a small trick, bought some time, and then handed the sword to David only after Doeg left. To lie and to trick under such circumstances is normally excusable. But Ahimelech did not think of saving himself. He only knew that the anointed one of God was in desperate need of help so he immediately offered what he had.

Ahimelech not only said there was a sword but also told its story, saying, “This is the sword you used to kill Goliath the Philistine in the Valley of Elah.” He clearly remembered the story of this sword and even the details of the time and location. He kept in mind all the things done by God’s anointed one. This is also the proof of his respect to God’s anointing.

How did Ahimelech’s serving satisfy God’s heart? It was because he set his eyes on God’s anointed one. Ever since David was anointed, Ahimelech had been paying close attention to everything God did through David. When God used David to kill Goliath, David was still young. Ahimelech was much older than David because one had to be at least thirty years old to be a priest. As an elderly and well-experienced priest, Ahimelech, however, highly regarded this great thing which God had done through “little” David. This showed how humble Ahimelech was. A humble spirit will respect God’s anointing. In other words, a humble spirit respects God’s anointed one.

A carnally-minded person is prone to be self-centered. He will never forget the things that God does through him but he is not so interested in things God does through others, not to mention attentively taking note of them. We tend to forget most of Sis. Li-chu's reports after listening to them. This is because we do not care to remember the glorious work of God. We might give glory to God after we learn about His work, but we never earnestly try to remember the details, especially those done by "little David."

When David won the battle, many women danced with tambourines, singing, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." But no one cared enough about the sword to keep it. I am ashamed to say that, although I have read the Bible many times, I did not notice what happened to this sword until now, when we discuss on Ahimelech.

When David won the battle and returned in victory, many people welcomed him singing "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." However, Ahimelech was the only one who kept the sword and treasured it. This is indeed the example from which we should learn and imitate. When Ahimelech mentioned about the sword, he said it clearly, "This is the sword you used to kill Goliath the Philistine in the Valley of Elah." He didn't say, "Here is a sword, but I have no idea where it comes from." We see that Ahimelech paid close attention to everything that God had done through David, God's anointed one. He could tell in details the time, the location, and what thing God had done through David.

Remembering what God has done through His anointed one can help increase our faith in God's anointed one and his ministry. When we go out to assume ministry, we say, "The prophet is in the East. The holy mountain is in Taiwan."

Many ask, "How do you know if Elijah Hong is the real prophet?"  
"Because many of his prophesies have come true!"

“What prophecies has he made?”

At this point, we realize that we can't relate them one by one since we do not remember them clearly. We have indeed fallen short of God. By God's grace, we hope to remember more of God's glorious works. Only then will we have a clearer understanding and confirmation of the man and the mountain chosen by God, and be established.

Ahimelech carefully kept the sword by wrapping it in a cloth and putting it behind the ephod. He did not carelessly throw it around. This sword testified of God's power and the amazing victory that God gave David. Cutting off Goliath's head with Goliath's own sword indeed marked God's marvelous work and David's astounding victory. That is why Ahimelech carefully kept it like a treasure. The sword that killed Goliath was a sign of God's power. Treasuring this sword was cherishing God's power that gave David the wonderful victory.

Thank God that today, the New Testament Church has also found grace in keeping David's sword. The “Zion Spiritual Flow” is an account of the glorious works of God done through the present-day David. We remember all these works of God by recording and compiling them periodically. This is keeping David's sword. The placards displayed inside Mount Zion's Victory Hall are also “the sword” that the present-day David used to kill the present-day Goliath. I hope that we all the more learn from Ahimelech in this aspect. Treasuring the sword that God used to kill the enemies is tantamount to cherishing God's work and His ways.

Ahimelech said to David, “If you will take that, take it.” He readily offered the sword for the need of God's anointed one without hesitation. Not everyone can take it but only you, because you are the anointed one. Ahimelech did not give it away randomly, but according to God's will. Although it was the only sword he had, he told David to take it. And he did it willingly. He did not offer the extra he had, but the only one he had.

It was also the best he had. David said, “There is none like it,” meaning there was no better sword.

Brothers and sisters, sometimes we also offer the only one we have, but it may not be the best we have. That *only one* we have happens to be what we no longer want, and we can give it away easily when people want it. It sounds better when we call it an offering, but in fact, we are getting rid of junk. How hypocritical! We tend to offer the “second-best” (or even those we do not want) and keep the best for ourselves. This kind of offering does not please God.

However, Ahimelech offered all he had, which was also the best he had. This was a self-denying offering which really pleased God. The sword was given to David, a fugitive, proving that God had given David the power to destroy tyrants. Ahimelech was willing to give this sword that had historical significance to David without holding back, because he knew that it was more useful in David’s hand than in God’s temple. He knew that David could use this sword to attack bandits and establish his kingdom. Since God wanted David to fight the thieves, wouldn’t the sword be more valuable in David’s hand?

The word of God is a double-edged sword, which is the sharpest weapon. This sword reaches its maximum power in the hands of the vessel of the era. Today, God has chosen His holy apostles and prophets to expound the mystery of His word. Once God’s word is preached, it becomes a lethal weapon.

After Mount Zion was plundered, the Grace of Jesus Christ Crusade was forced into wandering. In those days, we all wanted to be in one heart with God’s servant. We paid close attention to his messages and sought for the light of God’s words. At that time, I was staying in northern Taiwan, while the Lord’s servant and the co-workers were in the south. Every Friday night, there was a convention for the churches in the north. The

young co-workers took turns to deliver sermons on the pulpit. I was usually scared of serving on the pulpit and therefore searched the Lord diligently.

On one occasion, the Lord's servant spoke about God wanting to destroy tyrants and tyrannies. I thought it would be great if I could find some related Bible verses. But there wasn't any. But one day I found such verses in a particular version of the Bible. In Ephesians 6:12, it precisely talks about the church that is to wrestle against tyrants and tyrannies. I was so happy to discover this verse, thinking: *Wow! This is a good weapon!* My first reaction, however, was not to give the weapon to David but to save it for my own use, so I could talk about it during the Friday convention when there were no recorded messages from the Lord's servant.

Sadly enough, one Friday night, when I talked about this Bible verse, I could not expound its mysteries well. God knew that I could not let go of the sword. Later, when the Lord's servant heard the recording of my sermon, he was very happy to learn about the Bible verse. Afterward, God moved him to deliver an epochal message. This incident taught me a deep lesson: This sword should be handed to David instead of staying with Ahimelech. All the more we realize that this sword holds invincible power in the hand of the vessel of the era. If we do not give the sword to the present-day David, it will remain wrapped up in a cloth behind the ephod. A wrapped sword can never kill the enemies. Today, as we co-work with God's servant, we should all the more understand this spiritual principle and willingly offer ourselves to the vessel of the era, just like the churches in Macedonia that gave themselves not only to the Lord but also to the apostles. (See 2 Corinthians 8:5.)

When Ahimelech gave the sword to David, he was making a sacrifice. Man, by nature, have this problem: He likes to possess what others do not have, so he has something to boast of and to make himself special. The sword Ahimelech owned could be called a national treasure, which no

one could have. Had it been any ordinary sword, he could have given it away and replaced it with another. But this sword was so unique that there would be none other like it after he gave it away. Even if he had wanted to give it away, he should have at least given it to Saul to get a reward. Giving it to David, a fugitive, would not benefit him with an equivalent reward. So when Ahimelech gave the sword to David, he was sacrificing himself.

Many brothers and sisters own a Rod of God, and so do I. When that rod was sent to me from Mount Zion, I felt that it looked very much like the one used by the Lord's servant, and some brothers and sisters also thought the same. Right at that moment I felt great to have owned this precious "antique of the New Testament Church," which was once used by Bro. Hong. It had become my pride.

Once, I went to visit an elderly brother who was very ill. I brought this rod with me and let him hold it so that he would feel comforted. The most I could do was to let brothers and sisters touch and hold it for a while, but I would not give it away. The carnal man always hopes to own what others do not have. But Ahimelech was so willing to give this unique sword to David without any regret. He had made a sacrificial offering.

Another problem man usually has is always boasting of having a little more than others. One in Ahimelech's position might think: *Compared to other priests, no one else has a sword except me. Moreover, it is a very special sword. I can use it to make myself higher than others and even to extort: You can have this sword, but you must give me something in exchange. Now is a good chance for me to ask for whatever thing I want.*

Nevertheless, we see how respectful and fearful Ahimelech was to God. He did not use godliness as a means of gain. He knew that David would obtain the kingdom some day, but when he gave David the sword, he did not expect David to remember him when he reigned. His heart was pure and his offering was without any hidden intention.

Man has this problem: he may not expect others to repay him, but he would be very happy if others showed some gratitude. If someone were to say to us, “You are my benefactor,” we would be very happy. But if we gave people something and did not receive any appreciation in return, we would be very unhappy. That’s why sometimes when we give, we make the recipients feel that they owe us a favor. Giving in this way would make the recipients feel painful. Instead of having gained something, they feel indebted. This is what our old self will bring to men. When David received the sword, he did not say pleasing words to Ahimelech, like, “Please give me the sword, and I will be forever grateful...” It was clear to David that Ahimelech had a pure heart towards God.

People are good at using the “little extra (the sword) we have” as a means of gain. To put it more bluntly, it is spiritual extortion. When we offer a little more than others, we expect something in return, such as to become an elder or a deacon, a co-worker or even an apostle. In the early days of the New Testament Church, there was a brother in the Church of Taipei who often brought many people to his house, where he often held gospel meetings. He felt that he was more fervent than other brothers and sisters and so he asked the Lord’s servant to confirm him to be a worker in the New Testament Church. This is called spiritual extortion. When he could not get what he wanted, he left the church. However, Ahimelech did not try to blackmail David when he desperately needed the sword. He gave it to David unconditionally. This is a very good example for us.

*So the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father’s house, the priests who were in Nob. And they all came to the king. And Saul said, “Hear now, son of Ahitub!” He answered, “Here I am, my lord.” Then Saul said to him, “Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, in that you have given him bread and a sword, and have inquired of God for him, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait, as it is this day?” So Ahimelech answered the king and said, “And who among all your servants is as*

*faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, who goes at your bidding, and is honorable in your house? Did I then begin to inquire of God for him? Far be it from me! Let not the king impute anything to his servant, or to any in the house of my father. For your servant knew nothing of all this, little or much." And the king said, "You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house!" ... And the king said to Doeg, "You turn and kill the priests!" So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck the priests, and killed on that day eighty-five men who wore a linen ephod. Also Nob, the city of the priests, he struck with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and nursing infants, oxen and donkeys and sheep — with the edge of the sword.*  
(1 Sam. 22:11–16,18–19)

Ahimelech was interrogated by Saul after he helped David. The situation was very bad, and a death sentence was awaiting him. While being interrogated, Ahimelech bravely testified for David, saying how faithful and well-respected David was in the house of God. This shows that he was willing to give his life to the anointed one of God. Other than testifying for David, he also exerted his authority of judging. When he said, "Did I then begin to inquire of God for him?" In Today's English Version, it says, "Yes, I consulted God for him, and it wasn't the first time." Meaning: I have not done anything wrong, but you have.

In the court of Saul, Ahimelech rose up and judged Saul. Ahimelech was executing God's sovereignty to judge tyrants. He did not come to be judged by Saul. Instead, he was there to judge Saul. How surpassing his serving was! This is the testimony that the church should have: "Far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:21).

In the face of death, Ahimelech said to Saul: This isn't the first time I inquired of God for David. What he meant was: I have always been praying for David to obtain the kingdom. I pray according to the motivation of

the Holy Spirit, the burden God gives me, and by the heavenly revelations. I am not a hired priest who depends on the king's countenance to pray or not to pray. This is a testimony that disregards death. This is the mouthpiece of God's righteousness, wrath, and judgment!

"I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed" (Ps. 119:46). "I will announce Your commands to kings and I will not be ashamed" (Ps. 119:46, *TEV*). Ahimelech made a good testimony by proclaiming God's commands before kings. He let Saul know: The commands of the King of kings whom I serve are higher than that of you, King Saul. He also made it known to Saul the tyrant that he had always served God with a pure heart, a guiltless conscience, and a genuine faith. This is the testimony of the New Testament Church today. We have also seen this testimony demonstrated through the witnesses of the Truth in the New Testament Church many times and in many places. Those brothers and sisters in jail arose to execute the authority of judging while facing the evil human kingdoms. A few days ago we listened to the testimony of Sis. Cecilia who indeed judged Edom during her imprisonment.

Ahimelech could have defended himself during Saul's interrogation. He had sufficient reasons to argue for himself in order not to be convicted or to ask for a lesser sentence. When David saw Ahimelech, he told him that he was on some secret business by King Saul's order and because the king's business required haste, he had no time to bring a sword. (See 1 Samuel 21:2,8.)

Had Ahimelech told the truth as stated above, the sentence probably could have been lessened. However, he didn't say anything to defend himself, nor did he blame David for lying to him. Instead, he testified for the faithfulness of David. Whatever he did, he would not cause harm to the ministry of God's anointed one. He was a person that completely offered up for God's anointed one. In this aspect, the brothers, sisters and co-workers of the New Testament Church have also had much merit.

At midnight of August 26, 1982, the evil Kuomintang (KMT) planned to frame the Lord's servant Bro. Hong when they were carrying out a horrifying domicile check at the Hsiaolin Riverbed. They had questionnaires printed out in advance in Chinese, English, and French which read: "How did you come to the Hsiaolin Riverbed?" "Did Hong San Chi (Elijah Hong) ask you to come?" "How did Hong San Chi persuade you to come?" On that night, we saw many Ahimelechs appear in the New Testament Church. All the saints testified for the Lord's servant before the enemies while rebuking the evil KMT for their atrocities. Ten co-workers and brothers and sisters suffered afflictions when they defended the anointed one of God. However, they completely offered themselves for the Lord's servant, the present-day David with whom they would bring about the kingdom of Christ in one heart. They have all obtained a good report in the glorious and victorious history of the New Testament Church. We hope to keep finding grace in this aspect.

Nob was David's first stop while he ran for his life; it was also a critical stop. Here, Ahimelech sacrificed himself and his whole family to help David, and this good start later led to David's success in gaining his kingdom. In these last days, God wants His servant, the present-day David, to bring about the kingdom of Christ. Let us imitate Ahimelech in helping the anointed one of God through thick and thin, even if it means risking our lives for him.

Brothers and sisters, God pays great attention to how people respond to His anointed one. He once told Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you" (Gen. 12:3). May we all bless God's anointed one and be in one heart with the present-day David to bring about God's kingdom.

## **Ahimelech (2)**

### *The First Martyr of the Kingdom of David*

*(July 31, 1990 — Message of the Lord's servant Bro. Victor Pi during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

Ahimelech the priest can be considered the first martyr of the kingdom of David. His faithfulness, sense of justice, and brave sacrifice are recorded in the Scriptures and are preached even until today. He was a good example for us. Although Ahimelech only spoke a few sentences in 1 Samuel chapters 21 and 22, Sis. Elsie discussed about him for one and half hours. Her explanations were very thorough, interesting, and enlightening. She had truly spoken from her own life experiences. Now I will sum up these special characteristics that we found in Ahimelech, for they are what we seek after.

### **Has a Clear Recognition of the Anointed One of God in this Era**

How does the Bible describe Ahimelech when he met David? He was afraid. Why would this elderly priest with high standing be afraid when he met the young man David? Was it because David was a son-in-law of the king and Ahimelech wanted to please the royal family? No. He was afraid because he respected God's anointing. He recognized that David was the anointed one of God, and the future king of Israel. He knew that God through Samuel had anointed David as king to replace Saul. Ahimelech was certain that David would accomplish God's epochal mission and entrustment; establish the kingdom of Israel; bring forth the revelation of the temple, and revive the house of Judah. Judging from what Ahimelech did, we can see that Ahimelech was a godly man and a great priest.

### **Provides for the Anointed One Even if it's Against the Law**

According to the Laws of Moses, it was unlawful for Ahimelech to

give David the showbread. This bread was holy and only the priests could eat it. During a discussion with some Pharisees, Jesus justified the action of David when He quoted the Scriptures, “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.” (See Matthew 12:3–7.) Had Ahimelech been like those hypocritical Pharisees who loved sacrifice instead of mercy, David would have to go hungry while fleeing from Saul. Ahimelech desired mercy over sacrifice. He was not like the merciless Scribes and Pharisees who rigidly kept the letter of the law.

The Scriptures say, “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” On another occasion some hypocritical Pharisees brought an adulterous woman before Jesus and questioned Him if the woman should be stoned to death as commanded in the Law of Moses. But the Lord saved her by His wisdom and told her not to sin again.

Our Lord is merciful and gracious. He would not break a bruised reed nor snuff out a dimly burning wick. Ahimelech was merciful like the Lord. He was gracious to David, the LORD’s anointed one. When he learned that the young men had kept women from them for several days and that their vessels were holy, he gave David the holy bread without hesitation. He asked about the young men’s holiness because he feared the LORD, and respected His anointed one. He did not want David to sin against the God who anointed him by eating the bread with a defiled body.

It was contradicting man’s concept for Ahimelech to provide David with the sword, which was hidden behind the ephod. This was the sword David used to kill Goliath—it was a trophy, a symbol of glory and victory, and a memorial and a national treasure of Israel. Something of equivalent value today would have been a showpiece in a museum. How could it be given away so casually?

This sword was wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. This shows that the LORD remembered this sword (which had been used to kill Goliath to

deliver the house of Israel) as much as He remembered the names of the twelve tribes of Israel inscribed on the ephod. We believe that God would all the more remember the man who used this sword to kill Goliath to deliver the house of Israel. Wonderfully, besides having the sword, David later also put on a linen ephod. (See 2 Samuel 6:14.) He was not only a king, but also a priest.

Ahimelech knew very well that only this man was worthy of this sword. And only after this sword fell into the hand of this man would the enemy be killed and the kingdom of Israel be established. This sword and this man not only symbolized the victory of Israel but also the realization of the kingdom of Israel. After David put an end to the internal and external turmoil, there was peace in the country. He put on the ephod, and praised and worshipped the LORD of all hosts before the ark. He was truly a vessel after God's heart.

### **Testifies for the Anointed One at the Risk of His Own Life**

Saul said to Ahimelech, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, in that you have given him bread and a sword, and have inquired of God for him, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait, as it is this day?" (1 Sam. 22:13).

Saul said that Ahimelech had conspired or revolted against him because he helped David. Saul regarded David as his enemy. So, providing David with bread was "giving supplies to his enemy," and giving him a sword was "arming the enemy for a revolt." With these two charges, Ahimelech could receive the death penalty. It was obvious that Saul was incriminating him.

The way tyrants deal with their dissidents has always been the same throughout history. If they want to condemn somebody, they can always trump up a charge. Ahimelech was trembling before David. But he was

brave when he was in front of Saul, whom God had rejected as king. Ahimelech spoke sternly and righteously to Saul, showing no sign of fear for the king's wrath. He testified for David, saying, "And who among all your servants is as faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, who goes at your bidding, and is honorable in your house? Did I then begin to inquire of God for him? Far be it from me! Let not the king impute anything to his servant, or to any in the house of my father. For your servant knew nothing of all this, little or much" (1 Sam. 22:14–15).

Ahimelech boldly rebuked Saul's false accusation. He testified for the loyalties of David. He also proved that none among Saul's servants was as faithful as David, and that Saul was so blind and tyrannical to treat David, a faithful servant, as a traitor. Persecuting the faithful (David) and promoting the crooked (Doeg) was a sign of the fall of Saul's rule. Regrettably, Chiang Ching-kuo and the KMT did not understand this message. They will certainly perish the same way Saul did.

### **Sacrifices Himself for the Anointed One**

When Ahimelech risked his life to help David, he proved that he was willing to die for God's anointed one. "So Saul said to Doeg, 'You kill them!' — and Doeg killed them all. On that day he killed eighty-five priests who were qualified to wear the ephod. Saul also had all the other inhabitants of Nob, the city of priests, put to death: men and women, children and babies, cattle, donkeys, and sheep — they were all killed" (1 Sam. 22:18–19, *TEV*).

Saul was so daring as to order Doeg the Edomite to kill the priests and all the other inhabitants of Nob, the city of priests. Such bloody atrocity proved that Saul was a typical tyrant who opposed God and His anointed one. He was a conscienceless murderer. How could God not be furious at Saul? God is righteous. He made Saul pay blood for blood so as to avenge his servants and the innocent victims. In the battle, Saul was wounded by the Philistine archers, and he killed himself. His three sons and all his men

died together on the same day. Heavenly justice never fails! This is the consequence of all those who oppose God and His anointed one.

## **History Repeats Itself**

Saul incriminated God's anointed one with a trumped-up charge of conspiracy and treason. Chiang Ching-kuo and the KMT did just the same to the Lord's anointed one Bro. Hong for the past ten years, intending to put him to death. God did not hand David over to Saul. Today, God also did not hand the Prophet of All Nations Elijah Hong over to Chiang. God has protected the New Testament Church. How God made Saul pay blood for blood, He also made Chiang pay the blood debt. So Chiang died a violent death. The rule of Chiang and the rule of Saul had both ended. God's righteous judgment is clearly seen.

Ahimelech is a good example for us to follow. He risked his life to help David possess the kingdom. He also supplied for David's needs and bore witness for him even when his own life was at stake. The co-workers of the Grace of Jesus Christ Crusade and all the saints should strive to follow this example. Let us help God's anointed one, Elijah Hong, until Christ's kingdom — the kingdom of peace — is brought in.





# Joab





# Joab (1)

*(August 5, 1990 — Discussion of Co-worker Bro. Tai-ray during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

Joab was a commander and a nephew of David. David's sister Zeruah had three sons, namely Abishai, Joab, and Asahel. (See 1 Chronicles 2:16.) Abishai and Asahel were listed among the thirty mighty men of David. But Joab, who was a commander all his life and a strong strategist who followed David to all battles, was not listed among them. Instead, he died under David's judgment. (See 2 Samuel 23:18,24 and 1 Kings 2:5–6,34.) His lifetime efforts had all been wasted. And most tragically, his works were not remembered by God, but were cursed by Him.

Joab was a complex person. Outwardly, he was helping David like other mighty men. Sometimes he also had great insight into God's will and could precisely read David's mind. On the other hand, he was also most daring in defying David, leaving him in grief. Joab's carnal life was terrifying. Nobody, not even David, the anointed one of God, could offend him in any way. Whoever interfered with his benefits or offended him would be put to death. Before David and the whole nation of Israel, he had an arrogant attitude of "who dares to provoke me?" For this reason, he could not stand in the presence of God and he had to suffer the consequences of being stricken to death.

*Now Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. And Joab the son of Zeruah, and the servants of David, went out and met them by the pool of Gibeon. So they sat down, one on one side of the pool and the other on the other side of the pool. Then Abner said to Joab, "Let the young men now arise and compete before us." And Joab said, "Let them arise." So they arose and went over by number, twelve from Benjamin, followers of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and twelve from the servants of David. And each one grasped his opponent by the head*

*and thrust his sword in his opponent's side; so they fell down together. Therefore that place was called the Field of Sharp Swords, which is in Gibeon. So there was a very fierce battle that day, and Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David.... However, he (Asahel) refused to turn aside. Therefore Abner struck him in the stomach with the blunt end of the spear, so that the spear came out of his back; and he fell down there and died on the spot. So it was that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died, stood still.*

(2 Sam. 2:12–17,23)

Abner was the commander of Saul's army. After Saul died, he became the commander of the army of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul. One day, Joab went out and met Abner who challenged him saying, "Let the young men now arise and compete before us." Today's English Version says, "Let's have some of the young men from each side fight an armed contest."

Joab knew very well that there should be no combat except for helping David establish his kingdom. But this hot-headed man was easily provoked to fight according to the flesh. He ordered twelve men of David to compete with their opponents where they slashed one another with swords. How cruel! These men fought and lost their lives not for the kingdom of David but for entertaining the audience. They played such a game to satisfy their lusts for heroism. Serving God with such a mentality is horrifying.

The Scriptures tell us not to walk in the flesh, for flesh and blood is always a failure in the spiritual battle. That day, the sport turned into a fierce battle. Asahel, the younger brother of Joab, kept pursuing Abner and was killed by him. Undoubtedly, Joab was full of heroic ambition. He was cruel and evil. As a commander, he did not even love his troops. Instead, he sacrificed them for a sport. God would not permit such mentality. His younger brother Asahel died in this sport. The loss was great but

meaningless. This should serve as a warning for us. We should fight solely for the will of God, not because of the provocation of the enemies.

Before David went to any war, he would first inquire of God whether he should go, and how he should fight if God wanted him to go. David feared the LORD and loved the LORD's army. Joab seldom inquired of God and rarely did according to the directions of David. This proved that he was not living before God. In a spiritual battle, we must be very alert. We must do according to the will of God and the leading of His anointed one. Never treat any spiritual battle as a play or try to show off personal heroic deeds. All these must be avoided at all costs.

*Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to David, saying, "Whose is the land?" saying also, "Make your covenant with me, and indeed my hand shall be with you to bring all Israel to you." So Abner and twenty men with him came to David at Hebron. And David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him. Then Abner said to David, "I will arise and go, and gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires." So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace. And when Joab had gone from David's presence, he sent messengers after Abner, who brought him back from the well of Sirah. But David did not know it. Now when Abner had returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him privately, and there stabbed him in the stomach, so that he died for the blood of Asahel his brother.*

(2 Sam. 3:12,20–21,26–27)

Abner had decided to defect to David and would bring with him the other ten tribes of Israel. This matter was out of God so as to fulfill His will, that David could reign as He had destined. David made Abner a feast as a token of acceptance and forgiveness. He would not remember the enmity of the past as long as Abner recognized him as God's anointed one. After Abner left, Joab returned from a raid. When Joab learned about

this matter, he arrogantly rebuked David for what he did. After that, he secretly sent messengers after Abner, and brought him back by deception. Joab stabbed Abner in the stomach and made him die for the blood of Asahel his brother.

From here, we see that Joab was full of grudges and put his personal grudges before God's will. David had accepted Abner who was on the way to gather all Israel to David. It was God who brought Abner to help David establish his kingdom and fulfill God's highest will. Had Joab been mindful of God's will, he would not have done that. But he couldn't care less. To him, taking vengeance was more important than helping David to gain the kingdom. He completely discarded the thoughts and leading of David. His mentality was: I don't have to accept whomever the vessel of the era accepts. As long as I don't like him, I'll get rid of him. Brothers and sisters, we must renounce our own feelings and accept whoever the vessel of the era accepts and sends. Only then can we accomplish God's work.

From what Joab did, we can conclude that he was a very self-centered person. When David complied with him, he would do anything for David and fought courageously. But when David's arrangements and commands contradicted his interests, he would not care whether David was the anointed one of God, but disobeyed David's order openly before all Israel.

When David learned that Joab had killed Abner, he cursed him in his fury: "Let it rest on the head of Joab and on all his father's house; and let there never fail to be in the house of Joab one who has a discharge or is a leper, who leans on a staff or falls by the sword, or who lacks bread" (2 Sam. 3:29). "And the king sang a lament over Abner and said: 'Should Abner die as a fool dies? Your hands were not bound nor your feet put into fetters; as a man falls before wicked men, so you fell.' Then all the people wept over him again" (2 Sam. 3:33–34).

David always viewed matters from God's standpoint. He harbored no personal grudges against anyone. Although Abner had been Saul's commander and had often tried to hunt down David by Saul's order, David could put aside all this enmity. But Joab was completely the opposite. Although he was the commander of David, his thoughts and deeds often contradicted David's will. If he killed Abner before Abner defected to David, it would have been a great accomplishment. But he killed a person whom the vessel of the era had accepted, so he was deemed wicked in the sight of God. For this reason, David called him "wicked" and God fulfilled all the curses and judgment that David uttered upon him.

Joab had a reason to hate Abner. Anybody in his shoes would do the same. The point is: Will you renounce personal grudges for the will of God? Will you accept your enemy so as to comply with the leading of the vessel of the era? Emotionally, it would be extremely difficult, but this is the lesson of the cross that we have to learn. Contrarily, if someone who is good to you opposes the vessel of the era, will you sever your relation with him? For someone like Joab, we are certain that his answer would be no.

We often come across similar situations while serving the Lord, especially when we co-work with another person. If the vessel of the era sends someone to co-work with you and this person happens to have offended you in the past, will you be able to co-work with him? This is a very severe test not only to our submission to the vessel of the era's leading. We are required to not only change our bad attitude towards him, but also, more importantly, to forget the wounds he had inflicted on us. That means no prejudice or revenge, only self-denial.

If we don't put our old *self* to death, the spirit of Joab will fester within us and we will become horrible. Such spirit of Joab may say: "Well, since David has accepted you, there is nothing that I can do. But I will stab you in the back — I will say something to harm you, exposing your bad points."

This person you co-work with may truly have some shortcomings, but your hurting him this way is equivalent to Joab stabbing Abner to death. And you are not going against him, but the vessel of the era who sent him.

Joab had done many great things for David, sometimes even at the risk of his own life. But because he failed to submit to the vessel of the era, his entire lifetime ministration was not remembered by God. Instead, he was severely judged. Now I realize why the truth on *Apostleship* is so important. It concerns our ministration in heaven. God is looking for a group of people who are both faithful and submissive to Him so that they may reign with Him in heaven in the future. For this reason, He has to test their faith to see if they are eligible. God wants to test if they believe in the one whom He has sent. Can you submit to him completely if he is the one sent by God? If you cannot trust in the one sent by God, but claim that you will obey God in heaven, this won't make any sense before God.

After David learned about Joab having killed Abner, David said, "And I am weak today, though anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too harsh for me. The LORD shall repay the evildoer according to his wickedness" (2 Sam. 3:39). From here, we can see that David, the vessel of the era, was so gentle and humble before God. He said that he was weak, though anointed king. Actually he did not have to be weak. As a king he could do anything he wished. Nevertheless he lacked "boldness" in whatever thing he did. It seemed that he was not a great king. But it was not so, for David revered God. He looked to God in everything, and always let God work for him. He was truly a great king.

Joab and Abishai, these two brothers, were different. David said, "These men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too harsh for me. The LORD shall repay the evildoer according to his wickedness" (2 Sam. 3:39). To David, Joab was a strong and arrogant man. In certain aspects, he was very smart and good in strategy. This made him arrogant and look down on David. Therefore, he dared to overrule David's decision and acted harshly. He never had to

inquire of God or David.

He thought to himself: “All of you are afraid to offend David, the vessel of the era, but I’m not. Why must he spare a man like Abner? Abner is a dangerous man to have around; he should die. David, you lack confidence in yourself. Why are you so weak? God has anointed you king; why are you still worried? Must you need the support of Abner to be king?” Joab may have sounded logical, but it was out of his distrust in David. He himself had perceived something which David also mentioned: “Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel?” (2 Sam. 3:38). On one hand, Joab was taking revenge; on the other hand, he was afraid that Abner might take over his position as commander in the days to come.

Brothers and sisters, we must avoid being a strong man in front of the vessel of the era. A strong man before the vessel of the era is an evil man to God. So, the more humble, submissive and obedient you are before the vessel of the era, the better it is. This is a lesson that we must strive hard to learn.

In the course of serving God, I often have many ideas which I think are helpful to David. Sometimes I feel that the Lord’s servant or a leading co-worker is not efficient enough in taking care of certain matters. I often liked to be in the limelight, showing off my skills and doing things in my own way. All these are the spirit of Joab within me. Even if what we do is more efficient and better, it will be valueless before God if it is not endorsed by the vessel of the era. Whenever we see the Lord’s servant waiting on God and doing nothing, let’s wait patiently together with him. At this time, we don’t have to give any suggestions.

In 1976, after Ruth Cheung and her followers turned apostate, some brothers and sisters visited the renegades privately. They thought that the Lord’s servant was not showing sufficient love. They attempted to turn

these apostates around. Actually, those who were deceived had already turned back. As for the rest, the Lord's servant had told them what they needed to know but they showed no love for the Truth, but had chosen to betray the Truth. Some brothers and sisters insisted on visiting these apostates, thinking that they had more love than the Lord's servant. What happened in the end? Not only they did not accomplish anything, some of them were led astray by the apostasy and left the New Testament Church.

By God's mercy, we have gradually learned some lessons, and dealt with the spirit of Joab from us. In conclusion, those who are more gifted and talented must ask for more help from the Lord in ridding themselves of the spirit of Joab. Don't be a strong man in front of the vessel of the era, as if you are better and more advanced than him. All these must be dealt with severely. Ahimelech, the best character that we have ever discussed, was fighting shoulder to shoulder with David at the cost of his life. He truly understood the will of God when he served God.

Someone like Joab, a strong man in front of David, will forsake the Truth one day. But a person who is truly strong in the spirit always acts according to the leading of the vessel of the era. To David, Joab was a pain in the neck. He often denied or altered what David had arranged and gave him troubles. May the Lord rid us of the spirit of Joab.

When the co-workers are shepherding the various churches, it will be easy if the flock is obedient. But they will have a hard time if the flock always does the opposite of what they are told to do. Whenever I encounter such situations myself, I understand how hard it is to be the vessel of the era, who often suffers the travail for God's children. I also realize how much hardship I have brought upon him during my past ten years of serving God.

In spiritual matters, obedience is more important than skills. On Mount Zion, whenever brothers and sisters are to be allocated to the various

teams, every team leader will fight for the brothers and sisters of Oceania, because they are simple and obedient. They will do whatever you tell them to do without objections. Don't think that they don't know anything. They have a lot of experience from Mount Tabor. Moreover, they are not obedient only when they come to Mount Zion. From what I know, they have learned to be obedient since they were on Mount Tabor. They work hard until late in the evening and when they are tired, they still wear on a bright, beaming smile. They obey willingly, not grudgingly. How precious they are!

A contrasting example that I would like to give is the construction of the draining trench for the asphalt road. From the start, many experts and heroes had a lot of ideas. Moreover, they insisted on their own way. Many "Joabs" appeared. After helping in the construction for two days, I also had my own idea. As I recall all these, I feel that the Lord's servant is truly like David. Though he is anointed as Prophet of All Nations, he is weak and we are stronger than he is.

Thank the Lord, the people of Zion are a little better than Joab. They discussed with the Lord's servant out of love for Zion with a humble attitude. The Lord's servant also responded very gently and meekly: "I don't know anything about construction. I've never done this before. You do what you think is best." Frankly speaking, had any of us done such a big construction project before? But all of us spoke so assertively as if we were very experienced. The Lord's servant had been to many places, had heard and seen much, and was quite knowledgeable. But he said, "Honestly, I don't know anything. Let's do what you think is best." He was so supportive.

God remembered how His servant sought humbly before Him, so He bore his responsibility. Soon afterwards, He revealed the most feasible and least expensive method. Were it not for the leading of the Lord's servant, our drainage system would not have been completed nor would it

have reached the front gate even by now. I am not saying that we should just listen and not suggest at all. We can suggest but not insistently. We must put that attitude aside. We can't harbor the spirit of Joab in us before the vessel of the era. We must also pay attention to our words and attitude. Never act carelessly towards the anointed one of God.

*And Joab sent messengers to David, and said, "I have fought against Rabbah, and I have taken the city's water supply. Now therefore, gather the rest of the people together and encamp against the city and take it, lest I take the city and it be called after my name." So David gathered all the people together and went to Rabbah, fought against it, and took it. Then he took their king's crown from his head. Its weight was a talent of gold, with precious stones. And it was set on David's head. Also he brought out the spoil of the city in great abundance.*

(2 Sam. 12:27–30)

In chapter eight, David officially set Joab over the army. When David promoted him, he was so happy that he fought for David, and even gave David his victory and crown which he obtained without much effort. However, these conditional sacrifices could not withstand the test of time and became worthless. Our faithfulness and obedience to the vessel of the era must be pure and without conditions. We should obey and be faithful to him simply because he is the anointed one of God, not because he favors or praises us. Therefore, obeying the vessel of the era is living before God, not man.

*So Joab the son of Zeruiah perceived that the king's heart was concerned about Absalom... And the king said to Joab, "All right, I have granted this thing. Go therefore, bring back the young man Absalom."*

(2 Sam. 14:1,21)

Absalom fled and lived in exile for three years after killing his half-brother in revenge for his sister. Then Joab knew that David missed his son Absalom so he thought of a way to bring Absalom back to comfort

David. Joab seemed to have done something right at last. Had he really touched the heart of David and done his best to help? Had he really improved? No, not at all. He did it because it was easy and moreover, he could please David. Soon afterwards, when Absalom offended him, he killed Absalom with his own hands even though David had commanded him before the whole army of Israel to be gentle with Absalom for his sake. (See 2 Samuel 18:5.)

Joab brought Absalom back to Jerusalem but David refused to see him. After two years, Absalom sent for Joab, but Joab would not bring him to David because he knew that David did not want to see him. Absalom sent for him again, but Joab still refused to help. Absalom was furious and said to his servants, "See, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley there. Go and set it on fire." It was only then that Joab conceded and talked to David so that he could see David.

However, later, Absalom plotted to revolt against his father David. He succeeded and David had to flee. At one point, the two armies engaged in a fierce fight. Absalom was riding on a mule, which brought him under the thick branches of a great oak tree and his head caught fast in the oak tree. He was left hanging in the air, while the mule that was under him went on.

Absalom was very handsome, and had exceptionally nice, thick hair. Unexpectedly, his hair became the cause of his death. We must immediately get rid of all the carnal beauty and pride for they are deadly.

A soldier who saw Absalom caught in the branches dared not kill him because David had ordered them to be gentle with Absalom. Joab asked that man why he didn't kill Absalom on the spot. Even a soldier knew not to disobey the king's will. But Joab was worse than the soldiers he was commanding. He said, "I will not waste time like this with you." And he took three spears and thrust them into the heart of Absalom while he was still alive. Why must Joab put Absalom to death? Outwardly it seemed he

was fighting for David by killing his rebel Absalom. He seemed very righteous. In fact, he was taking a personal revenge in the name of public interests. He hated Absalom because he set fire to his field. His mentality was “whoever provokes me must die.” What a dangerous man he was! He couldn’t be bothered if someone offended David. But if someone offended him, he would not spare the offender, even if you were David’s beloved son Absalom.

Many people thought Absalom deserved to die. How could a son be so wicked as to revolt against his own father, who was also the anointed one of God? However, since David wanted men to deal gently with Absalom, it must have been God’s intention. So Joab had to deal gently with Absalom no matter how bad he thought he was and how much he deserved to die. But Joab defied the king’s command. He took this opportunity to kill Absalom, thinking that many would laud his righteous act. Conversely, the soldiers were wise enough not to lay their hands on the young man.

When David commanded his people to be gentle with Absalom, was he unjust or condoning his son? No! David was just. He was harsh with Absalom. Because Absalom did not repent, David refused to see him for as long as five years. The Lord’s maidservant Sis. Kong was righteous like David. When her daughter Ruth opposed her and ran away, she said to her daughter, “If you don’t repent, don’t come home!”

Why didn’t David want to see Absalom? Was it because he did not love him? No! David loved him very much. He missed him from the very first day he left and longed for him for five years. But David minded the righteousness of God. As long as Absalom refused to repent, he would not see him. A self-centered person such as Joab was full of personal grudges. Since he lived in darkness, how could he help anyone who was in darkness? All he could do was to arrange for the father and the son to see each other. He could not bring light to Absalom or lead him to repentance. Absalom did not truly come back to David in the spirit. A person who

does not respect and obey the vessel of the era will not bring people to the vessel of the era.

David was deeply grieved for Absalom. While David was still mourning for his son, Joab came in to ask David to stop crying. Otherwise, the whole house of Israel would leave him! We've fought and won the battle to save your life, and now you're weeping over the death of your enemy — your rebellious son? (See 2 Samuel 19:1–8.)

Joab's words seemed reasonable. David complied and stopped crying immediately. He was so gentle and meek in the spirit. If I were David, I could have pierced a spear right through Joab and said, "You have killed my son and now you tell me not to cry? You deserve to die!" But David did not get angry. He did exactly what Joab told him to do. This was not easy for David. Just think: Joab who reprimanded David was the murderer. Yet David was able to grasp God's will from the murderer's accusation and obeyed despite grieving for his son. Did Joab reprimand David out of love? Absolutely not! He berated David disrespectfully as if David was his subordinate. Moreover, he twisted the truth and slandered David.

This is how he slandered David: Then Joab came into the house to the king, and said, "Today you have disgraced all your servants who today have saved your life, the lives of your sons and daughters, the lives of your wives and the lives of your concubines, in that you love your enemies and hate your friends. For you have declared today that you regard neither princes nor servants; for today I perceive that if Absalom had lived and all of us had died today, then it would have pleased you well" (2 Sam. 19:5–6).

Was David really like what Joab had said? Did he really love his enemies and hate his friends? Would he be pleased if Absalom had lived and all his princes and servants died? No. Joab's slander on David was vicious. He knew very well that David would not be pleased if they were dead and

Absalom lived. He said that just to vent his anger on David.

Brothers and sisters, when the leading of the Lord's servant contradicts our interest, we might also speak like Joab. The rebellious spirit of Joab was vehement. *David, I will not comply with your command to deal gently with your son Absalom. He has offended me and I'm going to kill him for sure.* Joab said boastfully, "We have this day saved your life, the lives of your sons and your daughters, and the lives of your wives and your concubines from the hand of Absalom. But now you are grieving for him! You have today disgraced all your servants."

Joab did not feel guilty for killing David's son. Instead, he wanted David to agree with him. He had no sympathy for David at all. David was grieved because his dead son could not be brought to life again. It is written that the king was shaken and he went up to the room over the gateway, and wept. And as he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you — O Absalom my son, my son!" (2 Sam. 18:33, NIV).

David never pampered Absalom. At that moment, David was probably wondering to himself: *Have I been too harsh as a father? Why didn't I want to see him for the past five years? If only I had gone to see him and turn him around, perhaps what had happened today would have been avoided. But now he is dead.*

Joab distorted the facts to upset David. He even commanded him, saying, "Now therefore arise, go out and speak comfort to your servants. For I swear by the LORD, if you do not go out, not one will stay with you this night. And that will be worse for you than all the evil that has befallen you from your youth until now" (2 Sam. 19:7). What he meant to say was: *David, you should speak comfort to me because Absalom your son set fire to my field. Today I finally got even with him. Now if you don't do as I say, I can assure you no one will stay with you any longer, and that includes me, Joab. Moreover, I will turn the whole house of Israel against you. Don't forget I'm the commander; the army listens to*

*me!* How arrogant he was to breathe such a threat against the anointed one of God! Woe betide him! When such a person obeys David, don't think that this is a good sign. He is actually doing it for his own benefit. All his seemingly good deeds had proven to be selfish acts.

*And say to Amasa, "Are you not my bone and my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if you are not commander of the army before me continually in place of Joab."*

(2 Sam. 19:13)

*When they were at the large stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa came before them. Now Joab was dressed in battle armor; on it was a belt with a sword fastened in its sheath at his hips; and as he was going forward, it fell out. Then Joab said to Amasa, "Are you in health, my brother?" And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not notice the sword that was in Joab's hand. And he struck him with it in the stomach, and his entrails poured out on the ground; and he did not strike him again. Thus he died. Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri."*

(2 Sam. 20:8–10)

David appointed Amasa to be the commander of his army in place of Joab. Infuriated, Joab killed his cousin Amasa the new commander. He did not send someone to kill him but did it himself in the presence of the army. The way he murdered his cousin was wicked and cruel. He totally disregarded the king who appointed the new commander.

Joab's natural self was so horrifying. He tried to imply that: "You want to get rid of me and appoint my cousin in my place. I'll kill him and what can you do to me? Who says that the vessel of the era is the high-power line that no one can touch? I can touch this man. If David listens to me and honors me, I will lay down my life for him. If he chooses to resist me and stands in my way, I will oppose him to the end." Joab's attitude showed that he had no enlightened knowledge of the vessel of the era. He also

lived in his carnality and refused to learn the lessons of life. Hence, the longer he served David, the more defiant he became.

*Meanwhile one of Joab's men stood near Amasa, and said, "Whoever favors Joab and whoever is for David — follow Joab!"*

(2 Sam. 20:11)

Gradually, Joab's men also lost respect for David. Like commander, like soldiers indeed. Today's English Version has a clearer description: One of Joab's men stood by Amasa's body and called out, "Everyone who is for Joab and David follow Joab!" This young soldier put Joab's name ahead of David's. It's evident that Joab had been bringing the army to honor himself, giving them the impression that he was above David.

*So the king said to Joab the commander of the army who was with him, "Now go throughout all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and count the people, that I may know the number of the people." And Joab said to the king, "Now may the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times more than there are, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king desire this thing?"*

(2 Sam. 24:2–3)

It was not right for David to count the people and so Joab advised him not to do so by the words of God. Judging from this matter alone, Joab was very spiritual. He seemed to be able to prevent David from making a mistake. Since he had no spiritual recognition of the vessel of the era nor obeyed him, even his good advice to David was not remembered by God. And he was still a wicked man to God. This is a solemn matter.

A person who is on a foundation of error (a person not built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets) may have said or done the right thing, but it is still valueless. A monkey dressed in a business suit is still a monkey, not a human. So, we must not appraise our value before God by

how many good deeds we have done. The Bible says, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom He has sent.” If you do not believe in the one sent by God, no matter how hard-working you are or how good your work is, God will not remember your work. Even if you have fully dedicated your life to Him, God will not take it into account because in His eyes, you are not doing His work.

Ahimelech was truly doing God’s work. When David went to him for help, he could have blamed David and said, “David, you’re not being wise! You know Saul’s man is around and yet you ask me for bread and a sword? You’re putting my life at stake by making such requests!” David could have been careless but Ahimelech knew he was not in a position to question him. He ignored all these, and immediately gave David whatever he asked for.

God does not appraise us by our work but by how much we trust and obey the one whom He has sent. The whole house of Ahimelech and the whole city of Nob were killed on account of Ahimelech but they took their fate without any murmurs. Abiathar, one of the sons of Ahimelech who escaped, fled to David. From this, one can tell how Ahimelech had taught his children to recognize, respect, and obey the LORD’s anointed one until the end. On meeting David, Abiathar did not blame David saying, “Look, it’s all your fault. You asked my father for bread and a sword and now my whole family was killed.” If it were Joab, he could have reviled, “How could you, being the LORD’s anointed one could be so careless and ignorant and foolish? You only cared for yourself. You only wanted to eat when you were hungry. Couldn’t you wait? You simply didn’t care about us...”

David said to Abiathar, “I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul.” If Joab were Abiathar, he would have answered in fury: “Since you knew that Doeg would tell Saul, why were you still so careless?” Compared to Ahimelech, we have much to

learn in this aspect. We often count our own accomplishments, thinking that we *have done this and that matter pretty well*. But God doesn't see things the way we do. If so, Joab could also claim that he had done many good things. However, they were all not remembered by God. God wants us to have the revelation and recognition towards His anointed one and to be submissive to him until the end. He wants us to be like Ahimelech, who totally denied himself and followed David until death. That is why the Lord's servant says that obeying the leading of the vessel of the era is the greatest self-denial. Joab could not deny himself, and this proved that he had no profound recognition of David's ministry. Without such knowledge, of course he was also disobedient.

Joab was a very dangerous person. I wonder why David didn't get rid of this disastrous person earlier. Two days ago, the Lord's servant said that as a shepherd, we must have in our hands a stick as well as a rod. It means that we must be righteous as well as merciful and gracious. Joab had sinned against David many times. If David were to pursue his sins, Joab should have been put to death a long time ago. When Joab openly defied the command of David by killing his son, and rebuked him so arrogantly after the murder, David had all the right and authority to kill him. But he didn't. David was a vessel that did not do things as he wished and took matters into his own hands. He let God be the judge.

When David's time to die drew near, he charged Solomon his son, saying, "Moreover you know also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the two commanders of the armies of Israel, to Abner the son of Ner and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed. And he shed the blood of war in peacetime, and put the blood of war on his belt that was around his waist, and on his sandals that were on his feet. Therefore do according to your wisdom, and do not let his gray hair go down to the grave in peace" (1 Kings 2:5–6).

This was David's judgment for Joab. Prior to this, Joab helped Adonijah

to be king. He had greatly offended David's ministry and his administration. When David was still in power, Joab appointed Adonijah king according to his own taste without David's consent. From this, we see how arrogant and disobedient he was. He had no respect for David at all. Thinking that Adonijah was a more suitable candidate to be David's successor, Joab supported him. Joab proclaimed him king when David was still on the throne. In today's terminology, he attempted to stage a coup. Even so, David did not put him to death. He let God be the judge. Later, Adonijah did something really wicked and Solomon executed him. When Joab heard the news of Adonijah's death, he fled to the altar and Solomon sent people to kill him there. The tragic consequence of Joab is a dire warning to all of us. Joab was struck dead under a curse. God would not spare a person who had opposed David. If Joab had taken warnings and learned his lessons right from the start, he would not have made such terrible mistakes later on.

May the Lord root out the spirit of Joab from us. If we discover that we have not been obeying the vessel of the era, we must deal with this spirit immediately before it worsens. Otherwise, this spirit of disobedience will grow in us and the darkness in us will become greater and greater. We will find it harder to learn lessons and might even end up being a rebel.

Even though Joab had little to no enlightenment towards the Lord's anointed one, he should have noticed that David's feeling was different from his. He should have inquired of the LORD saying, "O God, when I killed Abner, why was I happy but David was not? Why he was so sad that he mourned for Abner?" When your feelings and actions contradict that of the Lord's anointed one, who should prostrate? The answer is definite, you should. Moreover, you should prostrate quickly. You cannot excuse yourself by saying that you fully agree with David and have nothing against his ministry, but that you just can't agree with the one sent by David. Such excuses cannot stand. As long as we are willing to prostrate, learn and seek before God, He is full of mercy and grace. He will make us recognize

the ministry of His anointed one. As soon as we are enlightened, we will treasure this minister for life. It is a great blessing to acknowledge this minister.

## **Joab (2)**

### *Disrespectful to God's Anointing*

*(August 5, 1990 — Message of the Lord's servant Bro. Victor Pi  
during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

All his life, Joab had been disrespectful and deceitful to the king. Even the death penalty could not pay off the sins that Joab had committed. Nevertheless, David put up with him, and even kept him as the commander of his army. David was a king who feared God and had great tolerance. He knew how to deal with both friends and foes. To David, Joab was both a friend and an enemy. Joab is a mirror of us, the co-workers of the vessel of the era today. His consequence serves as a great warning to us.

Within us, there is more or less some spirit of Joab. In the past years of co-working with the Lord's servant, we had also committed the same sins as that of Joab. Today, I'm discussing about Joab under the precious blood of the Lord. May God cast out the spirit of Joab from us, and forgive us of our sins, which are similar to that of Joab. Though the Lord's servant is like David and has been tolerating us again and again, we cannot keep going on Joab's way, and plunge into his tragic consequence.

Joab had many outstanding military exploits. He once helped take the stronghold of Zion and expelled all foreign troops. He also made several battle achievements for David. However, we might as well say that Joab did all these to secure his own fame and gain. Actually he brought David a lot of headache, hardships, threats, oppressions and pains. He killed those whom David loved and did what David didn't want him to do. It is not hard to understand why he had such a tragic end.

Saul took his own life after he was badly wounded in a losing battle against the Philistines. After Saul died, Abner, commander of Saul's army

made Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, king over Israel. There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. David grew stronger and stronger while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker. Abner was very angry and was determined to defect to David after Ishbosheth reprimanded him for sleeping with Saul's concubine. He went to see David in Hebron, made a covenant with him, and promised to make David king over all Israel. Then Abner left to assemble all Israel because David had sent him away in peace. (See 1 Samuel 31 and 2 Samuel 2 to 3.)

The reunion of the house of Israel and the house of Judah was about to begin, but Joab destroyed it. It was God's plan and promise to make David king over the entire Israel. No one should disobey or ruin this plan of God. If someone knows the vision of the era but fails to hold fast to it, he is opposing God's will. A person who refuses to learn his life lessons will always be self-centered. For the sake of his own benefits, he will readily ruin the whole general situation, hinder God's will from being done, and cause the vessel of the era to fall into a difficult position.

Joab was such a controversial person. When Joab came back from a raid, he was furious to learn that Abner had come to see the king and that the king had sent him away in peace. Taking advantage of his victory on the battlefield, Joab questioned and admonished the king, saying, "What have you done? Look, Abner came to you; why is it that you sent him away, and he has already gone? Surely you realize that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you, to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing" (2 Sam. 3:24–25).

Joab was a headstrong and ruthless man. He reprimanded the anointed one of God as if he was talking to a subordinate. Before David had a chance to explain, he came out from David's presence and sent messengers to bring Abner back without David's knowledge. When Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him privately, and there he stabbed him in the stomach, and he died. (See 2

Samuel 3:26–27.)

To Joab, this was killing two birds with one stone. He had avenged the blood of his brother Asahel on Abner, and he had also stopped Abner from becoming the future commander of David's house. But by killing Abner, Joab brought David immense pain and troubles. He had also thwarted the plan of the unification of the house of Israel. Worse still, he had obscured the will of God and caused irreparable damage to the kingdom of David. Joab was arrogant and domineering; headstrong and opinionated; brutal and murderous; disrespectful and hostile. All these terms are insufficient to describe his crimes. He should have been executed instantly for being disrespectful to the king and for killing the officials of the kingdom.

Many people consider it a miscalculation on David's part for not punishing Joab promptly, and this also resulted in endless trouble. But what did David have to say to this? He said, "Don't you realize that this day a great leader in Israel has died? Even though I am the king chosen by God, I feel weak today. These sons of Zeruiah are too violent for me. May the LORD punish these criminals as they deserve!" (2 Sam. 3:38–39, TEV).

Other than mourning for Abner, giving him a grand funeral, and cursing Joab, David seemed to be totally helpless. Wasn't David a mighty warrior who killed Goliath, the Philistine giant? Didn't he have many mighty men around him? It was easy for him to put Joab to death, but he didn't want to do it. From here, we can see that David feared God. He would rather leave Joab to the wrath of God than to get rid of him with his own hands. David was the opposite of Joab, who was arrogant, godless, and ruthless. David had the power to kill Joab if he chose to, but he had a lot of considerations. Joab had trained a strong and ferocious army that would only listen to Joab, not David.

Joab had successfully established his own *leading center* other than David's

leadership. He was proud of these followers and supporters for they had become his bargaining chip when he wanted to deal with the vessel of the era. Aaron, Moses' brother, had also committed the same sin. He made golden calves for Israel and began leading the people. Apostate Chen who was once in our midst also set up a new *leading center* apart from the leading of the chief apostle. He beguiled a group of young people into following him and with these people he could stand up to Ruth Cheung, the spiritual leader at that time. Unfortunately, Ruth Cheung gave in to Chen's threats, forsook the Truth, deserted the vision and turned apostate together with him. In the end, both were forsaken by God.

What does setting up another "leading center" mean? Whoever is bringing the sheep to himself instead of the latter-day Elijah is in the preliminary stage of setting up a separate leading center. If a group of brothers and sisters, including co-workers, give him special support, and even listen to him more than the latter-day Elijah, he would have succeeded in establishing another leading center. If someone's leading is different from that of Mount Zion, or if someone speaks differently from the Prophet of All Nations, the spirit of Joab has started to work in him. If he does not slam on the brakes immediately but continue to run the red light, he will run into a fatal accident. Even if the Lord's servant does not say anything to stop him, God Himself will interfere because He will not tolerate another leadership other than the one He has sent.

Brothers and sisters, beware of the apostasy. Some people claim that they are sent by the Prophet of All Nations, but they do things contrary to the prophet's leading. Many ignorant brothers and sisters go after them like the young man who followed Joab. This young man of Joab stood near Amasa, and said, "Whoever favors Joab and whoever is for David — follow Joab!" (2 Sam. 20:11).

Joab had killed Amasa, a second commander appointed by David. This young man was so foolish to consider that favoring Joab and David were

the same; and that following Joab was following David. What kind of logic was that? If these people were to continue following Joab in this way, one day all the right hand men of David would be assassinated. When they followed Joab to the peak, they would stain their swords with David's blood. Why did that young man make such a foolish claim? Joab might have taught his subordinates, saying: "If you follow me, you are following David; and if you favor me, you are favoring David."

Under the banner of David, Joab did evil to hurt David. He was establishing another leading center. If Joab established another leadership under his own name, people would not easily fall victim to his trick. But he was using David's name, so it was difficult for some people to differentiate. If a co-worker shares the same mind and burden with the Lord's servant, he doesn't have to tell others that he is sent by Bro. Hong and listening to him is listening to Bro. Hong, the Prophet of All Nations. Brothers and sisters will naturally know that he is sent by Bro. Hong. If he fails to co-work with the Lord's servant in one mind, it is meaningless for him to claim that Bro. Hong has sent him. He can only deceive some ignorant ones. People with bright insight will see the true facts. Let us examine ourselves and start anew for our God is gracious and merciful.

"Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the army" (2 Sam. 8:16). Finally Joab's dream came true. I think Joab would congratulate himself saying, "Luckily I killed Abner at the gateway of Hebron, or else how could it be my turn to be commander now?" David appointed Joab as commander for security's sake. He was compelled to use Joab because he had military power. If you appoint him, he will give you "peace." If not, you won't have peace even when you eat, sit, lie in bed, or walk in the street. Actually, you also don't have peace after you have appointed him. It is like sleeping next to a tiger. You never know when it's going to wake up and chew you up.

The Ammonites joined forces with the Syrians, the men of Maacah,

and the men of Ish-Tob. They arrayed themselves at the entrance of the city gate and in the open country. David sent Joab and the whole army to fight against them. The Syrians fled before Joab and the Ammonites fled before Abishai. So Joab returned from the people of Ammon and went to Jerusalem. (See 2 Samuel 10:6–14.) As described in verse 14, Joab ended the battle casually. He left from fighting the Ammonites and returned to Jerusalem! He did not continue to pursue and annihilate the retreating enemies but let them go easily.

Outwardly, Joab complied to David's order, but in reality, he just ignored it. As a matter of fact, he was preserving the enemies. He knew that as long as the enemies still existed, his position as commander would be secure. True enough, the Syrians soon gathered themselves together again with Shobach as their commander. This time, when David learned about it, he led the army of Israel himself, instead of sending Joab out. Once again the Syrians fled before Israel, but unlike Joab who left from fighting before annihilating the enemies, David pursued and slew seven hundred charioteers and forty thousand horsemen of the Syrians. He also struck Shobach the commander of their army, who died on the spot. From then on, all the kings who were under Hadadezer made peace with David and served him. (See 2 Samuel 10:13–19.)

If Joab had exterminated the enemies the first time, David would not have to risk his own life in leading the troops to battle the second time. But Joab did not feel guilty about this. He was probably watching the show and thinking: If David lost to the Syrians or got killed during the battle, then I would be the first in line to succeed David as king of Israel. Who could be more qualified than I? The *self* of man can be so horrifying!

Due to some momentary weakness, David did something displeasing to the LORD — he slept with the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and killed Uriah by the hand of Joab. (See 2 Samuel 11:1–25.) Joab was equally responsible for this grave sin. When Joab received the letter from David wanting

him to put Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fight so that Uriah might be struck down and die, he did it accordingly. He was the accomplice who helped the king do evil. A good official should advise a king to stop doing evil. But instead, Joab carried out David's evil plan and allowed Uriah to be killed. As a result, David's reputation was tarnished and woes came upon his descendants.

Uriah was not only a mighty man of David, but also a righteous man. After David slept with Uriah's wife Bathsheba, she conceived. David recalled Uriah from the front line, hoping that Uriah would go home and sleep with his wife so that his affair with Bathsheba would be covered up. Unexpectedly, Uriah slept at the door of the king's house, refusing to go home. When David asked him why, Uriah said, "The ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in tents, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields. Shall I then go to my house to eat and drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing" (2 Sam. 11:11).

Uriah was such a loyal mighty man. There were not many like him. Joab knew that too, but he chose to assist the king in doing evil, and so Uriah died. Joab did not care for the good of David. Instead, he would readily do anything that was harmful to David. After knowing David's weaknesses and sins, Joab could hold them against David. From then on, Joab could do anything he wanted because he could blackmail David at any time. That was how he co-worked with the Lord's anointed. How could God not requite him for his wickedness?

David had suffered great losses for having an affair with Bathsheba and murdering Uriah. God's judgment came to him through the prophet Nathan, saying, "Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never

depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun'" (2 Sam. 12:9–12). All these words were fulfilled upon the house of David. First, Amnon, David's son, defiled Tamar, his half-sister, and rejected her. Then Absalom avenged his sister and killed Amnon. Afterwards he fled to Geshur and lived there for three years.

David missed Absalom very much. Joab was a very intelligent man. He could read the mind of the king and so sent a woman to talk David into allowing Absalom to come home. As anticipated, the king sent Joab to Geshur and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. David let Absalom come back but he did not want to see him, for Absalom remained impenitent. (See 2 Samuel 13 and 14.) A carnally-minded person like Joab could only bring back Absalom, but not turn his heart around. Joab could not guide him into learning life lessons so that he might repent thoroughly. Instead, he had placed a time bomb in the house of David, which in due time almost destroyed the kingdom of David, and the life of the anointed one.

Later on, Absalom prepared his own horses and chariots, and stole the hearts of the men of Israel. The conspiracy grew strong and the people with Absalom kept increasing, turning it into an open revolt. (See 2 Samuel 15:2–6.) Joab knew what was going on and he had the power to stop it, but he did not do anything about it. He did not report to David the real situation. He let Absalom continue on with his plot until the situation got out of hand, causing David to flee hastily. The kingdom of David was almost toppled, and the lamp of Israel almost quenched.

Absalom and his men pursued David across the Jordan. Before the two armies confronted each other, David commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai

saying, “ ‘Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.’ And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains orders concerning Absalom” (2 Sam. 18:5). If Joab truly respected the anointing of God, he would have minded the king’s order, telling all his men not to harm the king’s son Absalom. By doing so, he might have made up a little for the disaster he had caused by bringing Absalom back. Unfortunately, Joab was in total darkness and despised the Lord’s anointing. He disobeyed the king’s order and killed Absalom himself. (See 2 Samuel 18:14–16.) This person had disrespected the king to the extreme. First, he killed Abner, and then he killed the king’s beloved son Absalom. Since he disliked Absalom, why did he bring him back in the first place? He knew that the king missed his beloved son but now he killed the son. This was outrageous!

When the king learned that Absalom was dead, he was extremely grievous. The Scriptures say, “Then the king was deeply moved, and he went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept. And as he went, he said thus: ‘O my son Absalom — my son, my son Absalom — if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!’” (2 Sam. 18:33).

Seeing the old king grieving so deeply for his dead son, even a heart of stone would be moved. That’s why the victory of Israel that day was turned into mourning for all the people. But Joab was a heartless man. While the king was grieving so deeply, he came in to reprimand, condemn and threaten the king. It was written, “Then Joab came into the house to the king, and said, ‘Today you have disgraced all your servants who today have saved your life, the lives of your sons and daughters, the lives of your wives and the lives of your concubines, in that you love your enemies and hate your friends. For you have declared today that you regard neither princes nor servants; for today I perceive that if Absalom had lived and all of us had died today, then it would have pleased you well. Now therefore, arise, go out and speak comfort to your servants. For I swear by the LORD, if you do not go out, not one will stay with you this

night. And that will be worse for you than all the evil that has befallen you from your youth until now’ “ (2 Sam. 19:5–7).

A person who lives in his old self and in darkness is so horrifying. If it was someone else other than David, he might have said to Joab, “You wicked thing! You have killed Abner, and now you have opposed my command and killed my son. You brought my son back but you also killed him. I have yet to pursue you for this sin, and how dare you come here to reprimand and threaten me while I am still grieving for my son! I’ve had enough of you! If I don’t end your life today, may the LORD deal with me severely!” But David did not respond in this way. Instead, he listened to Joab. “Then the king arose and sat in the gate. And they told all the people, saying, ‘There is the king, sitting in the gate.’ So all the people came before the king” (2 Sam. 19:8).

There was hardly a person like King David who revered God, lived in the light, and would not avenge himself. He was a man after the LORD’s heart. As for Joab, he saw the vision but disobeyed it. He knew the anointed one of God but disrespected him. For this reason, God sent him a strong delusion, that he might believe what was false. While David was still on the throne, Joab joined Adonijah and made him king of Israel. Though he didn’t follow Absalom, he followed Adonijah and rebelled against King David. Therefore, he was doomed for destruction.

When David’s end was near, he charged Solomon his son, saying, “You know also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the two commanders of the armies of Israel, to Abner the son of Ner and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed. And he shed the blood of war in peacetime, and put the blood of war on his belt that was around his waist, and on his sandals that were on his feet. Therefore do according to your wisdom, and do not let his gray hair go down to the grave in peace” (1 Kings 2:5–6). Joab fought with David all his life. He was an ever-victorious commander; he won every battle he fought. It was truly tragic for him

to face such an ending.

*Then news came to Joab, for Joab had defected to Adonijah, though he had not defected to Absalom. So Joab fled to the tabernacle of the Lord, and took hold of the horns of the altar. And King Solomon was told, "Joab has fled to the tabernacle of the LORD; there he is, by the altar." Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, "Go, strike him down." So Benaiah went to the tabernacle of the LORD, and said to him, "Thus says the king, 'Come out!' " And he said, "No, but I will die here." And Benaiah brought back word to the king, saying, "Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me." Then the king said to him, "Do as he has said, and strike him down and bury him, that you may take away from me and from the house of my father the innocent blood which Joab shed. So the LORD will return his blood on his head, because he struck down two men more righteous and better than he, and killed them with the sword — Abner the son of Ner, the commander of the army of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, the commander of the army of Judah — though my father David did not know it. Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab and upon the head of his descendants forever. But upon David and his descendants, upon his house and his throne, there shall be peace forever from the LORD."*

(1 Kings 2:28–33)

We call this blood for blood. Joab brought woe not only upon himself but also to his descendants. When he died, he was still not quite aware of why death befell him. He died because he disrespected God's anointed one — He controlled, threatened, despised, and even opposed God's anointed one. If a person's spirit is not right, all his faithfulness, diligence, and other merits will be in vain. May the Lord remove the spirit of Joab from our hearts.

Our discussion on Joab will be of no value if we just analyze his char-

acter. We must take him as a mirror and examine ourselves. When we co-work with the vessel of the era, do we respect God's anointing? Let the Lord shine upon us and make us see if we have the spirit of Joab in us, and if we have made the same mistakes that Joab made. If we have, let's repent before God while we still have time. May the Lord deliver us from the spirit and wickedness of Joab, so that our labor before Him will be remembered, and not cursed.

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

(1 John 1:9)

## Joab (3)

*(August 10, 1990 — Message of the Lord's servant Bro. Elijah Hong  
during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

Joab had the vision, and also recognized David. Otherwise, he would not have come to follow David and be the first to attack the stronghold of Zion. While he was following David, he did many things and most of them were memorable. Outwardly, he was admirable and there was nothing wrong with him. However, his consequence was very tragic — he was killed at the altar. (See 1 Kings 2:28–31.)

When we read this portion of the Bible, we feel sorry for Joab, and we also feel solemn. He caught hold of the horns of the altar and yet he was not spared. It would have been better if he had grabbed hold of the altar earlier. It was too late after he had rebelled against the king.

*Then the king said to him, “Do as he has said, and strike him down and bury him, that you may take away from me and from the house of my father the innocent blood which Joab shed. So the LORD will return his blood on his head, because he struck down two men more righteous and better than he, and killed them with the sword—Abner the son of Ner, the commander of the army of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, the commander of the army of Judah — though my father David did not know it.”*

(1 Kings 2:31–32)

Being a commander himself, Joab killed two other commanders. His motive was obvious. Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab and upon the head of his descendants forever... The king put Benaiah the son of Jehoiada in his place over the army. (See 1 Kings 2:33,35.) He thought that by killing others he would safeguard his position, but what happened instead? He still lost it, and God appointed someone else to

replace him. God did this not only in the Old Testament time, but also in the present time. We have seen God remove someone and replace him with another. I feel that this is something solemn.

## **Disrespectful to God's Anointing**

Joab was a commander who braved deadly danger to follow David all his life and helped him gain the kingdom. But in the end, he was stricken to death next to the horns of the altar. He did not only bring woe to himself but also to his descendants. Anyone would feel awe-stricken and sorry for Joab. What caused his tragic ending? We must find out the answer and be warned.

The Scriptures say, "For Joab had defected to Adonijah, though he had not defected to Absalom" (1 Kings 2:28). Joab was the military leader when David's son Absalom was carrying out a coup against David. Whether a coup will succeed or not depends on which side the military leader supports. At this time, it was a big test for Joab. Thank God! He did not follow Absalom and barely passed this test. Joab appeared to be very bright.

By looking at Joab's entire life, we can see that he dared not revolt against David because he knew that David's ministry was still very prominent and could not be betrayed. Absalom did not stand on David's side by respecting David as God's anointed. Instead, he contemplated the pros and cons, and then decided to withhold his rebellion until David was old. The best time to rebel would be when David was about to die, and just before young Solomon succeeded David's throne. Joab thought that Solomon, the son of Bathsheba, was unpopular and so looked down on him. But it so happened that another beloved son of David, Adonijah, was unhappy with how things were. He declared himself king and started to take action. Joab was moved, unable to resist the temptation from Adonijah. After some negotiation, Joab decided to follow Adonijah. Joab's

disrespect toward the anointing of God, his arrogance, and his rebellious spirit — were all exposed.

So, the evaluation of a person's ministration before the Lord does not depend on his capabilities or achievements. Rather, it depends on how much respect he has for God's anointing and how pure his spirit is. We may have done our work right, but it is valueless to God if our spirits are not right. When the time comes, God will expose our condition before all eyes.

### *Arrogant, Proud and Rebellious*

Before David died, he charged Solomon, saying, "Moreover you know also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the two commanders of the armies of Israel, to Abner the son of Ner and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed. And he shed the blood of war in peacetime, and put the blood of war on his belt that was around his waist, and on his sandals that were on his feet. Therefore do according to your wisdom, and do not let his gray hair go down to the grave in peace" (1 Kings 2:5–6).

Brothers and sisters, as children of God in the house of Israel, our spirits have to be bright and sharp. Our ministration has to be in accordance with the will of God in order to achieve eternal value. Otherwise, we would be so foolish that even someone who has gone astray could still deceive us.

Outwardly, Joab had a close tie with David and had done much work for him in helping David possess the kingdom. But David said, "He is too violent for me." (See 2 Samuel 3:39, *TEV*.) This was because Joab did some terrible things that David didn't even know about.

Joab had a very terrifying thing in him: he disrespected the anointing of God. In other words, he respected himself more than God's anointed one.

When David had the same feeling as he did, he would comply. But when David did something that differed from his desire, or was in conflict with his interest, his hidden disrespectful spirit towards God's anointed one would be revealed.

When Joab heard that David had accepted Abner, he spoke rudely to David: "What have you done? Look, Abner came to you; why is it that you sent him away, and he has already gone? Surely you realize that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you, to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing" (2 Sam. 3:24–25). He admonished David like a father to his son: What are you doing? You know that he is here to deceive you. Why are you so foolish? This kind of arrogant spirit is terrifying! I wouldn't say that having this spirit means the person is hopeless. But one has to deal with it severely as soon as he discovers it.

Babylon cannot be healed, but you can be healed from your rebellion if you are willing to deal with your rebellious spirit and receive salvation. Joab died a tragic death because he never learned his lesson on this matter nor dealt with his disrespectful spirit towards God's anointing. He harbored such a spirit until he died. Brothers and sisters, if we have recognized the anointed one of God, but fail to deny ourselves by complying with the anointing in him, our consequences would be tragic. If the feeling of God's anointed one does not coincide with ours, how much will we respect the Lord's anointing? This is a solemn test to us.

### *Disregard God's Anointing*

When David wanted to count the number of the people of Israel, Joab seemed to have behaved well. He said, "Now may the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times more than there are, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king desire this thing?" (2 Sam. 24:3). To men, Joab's viewpoint seemed to be right but we must see how God looked at this matter. God was certainly not pleased

with David numbering the people. Because of this, David later regretted and repented of what he had done. In this aspect, Joab seemed to be more godly than David. Outwardly, Joab appeared to serve according to God's laws, but in reality, he lived in his old self, not in the presence of God. His first response towards David's decision was to disagree.

In the process of our ministration, we often encounter the same situation. Sometimes, when a leading co-worker makes a decision not conforming to the spiritual principles, those being led will be put to the test. However, God allows this to happen so as to reveal our real condition.

David acted foolishly on the spur of the moment but he regretted it and repented to the LORD: "I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O LORD, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly" (2 Sam. 24:10). David was gentle and meek in the spirit. He was more than willing to be shone by the Lord's light and was ever ready to prostrate before God. He admitted that what he did was foolish. But there was no such virtue in Joab. He was so self-righteous that he disregarded God's anointing. If someone allows this kind of spirit to flourish in him, he will turn and suffer the tragic end of Joab.

David could not stand the things that Joab did, and he kept it in his heart. How many people knew exactly what David thought? And how many truly knew Joab? Today, as children of God and as mighty men of the present-day David who testify together for God's kingdom, we must learn to recognize the spirit of Joab and guard against it.

When David and Joab have a different feeling or viewpoint, we must always stand on David's side. It is always right to stand on David's side, unless God has forsaken him. But we still need to pay close attention to this: When David's feelings differ from ours, this doesn't mean that we have to deny all our feelings. "Fine, from now on, I don't have my own feelings. Even if I have feelings, I wouldn't dare speak out. If I speak, I'll become Joab..." No, respecting God's anointing depends on our spirit,

not on whether we speak our mind. God knows your mind even if you don't speak it.

David knew that Joab disregarded him, and God knew it even better. Even though David didn't deal with him, the righteous God didn't let him go scot-free. So we must truly respect God's anointing and not just do it for show. If we have learned the formality without the reality, one day we will still end up being smitten by God. What God wants is the spirit, not the outward appearance. Hope that we will learn this lesson well.

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# Eleazar





# Eleazar (1)

*(August 11, 1990 — Discussion of Co-worker Bro. Hermon Lee during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

*And after him was Eleazar the son of Dodo, the Ahohite, one of the three mighty men with David when they defied the Philistines who were gathered there for battle, and the men of Israel had retreated. He arose and attacked the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand stuck to the sword. The LORD brought about a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to plunder.*

(2 Sam. 23:9–10)

*After him was Eleazar the son of Dodo, the Ahohite, who was one of the three mighty men. He was with David at Pasdammim. Now there the Philistines were gathered for battle, and there was a piece of ground full of barley. So the people fled from the Philistines. But they stationed themselves in the middle of that field, defended it, and killed the Philistines. So the LORD brought about a great victory.*

(1 Chron. 11:12–14)

Eleazar would lay down his life for God's will. To put it more practically, it meant that he would risk his life for God's anointed one. "When the Philistines were at war again with Israel, David and his servants with him went down and fought against the Philistines; and David grew faint" (2 Sam. 21:15).

According to David's personality, he would definitely stand in the midst of the barley field to defend it if no one else did. He would kill the Philistines himself. But due to his old age, he would easily tire. Eleazar knew this, so he stood up to save the field and protected David, the Lord's anointed one. He risked his own life to kill the enemies. Thank the Lord. Throughout the years, brothers and sisters of the New Testament Church have acquired the spirit of Eleazar. They have been protecting the minis-

try of the anointed one in every way.

In the days of wandering, when we returned to Zion, entering from the back of the mountain, the Kuomintang (KMT) lackeys attempted to assault the Lord's servant. Disregarding their own lives, brothers and sisters shielded the Lord's servant with their bodies. They'd rather take the beatings than to see him suffer. This is an example of the spirit of Eleazar.

When everyone else had fled, Eleazar stood still and fought alone in the field. He knew that this battle was crucial, as it concerned the destiny, food supply, and inheritance of God's people. He was able to do this mainly because of his connection with David. He had been fighting shoulder to shoulder with David — he was always on the side of the vessel of the era.

In 1976, when the high waves of apostasy almost swept away the New Testament Church, God wonderfully raised up a group of mighty men in Singapore and Malaysia, who courageously stood up to defend the Truth. Because of them, the churches in Singapore and Malaysia were preserved. In 1980, when the people of Zion were evicted from their home, the three families of Tan and Liu still faithfully kept watch over God's mountain. They prayed everyday and fully believed in the leading and feelings of the Lord's servant. All these are the manifestations of Eleazar's spirit.

When I was shepherding a certain church in the West, some ambitious people wanted to destroy the testimony of the church in exchange for their own personal gains. They were like the Philistines planning for an attack. Most of the naive brothers and sisters were deceived. They caused strife and dissensions in the church. They were unhappy with everything and would not obey the co-workers. There was no room for God's words in the church, which was in confusion.

Once, there was a weekday service when almost all the brothers and

sisters did not show up. We were very sad and examined ourselves before the Lord. Our God allowed this problem to drag on for awhile. We were determined to defend the testimony by the Lord's grace and would not let the Philistines succeed. Sis. Fidelia wrote to us and said, "Stand firm and do not be afraid." We were exhausted of all our human strength and ways. Thank God that He remembered our determination to save His inheritance while everyone else was retreating.

After a few months of trials, God resolved the problem for us. He revealed those who came with evil intentions and expelled them from among us. From then on, the brothers and sisters began to turn around. Their spirits were relieved and they found the correct way to serve God. They were no longer manipulated and deceived by others. We greatly thanked God and also felt happy for the brothers and sisters. Both the barley field and God's people had been preserved. God's people were no longer captives. From this experience, we learned a spiritual fact — when someone faithfully defends God's inheritance like Eleazar, God will not only protect him, He will also make His people enjoy a great victory and collect the loots.

As for us, those days were difficult and full of sufferings. But those were also the times when we had the closest tie with the Lord's servant. We told him everything, whether big or small, and we did things as he told us. At that time, the Lord's servant also gave us the most help, guiding and correcting us in all aspects. He made us feel secure while serving God. Like the Scriptures say, "And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left" (Isa. 30:20–21).

Through afflictions and trials, God helped us establish a closer tie with

the vessel of the era. This tie became our strength to kill the enemies. It also became our impetus in serving and our power in defending God's inheritance.

Eleazar never failed to answer the Lord's call. He was more than ready to pay a price to accomplish the Lord's trust. During the battle against the Philistines, many Israelites joined the war, but only three mighty men followed David to defy the Philistines. Eleazar was the only one of the three mighty men who rose up to kill the enemies, and remained faithful until the people of Israel won a great victory. As God's leading is advancing, our faith will also be tested from time to time. Are we willing to keep paying this high price until the work of God is done?

In 1985, we assumed the ministry against the KMT during the Queens Festival in New York. By God's grace and with the help of the mighty men from Houston and Los Angeles, we did not retreat before our enemies. After that battle, we kept seeking before God as to how we should go assuming our ministry. On one occasion while we were preaching the gospel, we saw some Iranian dissidents demonstrating against the tyrant Khomeini. They were exposing his atrocities to all peoples. It suddenly struck us that as members of the New Testament Church, shouldn't we tell the world that the tyrannical KMT was carrying out ruthless persecutions against the New Testament Church?

At the time, the Holy Spirit moved us to assume ministry in Chinatown to expose the KMT's atrocities. But then we realized that there were only two of us assuming the ministry, and the KMT had a great influential power in New York. Moreover, New York was a city with high crime rates. Besides, the KMT had just murdered Jiang Nan (a professor who went back to Taiwan from the US). If anything happened to us, we would be helpless like Jiang Nan. The more we considered all these, the more our faith failed us. In the end, we could not assume the ministry according to the motivation of the Holy Spirit. Soon afterwards, we were reassigned to

leave New York.

A few months later, God led Sis. Rebecca and Bro. Paul to New York to continue assuming the ministry of exposing the atrocities of the KMT. They even led the local churches to assume the ministry, fighting a victorious battle against the KMT. Of course, it was arranged by God to happen that way. If we had gone to assume the ministry, we might not be beaten or bring about a similar glorious victory as Sis. Rebecca and Bro. Paul had. What I am saying is that when the Holy Spirit urged us to go there to assume the ministry, we did not obey due to our natural weaknesses and limitations. Hence we fell short of the glory of God. We had regretted it and learned a lesson: the work of the Holy Spirit is always advancing and the demand of God continues to grow higher and higher. If we keep on quenching the motivation of the Holy Spirit, God will raise up other people to replace us and we will be thrown away as salt that has lost its flavor.

Eleazar fought alone in the battle. This makes us realize that we must be able to withstand the test of loneliness if we want to bring about God's kingdom. This is a lonely, narrow path of the cross. Only our Lord is walking closely with us. Our Lord was alone while being judged and crucified. Paul had been preaching the gospel faithfully all his life, but in the end everyone in Asia forsook him. He said, "At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. . . . But the Lord stood with me" (2 Tim. 4:16–17). Prophet Elijah had also been through loneliness. God reserved in Israel seven thousand whose knees had not bowed to Baal. But Elijah was the only one who testified for the LORD.

Eleazar means "helped by God." His success in slaughtering the Philistines proved that he was helped by God. Eleazar trusted in the LORD, for victory is of the LORD, and it doesn't depend on the number of people. During the battle against Edom we only looked upon God and trusted in Him. Our heavenly Abba Father helped us cast out the enemies just as

Abraham cast out Ishmael for Isaac. We receive the inheritance according to the promise. So, what is valuable is not the vessel itself, but the Holy Spirit that is in us. The recent messages of the Lord's servant reiterate that as long as we are willing to offer ourselves, heavenly power will come upon us, and God's work will be manifested through our simple faith.

When Eleazar was vehemently killing the enemies to defend God's inheritance, he knew that he was doing God's work, a task entrusted to him by God's anointed one. When I encountered difficulties in the church I was shepherding, I received a letter from the Lord's servant that read: "Don't fight alone. You must have fellowship with other co-workers by mail or by phone." Before that, I used to think that since the Lord's servant sent us here to shepherd the church, we should be the only one responsible for their problems. Other co-workers had heard about our problems, and some of them wrote to inquire of our situation. But I tried to keep the problems to ourselves, thinking: "You people are not entrusted to work here, why do you ask so many questions? Why do you care so much?" Moreover, I was also worried that after some co-workers came to know of our problems, they might spread the news around. I felt that it was not appropriate to air our dirty laundry in public.

Unknowingly, the church problems had become our own personal business so the letter of the Lord's servant came as a shock to us. We realized that the problems of any local church actually concern the whole house of God and the Lord's servant. All the churches need the concern and care of the Lord's servant. The work of God is entrusted to him. As followers of the vessel of the era, the most we can do is to share his burden. Through this incident, by God's grace, I have learned to understand that the work we are sent out to do are all the Lord's work. Be it shepherding, going out to battle, assuming the ministry, or even work related to enterprising, constructing, farming — these are all what God has entrusted to the vessel of the era, and they are not our own personal work. If a church has any accomplishment, the Lord's servant should be cred-

ited. Likewise, the battles, afflictions and hardships in a church are also his. All these matters should be brought to his concern so he could make the decisions.

Eleazar was not alone in the spirit because he was fighting shoulder to shoulder with David. He was following David. He seemed to be alone, but in fact, he was in the congregation. The recent message of the Lord's servant brought us great salvation. He said, "Many people struggle to make this field their own. Man's selfish nature is terrible. He can still have his own work while doing God's work. He doesn't know that this is God's field, not his (the worker's). If he tries to occupy it, God will not be pleased."

Had Eleazar treated the barley field as his own, he would not have to risk his life for it. After all, a land estate is an external thing, and he could acquire another one if he lost it. After the battle, Eleazar did not stop the people of Israel from returning to collect the spoils. He knew that everything was accomplished and given by God, so he could not personally claim any credit.

"But he stood his ground and fought the Philistines until his hand was so cramped that he could not let go of his sword" (2 Sam. 23:10, *TEV*). Eleazar did not care if anyone saw him fighting the Philistines alone. He only knew that he had to risk his life trying to accomplish his mission. The Lord's servant told us that God has given us authority and has found favor in us. So we shouldn't be worried about whether we are worthy or whether we have enough courage.

Eleazar was neither a commander nor a general. But he offered up himself completely for God's use, without his own thoughts and opinions. For example, Sis. Wang Jing-sui who didn't have any title in the church, always offered up herself unselfishly. She faithfully served and showed concern for the flock on her own initiative. She did not complain or fight for anything in the church. This is serving with all one's might. How pleas-

ing it is to God!

One time when we were assuming our ministry in Washington, D.C. to requite the Singaporean regime, the weather was extremely hot. Sis. Elsie wanted me to proclaim in English. I was afraid of not being able to proclaim fluently, so I made an excuse, "Sorry, I can't. My throat is dry. Besides, it's better for sisters to proclaim because their high-pitched voice will be clearer." Unexpectedly, she replied, "Our brothers and sisters are dying in the prisons!" She meant that you still have so many excuses at such a time like this? Her words shocked me and brought me to my senses. I had not served with all my might. A vessel like Eleazar had only one thought: *Fight against the enemies without holding back. Otherwise I will lose my life.*

Eleazar was always alert. He was more than ready to fight under any circumstances. The place where he killed the enemies was a field full of barley. This tells us that when the church is revived, we must not put our guard down. Instead, we should be even more alert, lest our enemies sneak in and plunder our field. Then all our efforts in planting, sowing and watering would be in vain. The enemies would not be interested if the field doesn't have any crop and is full of thorns and thistles. But since the New Testament Church, this field, is a fertile land, we must all the more be watchful.

Also, when the barley field was turned into a battleground, Eleazar was able to demonstrate the power of killing the enemies as usual. Thank the Lord that the brothers and sisters of the New Testament Church are well-trained in this aspect. They are able to battle anywhere including airports, police stations, church premises, the hallway of Chang Gung Hospital, the riverbed, embassies, the White House, the Taiwanese Presidential Office, court houses, college campuses and many other locations. All these places can be our battlefields. Moreover, we act swiftly and are well-equipped. Although many of these locations are not ideal for battling, according to man, we would kill the enemies whenever they appear.

The spirit of Eleazar was the spirit of guarding the testimony. He could attack and also defend. This is a sober spirit that is ever ready to stand in the gap. Some people are gifted in preaching and they convert many people to Christ. Unfortunately, due to their lack of keeping watch, their fruits fall before they ripen. So let's pray that the Lord will remind us to be careful with our words, actions and conduct, so as not to stumble anyone.

*For who will heed you in this matter? But as his part is who goes down to the battle, so shall his part be who stays by the supplies; they shall share alike. So it was, from that day forward; he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day.*

(1 Sam. 30:24–25)

Eleazar's ministry was more or less the same as that of Shammah, another mighty man of David. (See 2 Samuel 23:11–12.) Among the mighty men of David, Eleazar and Shammah were listed as second and third, and their reputation far exceeded that of the other thirty mighty men of David. (See 2 Samuel 23:19,23.) It shows how much their ministrations pleased both God and man. They were truly the mighty men who helped David to possess the kingdom. Their main job was to guard and defend.

A vessel that realizes God's kingdom must have the spirit of guarding the testimony. Moreover, those who stay and guard the supplies and those who go to battle will receive the same reward and share of the same glory. (See 1 Samuel 30:24.) May God make us vessels that can be entrusted and keep watch over the testimony of God.

The ministry of Eleazar was crucial and great. Because he stood still, the whole house of Israel was saved from being captured, and God's inheritance was preserved. Today, God needs vessels like Eleazar to deliver His people who through fear of death have become slaves. May the Lord be gracious to us so that we will all become the present-day Eleazar.

## **Eleazar (2)**

### *Eleazar Turned the Tides*

*(August 11, 1990 — Message of the Lord's servant Bro. Victor Pi  
during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

*After him was Eleazar the son of Dodo, the Ahohite, who was one of the three mighty men. He was with David at Pasdammim. Now there the Philistines were gathered for battle, and there was a piece of ground full of barley. So the people fled from the Philistines. But they stationed themselves in the middle of that field, defended it, and killed the Philistines. So the LORD brought about a great victory.*

(1 Chron. 11:12–14)

Eleazar was a mighty man of David. When the Israelites were fleeing from the Philistines, Eleazar turned their defeat to victory and from danger to safety. Eleazar's indomitable courage and his faithfulness to King David enabled him to turn the tides. On the battlefield, most soldiers will follow others to advance or retreat. They will charge or flee according to the existing situation. If the battle conditions are favorable, they will charge ahead like heroes. If not, they will flee for their lives. They move according to the wind, and look at the circumstances. After all, they may think: the barley field is not mine; I'm not the only one responsible if it is lost.

However, there was a person who continued to charge and fight vehemently against the enemies all by himself when everyone else had fled. He was not showing off or trying to be a hero, for it was a real battle that might have cost him his life. When the people of Israel were fleeing before the Philistines, Eleazar stood still, defended the field, and saved the people of Israel from being captured and killed.

In the battle of Pasdammim, we see a common fault of the people — afraid to fight for public interests. These cowards on the battlefield are

usually fierce combatants at home. The newspaper often criticizes the KMT for being “good at internal fights, but bad at external fights.” It means that the KMT is a domestic hero but an international coward. They act so arrogantly before the Taiwanese, but so cowardly before their enemies. Towards outsiders, they will either bow or flee.

Eleazar was different from all the Israelites. When the enemies were fierce and everyone was fleeing, he stood still alone. Standing firm was not enough to protect the barley field (God’s inheritance). He had to attack the enemies because *as the saying goes*, “offense is the best defense.” Eleazar was a unique vessel who attacked and killed the enemies. His surpassing wisdom and strength did not come naturally; they were from God. (Eleazar means “helped by God.”) God will not help a person who doesn’t seem to care and just wants to live in ease.

Eleazar’s courage was not innate; it came through his daily training. His courage was not the same as that of a desperado. It was developed through his recognition of the Lord’s anointed one and having this vision. Not many are faithful, much less courageous. While battling against the Edomites, the New Testament Church needs vessels like Eleazar.

Eleazar was not well-known among the people. When did the people of Israel come to know about him? It was when they were on the battlefield. The battle was ferocious; the enemies were attacking from all sides; and everyone was fleeing, but Eleazar positioned himself and fought alone. In his eyes, there were only God and God’s anointed one, but no enemies. He only knew that for the kingdom of David, he could not retreat like the others. He also knew that if he were to leave the barley field, he would definitely die. So he fought bravely for Israel and for God’s will with a sacrificial spirit.

People usually stand up and fight for themselves. They fight for jobs, wealth and fame. Brothers and sisters, it is not important to stand up for

ourselves, but we have to stand up for God's will, His kingdom, and for the vision of a man and a mountain. While being attacked from all sides, Eleazar not only stood fast to preserve the field, but also took vengeance on the enemies for all of Israel. He was just as what the Lord's servant has described, "The selfless lamb is the unrivaled lion." This saying is fully manifested in Eleazar. He had a selfless spirit, ready to be martyred for his nation. He was ready to shed his own blood if he failed to kill the enemy. Possessing this determination, the unrivaled majesty of a lion reaches the peak.

In the military, we used to say, "Those who are ready to die will not die; those who are afraid to die will surely die." As a warrior on the battlefield, one must be ready to die. If one is prepared to die, he will bravely fight to survive. When New Testament Church warriors go out to battle (assume the ministry), we often bring with us a toothbrush, toothpaste, and a towel to be used in the prison should we be arrested. Some even left instructions to their families about what should be done in case they never returned home again.

In China, a man named Jing Ke attempted to assassinate Shih Huang-ti, the first emperor of China, to deliver the people from the tyranny of the emperor. Many people came to send him off at the Yi River, and with his sword as his instrument, he sang: "As the wintry wind blows and the icy Yi River flows; when the brave soldier is sent, he is never to come back again!" True to his song, he never returned. He was killed at the royal palace.

Eleazar was another person who did not care about his own life, and thus God helped him to exterminate the enemies, turn the tides, and save Israel with a great victory. When Eleazar stood in the position of death, Israel was saved. Paul also said, "Death is at work in us, but life in you."

I remember when Ruth Cheung turned apostate and the raging waves

of apostasy struck the entire New Testament Church; almost all the co-workers were on her side. Fortunately, God raised up Eleazar among the spiritual Israelites. He was the first to stand up as the mainstay in the battle. The Lord's servant Bro. Hong perceived the wiles of Satan, fought for the Truth, and saved this barley field — the New Testament Church. He was truly the present-day Eleazar. If Bro. Hong did not stand up to defend the full Truth and uphold the vision of 7.21 — *the Holy Spirit rebuilds the New Testament Church*, it is hard to imagine what would become of the New Testament Church.

The Lord's servant showed the co-workers Cheung's thirteen-page letter of apostasy. He asked them to decide for themselves which way to take. All those who thought Cheung was right, let them follow her. All those who thought she was wrong, let them join us to fight for the Truth and hold fast to Sis. Kong's vision. Thank the Lord. When the Lord's servant fought against the power of apostasy, he turned the whole situation around. He also brought about the revival in the New Testament Church. Moreover, he made the New Testament Church into the leader of all nations. Today, the whole world is revolving around his ministry. When we talk about this man and this mountain, we are not trying to exalt this person. There is nothing important about this person. What we want to say is that he is the man whom God has sent to us. When he stands in God's will and is ready to die for it, God's will is done. This is something important.

When Eleazar defended that barley field, he was not doing it simply for that piece of land, which was of little value. Rather, he was guarding it because it concerned the destiny of Israel. If the barley field was lost, the future of David's kingdom would be unpredictable. Why? If Eleazar also fled with everyone else, the land would have been taken by the enemies, and Israel would have lost the battle. Israel might have lost their nation and the life of God's anointed one might have been endangered. Wouldn't it be so? Therefore, this barley field represented the entire inheritance of

God, the will of God. To protect this land is to safeguard God's property and His testimony.

When the raging waves of apostasy struck the church, the Lord's servant stood firm. He had not only preserved all the churches in Taiwan, but also those in Southeast Asia, Europe, America and Oceania. Otherwise, the New Testament Church would have been finished. Because of one person's steadfastness, the rest were all saved, just like a domino effect. So, defending that piece of land is crucial.

Today, this man and this mountain are crucial to God's entire kingdom, as well as His end-time will. Holy Mount Zion is like that barley field where we should stand firm. Now we understand why the Lord's servant said, "In life or death, we vow to return to Zion, our homestead." In the past, many people didn't understand the importance of Zion, but now they understand. This mountain is related to God's end-time will and His kingdom. Mount Zion will fill the whole earth. When we stand firm in this barley field — holy Mount Zion — we are not just guarding it quietly. We must fight for this land. We must go against Edom, conquer and rule over it, and make the kingdoms of this world into the kingdoms of our Lord.

The battle took place at Pasdammim, which means the "bleeding valley." This battle resulted in blood flowing like a river. Throughout the history of Israel, thousands of battles had been fought throughout the land of Israel. Every inch of the soil was soaked in blood. Even the precious blood of our Lord Jesus was spilled on this land. The path of the cross that we walk on today is filled with blood, tears and battles. The blood of martyrs over thousands of years was shed on this path. We are standing on this valley of bloodshed and walking on this path of the cross.

Eleazar did not stop until he had eliminated all the enemies. He killed the enemies until his hand was stuck to the sword. (See 2 Samuel 23:10.)

Eleazar's sword had drunk the blood of the enemies. This sword symbolizes the word of God, which is a two-edged sword. It can annihilate the enemies and conquer all nations. Just as how Eleazar's hand was cleaved to the sword, we must also be cleaved to the word of God. In this way, we will be able to devour the enemies and drink their blood. And all the enemies shall fall before us.

*Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.*

(Rev. 19:11–16)

When our Lord came to this world, He shed His blood on the cross to redeem mankind from sins. He had offered one sacrifice for sins for all time. In Him we have redemption through His blood. The second coming of the Lord is to judge mankind. The verse above says, "He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood." This shows that He is on the battlefield. Out of His mouth goes a sharp sword with which He will strike the nations. He will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. Today we are standing in Pasdammim, the valley of blood. We will kill the enemies with the two-edged sword until their blood flows like a river.

*"Who is this coming from the city of Bozrah in Edom? Who is this so splendidly dressed in red, marching along in power and strength?"*

*...I was amazed when I looked and saw that there was no one to help me. But my anger made me strong, and I won the victory myself.*

(Isa. 63:1,5, TEV)

Who is this person mentioned? He is the LORD of all hosts, the One mentioned in Revelation 19. He has the power for salvation and comes to proclaim His victory. Why is He dressed in red? Because He is like one who treads the winepress, and is red all over. He is dressed with a robe dipped in blood. The LORD said that He would tread on nations like those who tread in the winepress. On the great and terrible day of the LORD, our God is going to tread on all nations. He will also be alone. God says He needs no one to help Him.

Eleazar means “helped by God.” Because he was human, he needed the help of God. However, God does not need any human help because He is the ever-victorious LORD of all hosts. In His wrath, He tramples on all nations and the enemies’ blood splashes on His garment.

Brothers and sisters, the New Testament Church is the body of Jesus Christ. The time has come for the New Testament Church to trample on all nations. We don’t need any help from people. But with the help of God, we trample on all nations like treading the winepress, overthrowing the thrones of all nations and the strength of the human kingdoms. God will save His people and punish their enemies. For this is His predestined and unwavering plan. Now, the time has come for Him to show His power and execute His plan through the New Testament Church. God has brought us to Pasdammim, the valley of blood. He will help us kill our enemies. The day has come for their blood to flow like a river. We will soon collect the spoils.

Eleazar was fighting the enemies alone. No one was helping him, because all the men of Israel had fled. But anger made him strong. In his fury, he struck down all the enemies and won a great victory with God’s help.

After the battle, the people returned only to collect the spoils. Brothers and sisters, we must imitate Eleazar.

Let's tell the Lord, "O Lord, we are willing to fight the good fight with You. We are willing to fight for Your kingdom. We will let our swords drink the enemies' blood and eat the enemies' flesh. We will trample on nations together with You until Your kingdom, authority and glory come."

The New Testament Church is alone. We are not reckoned among the nations. Nobody will help us. But God is our help. Anger will make us strong. God wants us to be like Him, to trample on all nations in anger and make the enemies' blood flow like a river. May every brother and sister imitate Eleazar, to stand still and fight alone, and be a vessel that turns the tides. May the Lord be gracious to us!

# **Eleazar (3)**

*(August 13, 1990 — Message of the Lord's servant Bro. Elijah Hong during the morning service on Mount Zion)*

## **Fight to Protect God's Inheritance**

God's people had to fight to receive God's inheritance. They also had to fight in order to protect the inheritance from the surrounding nations who often came to invade, plunder and occupy it. When inheriting a property, it is important to first possess and then safeguard it. But battles are inevitable when possessing and safeguarding the land God has promised. Eleazar had the same story. He was a mighty man who fought to defend the property of God. Today, God wants to gain mighty men like Eleazar from among His people.

## **A Sense of Responsibility and Initiative**

Eleazar followed David to the battlefield and faced the enemies courageously. While everyone was fleeing, He stood up to kill the enemies until God gave Israel a great victory. There are reasons for these unique results. Besides recognizing the ministry of David, Eleazar was also a vessel that had a sense of responsibility and possessed initiative. He fought ceaselessly not because he was told or urged to do so; he did it out of his own burden in the spirit with a sense of responsibility. He was so zealous that his hand was stuck to the sword. From the beginning to the end, he was filled with a militant spirit. We should adopt such a positive attitude when doing God's work. We should desire this virtue — being responsible in watching over God's testimony and defending His inheritance. When God chooses people to serve Him, He will choose and give more entrustments to those who display initiative, and who are zealous and responsible until the end.

*Faithful to God in the Spirit*

When everyone was fleeing from the Philistines, David did not say, “Eleazar, you can’t run away. You have to stand still. This battle depends on you now...” Eleazar did not receive an order from David. Whose order did he receive then? He received the order from his inner sense of faithfulness and responsibility. We need God to be more gracious to us in this aspect, so that we may show such faithfulness in our life, work and ministry.

Oftentimes when I drive down the mountain, I would see loose mud, and fallen rocks and branches along the sides of the highway of Zion. Though they will not block the road, they are not nice to look at. Everyday many people pass by them, but the mess remains there. Every time I pass by, I would want to clean it up but I fail to because I would always be in a rush. After a few times, I felt really sad and humorously said to the co-workers in the car, “The companions have not yet been officially assigned to clear the mess. That’s why they don’t dare clean up the mess. Everyone is waiting for an official notice.”

I don’t believe that no one has feelings. Our condition reveals the loopholes in our lives, and our lack of enthusiasm for God’s work. If we had Eleazar among us, the sides of the highway would have been cleared a long time ago. Also, there are many minor things that we neglect. For example, we can see juice bottles and aluminum cans thrown all over the place by some uncaring tourists. If we had the spirit of Eleazar, we would have picked them up without an “official notice.” Our environment would be much cleaner. If you have to wait for the assignment before you can work, then assign yourself! When you find the windows dirty, clean it. Don’t worry about overstepping the boundary. When you discover that the toilet is dirty, clean it. You don’t have to wait to be assigned.

Let our faithfulness towards God and a sense of responsibility be seen through every detail of our daily life. What Eleazar had done showed that he was faithful and responsible to God. He did not need people to give

him rules and regulations before he would do something for God.

***Deal with the Spirit of Being Passive  
and the Spirit of a Hired Worker***

A vessel greatly used by to God is definitely zealous in God's work, unless he does not know how or does not have the ability to do it. If he knows how and has the ability to do it, he will not be at peace not taking action. When the Philistines came to destroy the barley field, Eleazar couldn't tolerate the enemies and their oppression. As long as he had a little strength, he would fight on even at the risk of his life. This is the spirit of Eleazar. Some people are exactly the opposite. When the enemies come, they quickly flee from danger.

Throughout the past twenty years, we have found many vessels like Eleazar. They show initiative, zeal and are conscientious. They have an inner motivation and burden from their spirit, and also take actions in doing God's work. Unfortunately, there is a minority among God's children or even the workers called by God who lack the spirit of Eleazar.

One time, all of us tried hard to figure out how to improve the speed and quality of our literary printing work. But we failed. During that whole time, there was this one person who stood at the side quietly without saying a word. We later learned that he was an expert in this field. So I asked, "How come he didn't say anything?" I was told that he didn't dare say anything because he was afraid that once Bro. Hong knew that he was an expert in that field, he would have to do all the work. I said, "You're finished. You can forget about serving God." I was both angry and sad for him. Though he is still with us in the New Testament Church, his work is not productive. May the Lord have mercy on him.

I would feel bad if I knew how to do something but didn't help out. I believe many among us feel the same way. Surprisingly, this companion of ours was not so. While everyone was so anxious, he was hiding his knowl-

edge for fear that he might be given heavier responsibilities. So he tried to be smart and let others do the work. After all, he who gathers much (works more) has nothing left over, and he who gathers little (works less) has no lack (see 2 Corinthians 8:15), so why should I work more? This is the passive spirit of a hired worker. It is pathetic and also abominable! May the Lord deliver him from such a pitiful condition.

Presently, there is a construction project on Mount Zion. I am neither an architect nor a designer, so I have to look to God at every step in the development. Some people said, “It is very hard to get involved in any project on Mount Zion because there isn’t any overall plan.” Yes, they are right. We don’t have an overall plan. We build according to our needs. For instance, we built the Victory Shed because we needed a shelter from the sun and rain. What about the Triumph Tower? At first, it was intended to be the living quarters for the people of Zion, but it turned out to be the Triumph Hall.

When we started the construction, we never thought about whether it would affect the overall plan. This is how most of the buildings on Mount Zion came about, but God accepted them. Later on, some architects and builders gave us some suggestions, and I began to realize that we needed such skills.

Now we need to build more reception rooms, dining halls, dormitories, service venues, etc., and we need people to help us decide what material to use and where to build them. I heard that there are many architects and urban planners in the New Testament Church. But so far, only Sis. Rong-hua and Bro. Chai of Taichung come to help. Other than the two, I don’t know who else is trained in this field. No one has ever given any suggestions. Maybe they think that it’s no good to show off.

Being active and zealous towards God’s holy work is not showing off. In fact, those who are passive and negative in God’s house are more likely

to show off. All our skills and wisdom are given by God. Didn't God give them to us for the good of His house? Why do we receive education? Is it merely to find a better job and to get a better pay? If that's the case, then you are too pathetic. You are no different from those who are without God and hope.

Psalm 137:5 says, "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill!" This verse clearly shows that our skills should be used for Jerusalem. If it is not for Jerusalem, there is no point in learning them. All that we receive from God should be used for God and for Zion. Hope that we will be more equipped in every field so that He can use us freely at anytime and in whatever way He wants.

## **Everything for God**

A new semester has just begun. Many youngsters face the problems of what courses to take. They come to discuss with me, "What is needed in the consecrated work and what skills are needed on Mount Zion?" They want to learn and be equipped according to the needs of God's house.

Every time I hear youngsters saying this, I want to give them a big hug. They are so adorable. I often thank God for giving these adorable children to the house of Jacob. I feel very happy and comforted. I didn't expect that so many of our descendants would consider the way we have walked on to be meaningful, desiring to follow us.

Most children of the preachers in the denominations don't want to become preachers, because they think a preacher's life is too hard. However, the co-workers serving in the New Testament Church have successors. I am really consoled to see that the New Testament Church has descendants who study for God and are equipped for God. This is the spirit of Eleazar: doing everything for God.

Isn't it for today that I was trained? How can I run away? The people

of Israel were good for nothing but fleeing and plundering. They fled when the battle was ferocious and they returned to plunder only after the battle was won. May the Lord have mercy on us so that we will not become like them.

May we all be like Eleazar who was the mainstay of God's people. Let us also be ones who show initiative, and are zealous, conscientious and willing to invest everything in God's work. Let us not be like one of those who try to be smart and play safe and let others do the work, and only come to share the fruits of others' labor. May the Lord give us this spirit of Eleazar.



11

12



# Abishai





# Abishai (1)

*(August 20, 1990 — Discussion of Co-worker Sis. Yu-wei during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

Abishai was the second son of Zeruiah, David's elder sister. Abishai's elder brother was Joab and his younger brother was Asahel.

*So David arose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Now Saul lay within the camp, with the people encamped all around him. Then David answered, and said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother of Joab, saying, "Who will go down with me to Saul in the camp?" And Abishai said, "I will go down with you."*

(1 Sam. 26:5–6)

Saul took three thousand chosen men of Israel, and went to seek David at the hill of Hachilah and encamped there. David was in great danger. That night, David asked who would go down with him to Saul in the camp? Abishai immediately said, "I will go down with you." From here, we see that Abishai had full confidence in God's anointed one for he could answer his call without hesitation. Not only did he recognize David as God's anointed one, he also believed that all his leadings were from God.

At that time, a deep sleep from God had fallen upon everyone in the camp, including Saul. As a result, nobody saw or knew David and Abishai's move. God was showing Abishai that He confirmed both the actions of David His anointed one, and Abishai's action of faith in following David.

At first, they did not know that a deep sleep had come upon Saul's camp. So it was not easy for the two of them to confront an army of three thousand men. Evidently, Abishai was so confident in God's leading for

David that he ignored the difficult circumstances. He not only had faith in David, he also took up the action of faith in following David. Since it was God's leading, he was ready to sacrifice his life. If we have faith in the vessel of the era only in theory, but do not follow him in practice, we will not possess and enjoy the kingdom with him.

God has revealed many Abishais in the New Testament Church. In 1986, the Lord's servant brought the brothers and sisters of the churches in Taiwan back to Zion from the back of the mountain. All the brothers and sisters were very brave. They never questioned: "Is this how God brings us back to Zion? The journey is not only arduous, but also perilous. What awaits us is the assault of the Kuomintang (KMT), the evil gang. Why must we come back again and again?" Instead, they followed God's anointed one without doubt and fearlessly time and again.

Abishai said to David, "I will go down with you." Back then, brothers and sisters also said to the Lord's servant, "We will go up with you." They were all filled with the spirit of victory and they had full faith in the leading of the Lord's servant. They were willing to advance with the Lord's servant at any cost. Such faith led us back to Zion in victory.

*Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice." But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed, and be guiltless?"*

(1 Sam. 26:8-9, NIV)

Abishai had a different opinion from the leading of David. But he was able to believe and accept David's leading. God's leading for David was not to stretch out man's hand but to wait for God to work. This waiting is very trying. I believe if Joab were there, he would have killed Saul without David's consent. David wanted to wait, but for how long? As long as Saul

was alive, David would be pursued. One more day of waiting would mean one more day of suffering.

Waiting for God's time is a hard lesson to learn. The Lord's servant always waits for God. In the past I couldn't understand the Lord's servant. When something happened, I would think to myself, "Hey, the Lord's servant is the vessel of the era. He should say something. One word from him would be enough to cast out the evildoers from the New Testament Church. If he doesn't want to say it himself, he can tell Abishai to strike them down with the spear. Wouldn't that take care of everything?" But the Lord's servant waited for God, and he wouldn't stretch out man's hand. Although the matters often dragged on for years, God would take care of them in the end. All the problems would be solved beautifully in every aspect. God was glorified and His will done.

In my serving, I often like to solve problems right away. Just like Abishai who said, "Let me strike him at once with the spear, right to the earth; and I will not have to strike him a second time," I have to do it immediately; how can I wait? I'm trying to save David. I must take care of the problem now. There is no more time. And so I struck with one thrust of the spear, and didn't have to strike twice. As a result I messed up everything.

While following the vessel of the era, we often have differences in opinions with him. Abishai was good in the sense that he put aside his own opinion and obeyed the vessel of the era. He was a vessel that trusted and obeyed his master.

*Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head!" But the king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the LORD has said to him, 'Curse David.' Who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?'"*

(2 Sam. 16:9–10)

When David was pursued by Absalom, he fled from Jerusalem and came to Bahurim. There, an evil man named Shimei cursed him before his servants and his mighty men. Shimei was from the house of Saul, and was like a lackey of the KMT. When David was in a time of troubles, he cursed and slandered David, the LORD's anointed one. Shimei was beating David when he was down. The men of David could no longer stand his vicious words and arrogance, so Abishai said to David, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head!"

David had the power to deal with Shimei but his response was, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah?" David did not praise Abishai. Instead, he answered in such an unpleasant way, embarrassing Abishai in front of everyone. Later on, the same thing happened again:

*But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, "Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD's anointed?" And David said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should be adversaries to me today? Shall any man be put to death today in Israel? For do I not know that today I am king over Israel?"*  
(2 Sam. 19:21–22)

When David went back to Jerusalem after Absalom was killed, Shimei was terrified. He quickly rushed down to the Jordan to meet the king with a thousand men and with the servants of the house of Saul, begging the king to forgive and forget what he had done. Shimei was not repenting, but changed according to the direction of the wind. He hit David when David was down, and started behaving like a servant when David was king again. No wonder Abishai was so angry with him and wanted to kill him. David knew Shimei's true colors. He charged Solomon in his will, saying, "Bring his gray hair down to the grave with blood." But at that moment, the leading of God for David was not to kill him. So David said to Abishai again, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should be adversaries to me today?"

I feel that Abishai was full of vitality like Peter. He truly loved God's anointed one and was righteous. He would not be at ease unless the enemies had perished. He never expected that David would respond to him unpleasantly the second time. Time and again, David even called him an adversary.

Abishai was an important figure in Israel. He was one of the three sons of Zeruiah who were widely renowned. It was truly traumatic for him to be reprimanded in front of so many people, including the enemy. I can imagine what it would be like if the same thing happened to me. Suppose the Lord's servant said to me, "What have I to do with you, you daughter of Sis. Chao!" I would be so terrified that my legs would be shaking. I would start thinking: "My ministration must have been terrible. The Lord's servant must have been dissatisfied with me for a long time, and now he has found this opportunity to teach me a lesson. This couldn't be a coincidence. Otherwise, he wouldn't have said the same thing twice...."

Abishai was willing to learn his lesson. He obeyed the vessel of the era, and also willingly accepted his perfection and correction. This trait was truly precious. Actually, I thought that David was a bit strange. Joab was so disrespectful to him, but he never said a word against Joab. Sometimes, David would even do what Joab said. But towards Abishai, who was so loyal and good, David reprimanded him publicly. Why? Because David understood the characters of these individuals. He knew Joab couldn't be touched. Even before David touched him, he was on the edge of bursting. That was why David wouldn't speak frankly with him.

David was careful not to stumble Joab with his words. He tried to be patient and waited for God to do His work so as to preserve Joab. But Abishai was different. He would not leave, even when he was scolded or beaten. He was gentle in the spirit, and was more than ready to prostrate and to learn. He also knew that David truly loved him.

It is not easy to accept corrections. David reprimanded Abishai severely because he knew him very well. I realize how difficult it is to be the Lord's servant. When he corrects someone, he gives more life than words. Some brothers and sisters in the New Testament Church are fervent and seem spiritually enlightened. But you cannot tell them frank words. If you try to correct them, they will fall or burst into anger.

Throughout these years of serving God, the Lord's servant has always been nice and gentle to me. He knows that I am very timid. So before he corrected me, he would always give me plenty of "anesthetics" to make sure that I would not feel any pain. When I compare myself with Abishai, I all the more realize how precious he was. Despite being reprimanded in public, he remained calm and submissive. He accepted the correction of the vessel of the era and did not doubt his love for him. When David corrected him twice in this way, his feeling must have been hurt and it must have been unbearable for him. But he obeyed and did not try to defend himself. He looked at this incident from the viewpoint of God. That was why he did not think David disliked him or had misunderstood him. Let's read on:

*When the Philistines were at war again with Israel, David and his servants with him went down and fought against the Philistines; and David grew faint. Then Ishbi-Benob, who was one of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose bronze spear was three hundred shekels, who was bearing a new sword, thought he could kill David. But Abishai the son of Zeruiah came to his aid, and struck the Philistine and killed him. Then the men of David swore to him, saying, "You shall go out no more with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel."*

(2 Sam. 21:15–17)

When David went to war against the Philistines, he grew faint and was almost killed. Abishai came to his help and killed his enemy. Moreover he swore to David, "You shall go out no more with us to battle, lest you

quench the lamp of Israel.” Obviously, Abishai’s loyalty and love towards David had never changed. Even though he had been so severely reprimanded by David, he still gave him his heart and his life. He was willing to sacrifice his life for the lamp of Israel. He was a vessel who could be taught, corrected and perfected.

*David said with longing, “Oh, that someone would give me a drink of the water from the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!” So the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines, drew water from the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David. Nevertheless he would not drink it, but poured it out to the LORD. And he said, “Far be it from me, O LORD, that I should do this! Is this not the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?” Therefore he would not drink it. These things were done by the three mighty men. Now Abishai the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was chief of another three. He lifted his spear against three hundred men, killed them, and won a name among these three.*  
(2 Sam. 23:15–18)

Abishai was the leader of the first three mighty men of David. He went to Bethlehem, David’s hometown, and risked his life to get water for David. It was because at the time, Bethlehem was occupied by the Philistines. It would have made more sense for Abishai to risk his life to enter the enemies’ territory if David’s life was in danger, or if Israel was besieged by a great army. However, Abishai went to Bethlehem just because David wished to drink of the water from the well of Bethlehem.

David would not die if he did not drink the water from there. The matter didn’t seem so great that it was worth taking such a risk. Nonetheless, this incident is recorded in the Bible, not only in 2 Samuel, but also in 1 Chronicles 11. Moreover, this matter was recorded before any of Abishai’s other impressive military achievements. What he did was beautiful, well-pleasing and remembered by God.

How was Abishai able to do things according to God's heart? It was because he could understand the feelings of God's anointed one. He knew that David wanted to drink the water from the well in Bethlehem not just because he longed for his hometown. Bethlehem was also the place where God chose and called David; the place where God anointed him through Samuel; and where God made a covenant with him.

When David longed for the water from the well in Bethlehem, he was actually longing for God, His will, and His promises. The Lord's servant felt the same for Zion before we returned to Zion. I remember while we were wandering at the Hsiaolin Riverbed, we looked up to gaze at Zion everyday. We could only see a very small part of Zion through the V-shaped ravines of the ranges in front of us. Wonderfully, by looking at Zion this way everyday, we gained strength in serving God. But gradually, we became discontented because Zion was so far away that we could barely see her. So the Lord's servant brought us to different places to gaze at Zion.

Once, while we were gazing at Zion from Wulipu, the Lord's servant even brought along a pair of binoculars to have a better look of her. We made many long and arduous journeys, crossing mountains and valleys for hours. We trekked through tall, razor-sharp blades of grass, while carrying toddlers in our arms and on our backs. By the time we reached a good spot to gaze at Zion, most of us, young and old, were already worn out and full of cuts.

As soon as we saw Zion, tears rolled down our cheeks. Wonderfully, we regained our strength. Some time later, God brought us some produce of Zion through some mighty men. When we saw the produce, we seemed to have seen God. This was exactly how David felt: when he saw the water from Bethlehem, he saw God. He was strengthened immediately despite all the afflictions, wandering and trials.

Abishai did not regard David's feelings as something trivial. He was willing to risk his life to fulfill David's wish. He knew that David's feeling was from God, and that if he went to get the water for David, he would bring David great comfort. On the other hand, David was so thankful to God for what Abishai had done that he poured the water from Bethlehem out before the LORD.

It is very important for us who serve God to know the feeling of God's anointed one. We don't just follow him outwardly. God does not only entrust him to speak His words and deliver His messages. God also wants him to reveal His feelings of His love, hatred, sadness and joy. God doesn't want us to obey the vessel of the era like a robot, but with understanding of his feeling. He wants us to share his feelings and thoughts, for they are from God.

I heard the testimony that Sis. Rachel made on Mount Zion before I came back. After listening to her testimony, I had a profound feeling that her ministration is wholly based on searching the feeling of the vessel of the era. No wonder her ministration carries the power of the throne. It is easy for us to speak what the vessel of the era speaks, but it is not easy to feel how he feels. I realize that Sis. Rachel has grasped this important point in her ministration. When she serves brothers and sisters, she not only brings forth God's words, but also reveals God's feelings.

While I was on Mount Zion this time, I found that the Lord's servant serves in the Most Holy Place, face to face with God. He brings forth God's words and feelings. 1 John chapter one says: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life." Though we cannot see God, we can still follow Him through the apostles.

Heaven and earth shake at the word of the Lord's servant. He is truly

the representative and spokesman of the Throne, and is the manifestation of God in the flesh. His ministration is full of authority. But mine is the ministration at the outer court. Sometimes, my service looks bustling and busy on the outside: killing bulls and sheep, cleaning and cutting them to pieces. I seem to be busy all day long. Of course it is also a ministration, but not one in the Most Holy Place. I can spend a lot of time doing something God entrusted me to do. But it is hard for me to wait constantly before God, and to seek and understand His will and the feelings of His anointed one.

God wants us to be diligent and faithful. He all the more wants us to have a better ministration — one that is in the Most Holy Place where we meet Him face to face, trying our best to follow the vessel of the era and strive to know his feelings. If we neglect this key factor in our ministration, all our labor will be in vain, because we can't satisfy the Lord, and our service will not bring about the glory and authority of the Throne.

*So Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had killed their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle. . . For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king's intent to kill Abner the son of Ner. Then the king said to his servants, "Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel? And I am weak today, though anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too harsh for me. The LORD shall repay the evildoer according to his wickedness."*

(2 Sam. 3:30,37–39)

Abishai did something that went against David's will, which was to help Joab in the assassination of Abner. Although Abishai was not the culprit, he was the co-conspirator. David was very furious about this matter. He said, "These men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too harsh for me."

Outwardly, Abishai and Joab had committed the same crime and should suffer the same consequences. But God searches the hearts of man. David

also knew that Abishai respected and loved the vessel of the era in the spirit. Abishai really wanted God. Even though he had failed badly and harmed the will of God, he was still listed among the mighty men of David. Abishai was still remembered by God because he was willing to repent and learn from his failure. He always followed the vessel of the era loyally even at the risk of his life.

## **Abishai (2)**

### *Always Denies Himself*

*(August 20, 1990 — Message of the Lord's servant Bro. Victor Pi  
during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

*Then David answered, and said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother of Joab, saying, "Who will go down with me to Saul in the camp?" And Abishai said, "I will go down with you."*

(1 Sam. 26:6)

When Saul was searching for David, he encamped on the hill of Hachilah. In the middle of the night, David and Abishai took a very risky action — they went into Saul's camp. Abishai was the only person going with David. According to the common military practices, they should have had a backup group of soldiers waiting nearby. But David did not deploy any. He only brought Abishai with him. David and Abishai were no common warriors. Their insight and courage surpassed all others. When Abishai quickly responded to David's call without any regard for his own life, David believed that God would protect him.

David did not kill Saul but only took the spear and the jar of water which were near Saul's head because he respected the anointing of God and treasured Saul's life. In doing so, David hoped to convey this message to Saul: "Although God had twice delivered you into my hand, I did not hurt you. For I, the son of Jesse, did not conspire against you as you said." (See 1 Samuel 22:13.) As expected, Saul returned to his place and did not pursue David again.

*Then Abishai said to David, "God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day. Now therefore, please let me strike him at once with the spear, right to the earth; and I will not have to strike him a second time!" But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for*

*who can stretch out his hand against the LORD's anointed, and be guiltless?"*

(1 Sam. 26:8–9)

Abishai and David had a difference in opinions. When David disapproved of Abishai's idea, Abishai immediately denied himself and obeyed David. This is a rare trait that is hard to come by. It is very important for someone who co-works with the Lord's anointed one to put aside his own opinions. If he refuses to deny himself, he will fail to co-work with the vessel of the era. Moreover, his speech and actions will harm the ministry of the vessel of the era and bring much headache and sorrow to him.

Joab the brother of Abishai was a good example. He hurt David, and finally himself. It was fortunate that Abishai was the one who went with David that night. If it were Joab, the outcome would have been a lot different. Saul, Abner, and the people were in a deep sleep. What a golden opportunity! But Abishai consulted David first. Do you think Joab would consult David? I don't think so. I am afraid David would not be able to stop him from what he wanted to do. Saul would have died that day. If that happened, David would have had a tainted reputation in history for killing his father-in-law, a king, and an anointed one of God. He would never be able to clear himself of this crime. And when he became king of Israel, history would say that David killed King Saul and seized the throne from him. This would be an eternal regret. Thank God that David did not bring Joab that day.

Abishai said, "*Strike him at once with the spear, right to the earth; and I will not have to strike him a second time.*" *Success at the first strike* seemed to be the most effective strategy. With just one strike, all the problems would be solved — the archenemy would be killed and the root of evil removed; the war would stop; and David could reign immediately. It was a task to David and a strong temptation to Abishai. If Abishai made this "one strike," the kingdom of David would owe to his stunning strike of the spear, making

him the founder of David's kingdom, and none would be greater than him in the entire kingdom.

Brothers and sisters, I'm not saying that immediate results are not good. But it would not please God if we only wanted instant results, and did not want to wait upon Him. We would provoke God to anger if we tried getting immediate results through unscrupulous means. *Success at the first strike* is the way adopted by those who look for instant results. It is a common flaw of man. Those who serve God must guard against this habit.

David was a God-fearing vessel after the LORD's heart. He would never stretch out man's hand for some instant results. He would rather wait for God and let God champion justice for him. Though Abishai did not resort to unscrupulous means, he had the weakness of wanting immediate achievements. However, he resolved to deny his own thought as soon as he realized that the anointed one of God had a different feeling. This was commendable.

Abishai had some special traits. He was evil-hating, strong-willed, quick to speak but without evil intents, quick to deny himself, and able to accept corrections and reprimands. We can see these traits from the two incidents below:

*Now when King David came to Bahurim, there was a man from the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei the son of Gera, coming from there. He came out, cursing continuously as he came. And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David. And all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. Also Shimei said thus when he cursed: "Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue! The LORD has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son. So now you are caught in your own evil, because you are a bloodthirsty man!" Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the*

king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head!" But the king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the LORD has said to him, 'Curse David.' Who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?'" "And David said to Abishai and all his servants, "See how my son who came from my own body seeks my life. How much more now may this Benjamite? Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the LORD has ordered him."

(2 Sam. 16:5–11)

Then a ferryboat went across to carry over the king's household, and to do what he thought good. Now Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king when he had crossed the Jordan. Then he said to the king, "Do not let my lord impute iniquity to me, or remember what wrong your servant did on the day that my lord the king left Jerusalem, that the king should take it to heart. For I, your servant, know that I have sinned. Therefore here I am, the first to come today of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king." But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, "Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD's anointed?" And David said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should be adversaries to me today? Shall any man be put to death today in Israel? For do I not know that today I am king over Israel?" Therefore the king said to Shimei, "You shall not die." And the king swore to him.

(2 Sam. 19:18–23)

Shimei was despicable and shameless. When David was in distress, he cursed and humiliated the king, trying to please Absalom. When David returned in victory, he was the first to welcome the king. No king would tolerate such a person. Everyone witnessed both incidents but no one said anything, except Abishai, who was evil-hating. He burst into anger saying, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head!" I think this is one of the points that made Abishai

endearing — he spoke his mind.

If the anointed one of God is cursed and humiliated and we remain indifferent, this shows that our spirit is not right. When David was cursed by Shimei, those who had a grudge against David might be happy, thinking, “Someone is venting out anger for me. David deserves it! Shimei has scolded well. He is doing the job for us. How nice!” Anyone with such a spirit is horrifying!

Abishai loved David and vice versa. David knew Abishai well. That was why he could severely reprimand Abishai. He knew that Abishai would accept his correction and admonition. With these virtues, Abishai could follow David loyally for his whole life, and he could be trusted and used by David without fail. If it were Joab or another person, David would probably say nothing to him. Even if David wanted to stop him from killing Saul, he would tell him in a gentle way instead of reprimanding.

This reminds me of why the Lord’s servant reprimanded some co-workers severely while exhorting others lightly when they had done wrong. Towards those who are willing to learn lessons of life and accept corrections, he is often stern and straightforward. As for those who are spiritually tender and don’t know how to learn lessons, he will try to exhort them according to their condition.

Co-workers and brothers and sisters, if we are wrong and the Lord’s servant does not reprimand us, we better examine ourselves carefully before the Lord. Most likely the Lord’s servant is afraid that our carnal self is too strong to withstand any correction. Our God also does the same thing. He disciplines those whom He loves.

*And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves*

*He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.” If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.*

(Heb. 12:5–8)

David rebuked Abishai twice the same way, saying, “What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah?” David seemed to have gone too far. Abishai was David’s nephew and right-hand man. He was David’s own flesh and blood and moreover, he treasured David’s life more than his own. It is written:

*When the Philistines were at war again with Israel, David and his servants with him went down and fought against the Philistines; and David grew faint. Then Ishbi-Benob, who was one of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose bronze spear was three hundred shekels, who was bearing a new sword, thought he could kill David. But Abishai the son of Zeruiah came to his aid, and struck the Philistine and killed him. Then the men of David swore to him, saying, “You shall go out no more with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel.”*

(2 Sam. 21:15–17)

To Abishai, Israel could do without him but not without David. David was the lamp of Israel, which must not be quenched. As David was so important to Israel, Abishai protected David and his kingdom at the risk of his own life.

“What have I to do with you... that you should this day be an adversary to me?” (2 Sam. 19:22). This comment of David should be quite unbearable for Abishai. He was trying to defend and protect David, how could he become David’s adversary? Peter experienced a similar situation when he tried to stop Jesus from going to Jerusalem to suffer death. Jesus

turned and said to him, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (Matt. 16:23).

According to the Lord’s standard, Abishai deserved the rebuke. From these examples we have this enlightenment: The anointed one of God (the vessel of the era) has the same mind as that of Christ, and the will of God is his life. If you go against the decisions of the vessel of the era, you are going against God because you are not mindful of the things that God has entrusted him. When Abishai mentioned of killing Shimei a second time, he didn’t understand the will of God and was only mindful of the things of men.

I’m not saying that from now on we should not express our opinions. Yes, we can. But if the Lord’s servant has already made a decision, we shouldn’t hold fast to our own opinion, but must try hard to carry out his decision. David rebuked Abishai for being an adversary because it was the second time he wanted to kill Shimei. David was angry because Abishai was holding fast to his own opinion. This shows that David had the same mind as God. All those who co-work with the vessel of the era need to pay extra attention to this: insisting on one’s own opinion is opposing the anointed one of God, and is not being mindful of the things of God.

It was extraordinary for Abishai to risk his life breaking through the camp of the Philistines to draw water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem, and give it to David. No ordinary man is able to do that, not to mention those who have their own feelings. They may say: “There is water everywhere. Why must you drink the water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem? Even if you want to drink the water from there, you have to wait until the army of the Philistines pulls out. Why risk lives breaking through the camp of the Philistines to get the water now? Do you have to drink the water of Bethlehem at the risk of the lives of your soldiers? If they are caught or killed while breaking through the enemy’s camp, how

can you, David, explain this to the whole army?"

The arguments would be endless. But Abishai had no opinion of his own in this matter. He only considered the feeling of David. He knew he had to support David and to comfort him. That was his goal. His collaboration with the anointed one had reached perfection. David did not ask him to go to Bethlehem to fetch the water. He went on his own. He was willing to go anywhere for the anointed one at any cost. This happened as a result of his close life unison with David. It is worth our imitation.

Everyone has shortcomings and weaknesses. These weaknesses should only be part of our process of learning lessons. No one should remain stubborn and weak permanently, or he will have a tragic ending. The worst thing about Joab was that he never did learn this lesson during his life. In his old age, he went against David and followed Adonijah, and ended up with a sad ending.

Abishai was exactly the opposite of his elder brother. In the beginning, he was somewhat unrestrained. He ignored the feeling of David and killed Abner together with Joab in revenge for his brother. We know this from how David cursed them: "And I am weak today, though anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruah, are too harsh for me. The LORD shall repay the evildoer according to his wickedness" (2 Sam. 3:39). Today's English Version translates it more plainly: "Even though I am the king chosen by God, I feel weak today. These sons of Zeruah are too violent for me. May the LORD punish these criminals as they deserve!" Abishai had a part in the murder of Abner. However, he was faithful to David and always sought the feelings of David. He even risked his own life for the life of David. So his earlier mistakes did not affect his lifetime accomplishments.

A person's spiritual life does not mature instantly. He needs to continually deny himself and accept corrections in order to grow. Abishai had an

ugly past, but he ended up as one of the most outstanding mighty men of David. His conclusion is worth our admiration.

## **Abishai (3)**

*(August 20, 1990 — Message of the Lord's servant Bro. Elijah Hong during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

### **Take the Feelings of the Vessel of the Era as the Standard**

Abishai really understood David's feelings, and accepted his corrections. When he had a difference of opinion from David's, he willingly discarded his own feeling without reservations. Abishai was not a shameless person but one with dignity. It was not easy for a person like him to deny his own feeling and concept and to accept David's words as his standard.

But when Abishai renounced his own feelings, he meant it. He did not just say, "Yes" to David and continue in his own way. I have come across some co-workers or brothers and sisters who seemed to accept whatever I said, but didn't make any changes later. Their attitude was: *Since you are the vessel of the era, I will keep quiet to listen to what you want to say, but I'm not going to change.* This is not self-denial or obeying the vessel of the era.

Abishai took David's feeling as the standard in all things. If we are like Abishai in this aspect, we will become mighty men and honorable vessels in God's house. We will surely be acceptable to Him. What should we do to become like Abishai? Abishai was not that good in understanding David's feeling in the beginning. But he kept on obeying him, desiring to take David's feelings as the standard. I hope we also have the same desire as him. After having the desire, we still need the light of the era or the light of the Holy Spirit to enlighten us at all time.

### **Recognize that the Vessel of the Era Is the Lamp of God's People**

### *Love the Vessel of the Era as His Own Life*

*But Abishai the son of Zeruiah came to his aid, and struck the Philistine and killed him. Then the men of David swore to him, saying, "You shall go out no more with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel."*

(2 Sam. 21:17)

Why did Abishai have the desire to accept David's feeling as the standard? It was because he had an enlightened recognition towards David — David was the lamp of Israel. This recognition urged Abishai to have a positive response towards David and to love David as his own life. This means that it would be fine for me, Abishai, to lose my life, but not David's. Because Abishai had revelation and recognition towards David's ministry, he desired to understand David's feeling and take David's feeling as the criterion.

There was a period in the past when we submitted ourselves to Sis. Kong and Cheung, we were criticized as "exalting man, following man, and obeying man more than God." Some people even said: "Bro. Hong is Cheung's propagandist. He is not preaching Jesus Christ but Cheung." Why did they criticize us like that? I can only say that it is because we had enlightened recognition towards the vessel of the era whom God had appointed in His house.

Before I recognized Sis. Kong's ministry, I considered her as one of the many servants of God, except that she had a greater gift, a greater entrustment, and a greater accomplishment. I also considered myself as one of the servants of God. I thought each one of us just had to be faithful to God according to our own portion which we received from Him. I would do my part, and Sis. Kong would do hers. I did not have to co-work with her to do God's work.

But later, I came to realize that Sis. Kong was the lamp of Israel. If this

lamp was quenched, it would be the end of Israel. This was not the lamp for one family but for the whole house of God. The children of God needed to walk in its light. Without the lamp, they would have to fumble in darkness, not knowing where to go and how to live on. Hence, this lamp must never be put out. Ever since I had this enlightened recognition of Sis. Kong's ministry, I began to treasure her. If I did not treasure her, I was not treasuring myself. Hurting her would mean hurting myself. More importantly, I could not do without her. If I did not have her, I would have been lost in darkness, and I'd be unable to serve God at all.

### *Life Connection with the Vessel of the Era*

True life connection with the vessel of the era comes from an enlightened recognition. The nature of a person's recognition towards the vessel of the era can be easily revealed. If he thinks that he can still serve God even without the spiritual minister and that he can still see the results of his work, then his recognition of the spiritual minister is from the carnal mind, and not from revelation.

You are in great danger if you think that you can still go on serving God and still have an enjoyable life without the vessel of the era. This shows that the lamp of Israel is still burning but the lamp inside you has already been put out. Abishai loved David so much because he knew that David was the lamp of Israel. With this recognition of David's ministry, he coordinated harmoniously and efficiently with David.

Some people asked, "Bro. Hong, how can I have a life connection with you?" I replied, "It is not a question of how to do it but it comes from one's life." The story of life derives from an enlightened recognition. There is no fixed formula to it.

Suppose there is a blackout and you see a lamp before you. Naturally, you will be connected to the lamp and treasure it. Will you ask, "How can I connect to the lamp? How should I treasure it?" I believe that if the wind

blows and the lamp is about to go out, you would try to shield it. If the lamp is about to fall, you would try to support it. These are natural responses and you need not be told what you should do.

Some people think that in order to have a connection with the vessel of the era, they must read “Zion Spiritual Flow.” If tomorrow is their turn to preach on the pulpit and yet they still haven’t received the “Zion Spiritual Flow” that night, they will be as restless as an ant on a hot pan. I am not saying this is bad. What I am saying is that having a life connection with the vessel of the era is not as simple as repeating what he says. If it was that easy, the connection would be too fragile. The connection would be like pieces glued together. Once the glue dries up or wears out, it would fall apart. So, our connection with the vessel of the era must be a bond in life. It is not a question of how to glue it on.

### ***You Will Have No Light if You Leave the Vessel of the Era***

The relationship among the members of our body is a connection of life. In other words, if a member is cut off from the body, it will die. In a body where all the members are well-connected, when one member is hurt, you would also feel the pain. This is because his life is connected to yours. If he does not survive, you will not survive.

Thank God for giving me this recognition towards the ministry of Sis. Kong and the Grace of Jesus Christ Crusade. This recognition led to my glorious turning point in my ministrations. By the mercy of God, He allowed me to have a life connection with the spiritual minister in the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Once you have this connection, you will know what to do. In the beginning, you may lack experience and may not be perfect in the things you do. But as your spiritual life matures, you will become more knowledgeable and experienced, thus becoming a good helper of the vessel of the era.

Some people said to me, “Bro. Hong, you are so busy that I’m afraid to

bother you. Do I have to tell you everything? If I were to tell you all the trivial things, do you think you could handle it?" Others said, "Yes, you have to tell him everything. Don't worry that he is too busy." Who is right? Both are right and both are wrong! All these are signs of lacking the enlightened recognition towards the lamp of Israel.

If you truly understand that this minister is the lamp of Israel, you will know how to treasure him. God will teach you how to value him through your real life experiences. What do I mean by that? If he is the lamp, you will have no light if you leave him. You will be in darkness. If you don't have him and yet you say, "I can feel the presence of God. Every time I pray, I'm filled with the Holy Spirit," you are lying! You may deceive those who are spiritually tender, but not those with bright spiritual eyes. If you don't even want the lamp of Israel, how can you have light and the presence of God? Unless he is not the lamp of Israel, otherwise, it's a fallacy to claim that you still have light when you leave him.

During the Singapore battle in 1987, the mighty men in Southeast Asia had fought a good fight. Many of them were Abishais. There was also a minority who did not have the spirit of Abishai. Those with the spirit of Abishai headed towards Singapore to battle one after another. Those who refused to go and were afraid to go said, "Sis. Rachel tells others to go to the front line while she herself hides at the back." They thought Sis. Rachel was afraid to die. This kind of spirit is terrible, wicked, and detestable to God.

The spirit of Abishai was not so. He said to David, "You shall no more go out with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel." That is to say: You are the lamp. All you need to do is give the order and we will do the fighting. Unenlightened people will not display this behavior in their life. May the Lord help us to be like Abishai so that we will have an enlightened recognition towards the vessel of the era, to desire to understand David's feeling, and practically take his feeling as your own feelings.

## **Justify the Thoughts of the Vessel of the Era**

Abishai was not only able to understand the feelings of David, he was also able to discern how he thought. He knew exactly what David longed for. Having such a life connection is profound, for they even shared the same thoughts. Abishai justified the thoughts and feelings of David unconditionally. He would do anything to satisfy the feelings and wishes of David. His goal was to help David fulfill his desires. This kind of sermon can only be heard in the New Testament Church. This kind of ministration can only be found in the New Testament Church. If the denominations hear us preaching about this, they will say that we are preaching heresy. They will consider Abishai and the three mighty men fools. To die for the Lord is worthwhile, but why die for David?

Brothers and sisters, it is most precious in the eyes of God for us to risk our necks for the vessel of the era, because to love the Lord's anointed one is to love God. May we continue to learn in Abishai's enlightenment until we help the present-day David possess the kingdom.

11

12



# Abner





# **Abner (1)**

## *An Opportunist*

*(August 27, 1990 — Message of the Lord's servant Bro. Victor Pi during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

A vessel living in the vision does not have a position before God. And a vessel without the vision is valueless. An individual vessel by himself, amounts to nothing. His value and function mainly depend on how much he entrusts himself to the one sent by God — how much he gives himself to the apostles in the vision.

In 1 Kings chapter 18, two calves were prepared to be sacrificed during the battle on Mount Carmel. The calf in the hands of the prophets of Baal became a heap of rotten flesh and bones, which became food for vultures and maggots. However, the calf in Elijah's hand became an offering of sweet aroma to the LORD, which pleased the LORD. Thus God sent down fire from heaven and He also sent rain to end the long drought. The difference is obvious.

What made the difference was not the calves, but to whom the calves were given. During the time of the apostates Cheung and Chen, there was a precious group of young adults. Unfortunately, this group fell into the hands of the wrong people. So in the end, they became useless vessels to God.

Today, many people consider us useless, but under the leading of the Lord's servant, we have become precious instruments and honorable vessels to God. There was an apostle Fun in the New Testament Church. While he was co-working with the Lord's maidservant Sis. Kong, his words were brilliant and powerful. But once he left the vision of Sis. Kong, he lost his apostleship and functions, and became useless. Therefore, the story of Abner serves as a warning for us.

Being the commander of Saul, Abner was only second to the king. He had a high position. Unfortunately, he had done nothing worth mentioning. He had never fought in a winning battle. Instead, he killed Asahel, a mighty man of David. By hurling his spear at Asahel, Abner sowed the seed to his death.

Abner treated his duty of commanding the army as a game. All he sought for was to enjoy life and the comforts of the flesh. He fell asleep so soundly that he didn't even know that David and Abishai had taken away the spear and the water jar that were beside Saul. Thus, David rebuked him:

*Are you not a man? And who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not guarded your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy your lord the king. This thing that you have done is not good. As the LORD lives, you deserve to die, because you have not guarded your master, the LORD's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is, and the jug of water that was by his head.*

(1 Sam. 26:15–16)

I wonder how he served as a commander. There used to be a Kuomintang (KMT) army general who reprimanded his subordinates, saying, "Foolish officers lead foolish troops to fight foolish battles, and end up becoming foolish ghosts." This sentence described Abner well. Let the story of Abner serve as a mirror to us, so that we will learn from his failures. For Abner was truly a commander guilty of a serious dereliction of duty.

### ***Fails to Correct the King***

Saul did many evil things in the sight of the LORD. He disobeyed the command of the LORD to spare King Agag and the best sheep and oxen of the Amalekites. He also sought to kill David out of jealousy; destroyed the city of Nob; killed all the priests of the LORD, and consulted the Witch

of Endor... Saul gravely sinned against the LORD. As commander and cousin of Saul, Abner did not say a word to correct him. Was he too timid to speak or did he fail to see that these transgressions were evil in the sight of the LORD? If he was too timid to speak, he proved himself useless. If he did not know that these were transgressions, he must have been as foolish as Saul.

### ***Fails to Protect the King***

When Saul was pursuing David, Abner came along with three thousand chosen men. Abner and his army slept so soundly that “the enemies” could freely come into the camp and take away the spear and the water jar beside Saul, and leave in peace as if no one was on guard. Although he was a commander, he was less watchful than a dog. He was a soldier that was unaware of the enemy’s presence and was without adequate defense.

The brothers and sisters in the New Testament Church are very alert. They can tell the sheep from the wolves. But a minority among us overreacts. They often treat the relatives and friends of brothers and sisters and newcomers as secret agents of the KMT. Though it is annoying, it is better than not being vigilant. Fortunately, Abishai was the one going to the camp with David that night. If it was Joab, Saul could have been killed with one stroke of the spear, and not by the Philistines’ archers. Abner was so undutiful to such a terrible state.

### ***Fails to Defend the Nation***

*And a champion went out from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. And he had bronze armor on his legs and a bronze javelin between his shoulders. Now the staff of his spear was like a weaver’s beam, and his iron spearhead weighed six hundred shekels; and a shield-bearer went before him. Then he stood and cried out to the armies of Israel,*

*and said to them, "Why have you come out to line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and you the servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." And the Philistine said, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together." When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.*

(1 Sam. 17:4–11)

Goliath the Philistine dog was defying the armies of the living God, and humiliating King Saul and Israel. It was intolerable. However, Abner and the armies of Israel retreated without doing anything. They didn't think that it was a shame to the nation. "You can defy us any way you like; I'm still in power anyway." Abner deserved to be called a shameless and incompetent ruler. If God did not raise up David to kill Goliath, Israel would have been enslaved and humiliated. The name of God would have been put to shame.

### ***Fails to Avenge, Save, or Die for the King***

*Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. Then the Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons. And the Philistines killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul's sons. The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was severely wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armorbearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me." But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword, and died with him. So Saul, his three sons, his armorbearer, and all his men died together that same day.*

(1 Sam. 31:1–6)

As a commander, Abner should have been at the forefront to protect the king. But surprisingly, Saul and his three sons were killed but not Abner. Since he failed to protect the king, at least he should have fought to the death to avenge the king. But he was nowhere to be found. Maybe he was the first to flee when the men of Israel fled before the Philistines. He was just like Ger Yien-seng, the KMT representative in Kuwait, who was the first to flee when the situation in Kuwait was getting critical. Ger himself fled first, without caring for the evacuation of the overseas Chinese. Actually, why blame him? Didn't the KMT do the same when they fled from China? Maybe Abner had long hoped for Saul's death, so that he may rise to power.

### ***Makes Himself King and Challenges David's House***

*But Abner the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, took Ishbosheth the son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim; and he made him king over Gilead, over the Ashurites, over Jezreel, over Ephraim, over Benjamin, and over all Israel. Ishbosheth, Saul's son, was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned two years. Only the house of Judah followed David.*

(2 Sam. 2:8–10)

Abner made Saul's son, Ishbosheth, king, who was actually only his puppet to blind Israel from his wild ambition to be king. Actually, Abner was the real "king" who controlled everything. The Scriptures say, "Now it was so, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, that Abner was strengthening his hold on the house of Saul" (2 Sam. 3:6).

Also, he challenged the house of David and instigated the battle at Gibeon: "Now Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. And Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out and met them by the pool of Gibeon. So they sat down, one on one side of the pool and the other on

the other side of the pool. Then Abner said to Joab, ‘Let the young men now arise and compete before us.’ And Joab said, ‘Let them arise.’ So they arose and went over by number, twelve from Benjamin, followers of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and twelve from the servants of David. And each one grasped his opponent by the head and thrust his sword in his opponent’s side; so they fell down together. Therefore that place was called the Field of Sharp Swords, which is in Gibeon. So there was a very fierce battle that day, and Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David” (2 Sam. 2:12–17).

He regarded the dangerous warfare as a mere game. He wanted the young men to play the “game” for his own interest, completely disregarding others’ lives. In the end, he lost the battle to Joab. While fleeing, he killed Joab’s brother, planting the seeds of his own death.

### *Threw a Tantrum Because of a Woman*

When Goliath defied the army of the living God, Abner wasn’t angry. When the Philistines killed King Saul, he wasn’t angry either. But he was very angry because of a concubine of Saul. “And Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. So Ishbosheth said to Abner, ‘Why have you gone in to my father’s concubine?’ Then Abner became very angry at the words of Ishbosheth, and said, ‘Am I a dog’s head that belongs to Judah? Today I show loyalty to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not delivered you into the hand of David; and you charge me today with a fault concerning this woman? May God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not do for David as the LORD has sworn to him — to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba.’ And he could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him” (2 Sam. 3:7–11).

Saul was Abner’s king and cousin. So, when Abner defiled Rizpah, the king’s concubine, he had committed sexual immorality and was contemp-

tuous against the king. He should have been put to death. Although Ishbosheth was Abner's nephew, he was his king and had the authority to reprimand him. But Abner was so domineering that he had no respect for the law or the king. Neither did he have any respect for God. Instead of repenting, he flared up and threatened the king. He joined David not because God's anointing was on David or His will, or because it was God's will to join David, but because he was rebuked for his sexual immorality. With such an impure intention, his consequence was foreseeable. God is a consuming fire, and not to be mocked. People could do nothing to Abner. But God is righteous; He never spares the guilty.

### *An Opportunist*

*Now Abner had communicated with the elders of Israel, saying, "In time past you were seeking for David to be king over you. Now then, do it! For the LORD has spoken of David, saying, 'By the hand of My servant David, I will save My people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and the hand of all their enemies.' " And Abner also spoke in the hearing of Benjamin. Then Abner also went to speak in the hearing of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel and the whole house of Benjamin. So Abner and twenty men with him came to David at Hebron. And David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him. Then Abner said to David, "I will arise and go, and gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires." So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.*

(2 Sam. 3:17–21)

Abner clearly knew that it was God's will to join David and this was also the wish of the people. Joining David was a good thing to do, but his timing, location, and motives were all wrong. The best time for Abner to join David was when Saul was still pursuing David; and when many bright vessels joined David in the wilderness. Why didn't he join David then? The answer was simple. He couldn't forgo his own interests as commander: To follow David in the wilderness with an uncertain future was too much

a price for him to pay.

Similarly, many preachers in the denominations know the Prophet of all Nations and understand the Truth preached in the New Testament Church. Why don't they come out of the denominations? They are just like Abner. They refuse to pay up the price to walk on this path of the cross. They are also reluctant to forgo their benefits and friendship in the denominations. Strictly speaking, these people do not really want the Truth or to serve God.

The second opportunity for Abner to join David was when Saul died. When Saul was alive and in power, he didn't have the opportunity to lead the nation of Israel to David. But after Saul died, as a man in charge of Saul's house, he was free to do whatever he wanted. He could lead all of Israel to welcome David to reign over them in Jerusalem. That would have been a pleasing move to both God and men, and a great accomplishment before God and David. All his past weaknesses, shortcomings, ignorance, foolishness, and wretchedness would have been forgiven after his defection to David.

Unfortunately, Abner didn't make this choice. He'd rather be a king himself, trying to challenge David by creating a rival for David in Israel. If Ishbosheth did not reprimand him and had let him do whatever he wanted, he would not have joined David even until the day he died. He only decided to join David after his sexual immorality was exposed. And in order to accomplish God's will, David accepted him and would probably make him a commander of his army. Abner was certain of his own benefits in following David as the house of Saul had met its fate. Why not try to please David and save my position as a commander? Regrettably, he could not stand firm before God.

In Psalm 109, David said: "Set a wicked man over him... Let his days be few, and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and

his wife a widow.” This curse was fulfilled on Abner first. This serves as a warning to all opportunists. True enough, Abner died in the hands of a wicked man — Joab.

*And when Joab had gone from David's presence, he sent messengers after Abner, who brought him back from the well of Sirah. But David did not know it. Now when Abner had returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him privately, and there stabbed him in the stomach, so that he died for the blood of Asahel his brother.*  
(2 Sam. 3:26–27)

Abner had a tragic end. He knew that the anointing of God was on David, but refused to follow him. He refused to obey God's will. By the time he realized the house of David was growing stronger and the house of Saul was getting weaker, it was too late for him to join David. For the will of God was almost done. Even if he succeeded, he would be nothing more than an “opportunist,” and that would not be permitted by God.

From the story of Abner, we learn that an individual vessel amounts to nothing. The value of a vessel depends on whether he is living in God's will, working in the vision of the era, and whether he has entrusted himself to the one sent by God. Abner was not in the vision of the era. Instead of following David, God's anointed one, he followed the wrong person. As a consequence, he spent his life in vain without achieving anything. He ruined his own reputation and died a violent death. Therefore, take heed!

Throughout the years, the brothers and sisters of the New Testament Church and the companions of the Lamb followed the Lord's servant to the pigsty, and the Hsiaolin Riverbed. They remained faithful even to the verge of death, and never disobeyed the vision from heaven. Due to their recognition and respect towards the Lord's anointing, they can now dwell on Zion to gain and enjoy God's kingdom. They have found great grace

and mercy. This is a great mystery of God's kingdom and the only way to obtain it.

## **Abner (2)**

*(August 27, 1990 — Message of the Lord's servant Bro. Elijah Hong during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

There are many things about Abner that can serve as a warning to us. Before God rejected Saul as king, it was all right for Abner to be his commander. But after God had rejected Saul as king and anointed David, he should have left Saul and joined David. At this time, a person who truly loved and revered God, and wanted to serve Him, would have no peace to stay on in the house of Saul. But Abner stayed on with Saul despite his knowledge of what had happened. This revealed that he had selfish intentions. Did he really do things for God or did he really want God? This was the hardest test for Abner. Everyone will also face this test. Let Abner be our warning while we are on this way of following the Lord.

When I was still in the Christian Assembly, I did not know that God had raised up Sis. Kong, but I could see that the glory of God had left the Christian Assembly and God's Spirit was no longer working there. I was grieved in the spirit and I could no longer stay there.

Brothers and sisters, a person who truly loves God will have the spirit of caring for His will. What we want is God and the Truth. Our relationship with anyone must be built on the Truth and God's will, and not on mutual affections or personal interests.

### **Fails to Forsake Personal Grudges and Individual Interests**

Abner could not forsake his personal grudges and interests. His heart towards God was neither pure nor absolute. This was the root of his failure and the cause of his tragic end. Let this be our warning! Brothers and sisters, our relationship with anyone must be based on the will of God. Relationships based on mutual gains and interests are very fragile. Only a

relationship in the will of God is stable.

Why do some people come to the New Testament Church? Some say, “The denominations look down on poor people like us, but the New Testament Church doesn’t. The New Testament Church has more love and they are nice to us. So we return to the New Testament Church.” These people will leave the New Testament Church at once if you are not so nice to them. They come because they think the people in the New Testament Church are nicer to them, and not because the way of the New Testament Church comes from God or because what the New Testament Church receives and preaches is the Truth.

### **Does Not Serve According to God’s Anointing**

Abner knew very well that God had discarded Saul and anointed David. He did not want to join David because he was the commander in the house of Saul. Since he was so privileged, why risk joining David? Besides, when Saul died, David would be the successor. So why bother joining him?

Abner’s serving was not according to God’s anointing but his personal preference and interests. Such serving is worthless to God. Whether a person can be greatly used and entrusted by God is judged by this criterion. Brothers and sisters, please forgive me for saying this: if God can use me, Bro. Hong, it is because I have found God’s favor in this aspect. Respecting the anointing of God is not an easy lesson to learn. But if you can learn it well, God will have a way in you. God will be able to use you in His will, and you will enjoy God’s promise and accomplish His will.

### **His Intention Is Not for God**

Why did Abner join David later on? “Then Abner became very angry at the words of Ishbosheth, and said, ‘Am I a dog’s head that belongs to Judah? Today I show loyalty to the house of Saul your father, to his broth-

ers, and to his friends, and have not delivered you into the hand of David; and you charge me today with a fault concerning this woman? May God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not do for David as the LORD has sworn to him — to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba” (2 Sam. 3:8–10).

Abner became very angry after he was reprimanded by Ishbosheth. His resentment drove him to retaliate so the house of Saul would know how powerful he was. For this reason, he turned to David and wanted to transfer the kingdom to him. Obviously, Abner’s intention was evil. He did not respect the LORD’s anointing. He only cared about his own gains and interests. He did not follow Saul because of God’s will. Also he did not join David for the will of God. Superficially, it seemed that Abner was doing God’s will by transferring the kingdom to David, but his inner motive was not right.

God judges the hearts, not the appearances. If someone wants to leave the denominations and join the New Testament Church, we would like to know why he joins the New Testament Church. Is it because he understands that the way of the New Testament Church is from God, or is it because he is disappointed with the denominations? God will examine his intention.

Frankly speaking, after God raised up Sis. Kong, those who first contacted her and joined the New Testament Church in Taiwan were the brothers and sisters who were not doing so well in the denominations, especially the Christian Assembly. These people who came to the New Testament Church in this way did not stay long. They joined the New Testament Church quickly but they also left quickly. They did not see that the Truth preached by Sis. Kong was the complete gospel from God. They also failed to see that Sis. Kong was the vessel of the era raised up by God. If a person’s motive in seeking God is not pure, he will not have a good

ending. God will not have a way in him. Let's take heed to learn this lesson. So, what is the reason of our mutual relationship? Is it because we have the same interests or is it because we have received and exalted the same Truth? Brothers and sisters, our relationship must be in God's will and should be based solely on the Truth and nothing else. In this way, we will be in one mind steadfastly!

I was one of the slowest and had the most difficult time in returning to the New Testament Church. I felt that I had to fully understand before I joined the church and walked on this path. Once I understood that the Truth of the New Testament Church was from God, and that this way was correct, I would come even if I was not invited or welcomed. And once I came, no one could chase me out of here.

If someone is thinking about leaving Mount Zion just because the people of Zion didn't smile at him as before, he must have lost the vision. His spiritual eyes have grown dim, his motive has become complicated, and he has fallen victim of having personal grudges. The people of Zion are not perfect; they might offend one another, but Mount Zion and the God of Mount Zion will never offend you. Brothers and sisters, do you come because of the God of Mount Zion or because of the smiling faces of the people of Zion?

All of us will face this test. If you understand that the way of the New Testament Church is right; that Mount Zion is the holy mountain chosen by God; and that the Lord has called you to consecrate yourself to serve here, you will not waver no matter what anyone does to you.

What we want is not the praises of man but the will of God. For this reason, I often like to mention what Sis. Kong said: "I know nothing, but only God and His will." Our motive of serving God must be as simple as that of Sis. Kong. Our relationship with Sis. Kong and later on, with Ruth Cheung, was purely based on nothing but the Truth.

At that time, someone said, “Bro. Hong faithfully follows Ruth Cheung because she is good to him.” Yes, Ruth Cheung was good to me, but once I discovered that she rejected the Truth, our relationship ended immediately. When Bro. Pi and I were in Singapore, she called us over and asked, “Bro. Hong, Bro. Pi, do you think Chen Kui-fang has turned apostate?” On account of how Ruth Cheung highly regarded both of us and treasured us, it was very difficult for us to say that he was. Nevertheless, we had to speak the truth. From then on, Cheung’s attitude towards us changed. But we didn’t mind because what we wanted was the Lord, the Truth, and His will. We were not afraid of anyone’s attitude. We were old enough to be her father. Why did we respect her so much? It was because at that time she wanted the Truth. Later, when she rejected the Truth, the cause of our connection was also gone.

May the Lord help us learn this lesson. We need to be certain: Why do we come to the New Testament Church? Why do we co-work with Bro. Hong and walk on this path together with him? It is not because Bro. Hong is good to me or because the New Testament Church is giving me any benefit. It is because the way of the New Testament Church is from God; the Truth preached by the New Testament Church is complete, and Bro. Hong is appointed by God. So I come to help testify to this Truth and offer myself up for the kingdom of God.

If we are able to co-work in one mind, it is all because we have the same vision, the same Truth, the same mission, and the same entrustment. It is not because we have similarities or share the same interests. Let the tragic failure of Abner serve as our warning, and let us examine ourselves before the Lord constantly: Why do we come to serve God? Is it because we have seen the vision? Do we come because we respect the anointing of God? Do we come purely for doing God’s will, or do we come for other motives?

We thank God that apart from God’s will, we don’t come for other

motives. In this way, we will find grace, and walk firmly and surely on this path until the end. But if we do come with other motives, may the Lord deliver us from all impurities so that our relationships are completely based on the will of God. May God and His will be the only reason for our following the Lord all the days of our life. May this also be the only reason for the coordination and connection among ourselves. Only such serving is pleasing to God and precious in His eyes.



# **Shammah and Josheb-Basshebeth**





# Shammah (1)

*(September 3, 1990 — Discussion of Co-worker Bro. Bartholomew during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

*And after him was Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite. The Philistines had gathered together into a troop where there was a piece of ground full of lentils. So the people fled from the Philistines. But he stationed himself in the middle of the field, defended it, and killed the Philistines. So the LORD brought about a great victory.*

*(2 Sam. 23:11–12)*

David was specially anointed by God to build the kingdom of God. God also gave him many mighty men to help him achieve this mission. The verse above mentions Shammah, the son of Agee the Hararite. He was one of the three renowned mighty men of David. When the people of Israel fled from the Philistines who gathered themselves to go against them, Shammah was the only one who stood fearlessly in the Lord's field, killed the enemies, and defended God's inheritance. Many of David's mighty men had the special trait of treasuring the inheritance of God. Shammah was one of them.

It was close to the harvest. The field was full of lentils, which the people of Israel needed for food. When the Philistines wanted to plunder the harvest, the people of Israel fled from them. Most of the Israelites thought that saving their lives was more important than saving some food. But Shammah thought differently. He knew that it was not just a matter of food, but more importantly, the inheritance of God. He treasured God's inheritance more than his own life.

The Philistines were a thorn in the flesh to the Israelites. They were invaders from the sea and they were more highly skilled in making weapons than the Israelites. As a result, the Israelites lost many battles to them. The following Bible verses clearly show the situation: "Now there was no

blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, 'Lest the Hebrews make swords or spears.' But all the Israelites would go down to the Philistines to sharpen each man's plowshare, his mattock, his ax, and his sickle; and the charge for a sharpening was a pim for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to set the points of the goads. So it came about, on the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people who were with Saul and Jonathan. But they were found with Saul and Jonathan his son" (1 Sam. 13:19–22).

Shammah did not face the well-armed enemy with his own courage. He knew he had to trust in the LORD God who had chosen David and helped David possess the kingdom, and not to battle with swords and spears. He also knew that God would bear full responsibility for David and protect the inheritance of David. This recognition of Shammah enabled him to take a stand and fight for Israel. Because of his faith, God manifested His warring powers and helped him to defeat the Philistines. In this battle, Shammah had withstood a severe test of fighting the enemies alone.

While serving God, we often face a similar test. When we have many companions with us, we tend to be full of the militant spirit and courage in confronting the enemy. But when we are alone, we tend to pity ourselves, become dismayed, and end up fleeing from the enemies.

Shammah means "desolate and lonely." Every successful vessel has to go through loneliness as Shammah did. God's maidservant Sis. Kong and God's servant Bro. Hong also experienced the test of loneliness. All these witnesses of God know that the battles of man's kingdom depend on the multitude, whereas the battle of God's kingdom depends on justice and righteousness.

On the battlefield of God's kingdom, when circumstances are adverse,

and when everyone has turned against the Truth and left, only one vessel who courageously stands firm is enough to ravage the ferocious power of the enemy. God's inheritance will still be protected; God's work will be accomplished; and God's kingdom will be realized.

Shammah was the mainstay of Israel. We greatly admire a vessel like Shammah who stood firm amidst all the dangers. He did not care for his own safety. All he knew was to faithfully defend the field, guard against the Philistines and stand firm even if he was the only one left.

Today God wants us to assume a similar ministry. When the whole world is against God, He wants the New Testament Church to stand firm for Him. This is a lonely path. Samson experienced it, so did Shammah. We have also experienced loneliness all these years. When the dominion of the Kuomintang (KMT) overpowered us like the Philistines, many people told us, "The New Testament Church thinks of going against the KMT? Forget it! No one has ever overcome them in forty years! Be smart. Forget about opposing the KMT. You'll never succeed."

While we were on the riverbed, the KMT uttered more serious threats against us, saying, "You can never return to Zion! If you can, I will carry your luggage for you." They said the same thing in court, "Be smart. This is a political case." The world did not believe that the New Testament Church, which seemed insignificant, could actually defeat a regime that had swords and spears.

The New Testament Church is today's Shammah. How did the New Testament Church defeat the KMT? By defending God's inheritance at His command. During the battle against the KMT, the Lord's servant held fast to the vision of holy Mount Zion and led the New Testament Church — today's Shammah — to stand firm in defending God's inheritance. With faith, we have written down this unusual record. No wonder recently, when many people looked at this part of our history, they said,

“You are the only group that has stood firm under the forty-year-old despotic regime in Taiwan!”

Today, God has not only made His children in Taiwan stand firm at the lentil field at Lehi, but has also raised up witnesses like Shammah in the whole world. In the battlefield in Singapore, a group of Shammahs stood firm. In Malaysia, another group of Shammahs stood firm, and the same in America. We can see Shammahs even in China. After hearing the testimonies of our brothers and sisters in China, we felt that they are truly the present-day Shammahs. They are opposing the Philistines who have swords and spears, a bestial regime which no one dares to offend. Today, God wants to gain a group of mighty men like Shammah, who, for the sake of the Truth and God’s inheritance, would stand firm even to death.

In the past, I thought it was no surprise that David established his kingdom successfully because he had so many mighty men. But recently when I researched on these mighty men, I have a more profound perception. These mighty men were undoubtedly brave, but if God did not raise up David, their proud records of bravery would not be of much value. For all their boldness and repeated success in battles were predestined by God for the sake of David. In other words, their names were recorded in the Scriptures and they had a share in helping David to possess the kingdom, not only because they came to help David, but because God raised them up for David. The value and significance of their existence rested on David. Had they not lived, fought and risked their lives for David, they would not be all that great before God. They might have just been considered as military men, at the most.

I used to think that David was blessed, because he had so many mighty men helping him, but now I realize that the mighty men of David were the most blessed. When they fought together with David, they were not merely winning a battle, but receiving a glorious kingdom with him. So, they were truly the mighty men who realized God’s kingdom. The highest value of

their lives was to help David possess the kingdom. The same principle applies to our ministration today. It is not because we are able to help the Lord's servant, but rather, God has given him to us and made our ministration invaluable. We are blessed because the God who helps His servant receive the kingdom has chosen us. He also let us possess and enjoy the kingdom with him. Hallelujah!

According to Today's English Version, the lentil field, where Shammah stood, was called Lehi. The book of the Judges also mentions that Samson once fought with the Philistines at Lehi.

*Now the Philistines went up, encamped in Judah, and deployed themselves against Lehi. And the men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" So they answered, "We have come up to arrest Samson, to do to him as he has done to us." Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us? What is this you have done to us?" And he said to them, "As they did to me, so I have done to them." But they said to him, "We have come down to arrest you, that we may deliver you into the hand of the Philistines." Then Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves." So they spoke to him, saying, "No, but we will tie you securely and deliver you into their hand; but we will surely not kill you." And they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock. When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting against him. Then the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him; and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds broke loose from his hands. He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it. Then Samson said: "With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of a donkey I have slain a thousand men!" And so it was, when he had finished speaking, that he threw the jawbone from his hand, and called that place Ramath Lehi.*

(Judg. 15:9–17)

The Philistines had to pass through Lehi on their way to Israel. During the time of Samson they came by the way of Lehi to attack Israel. In David's time, the Philistines also came from Lehi trying to interfere with the establishment of David's kingdom. Lehi was a strategic point as well as an eyesore to the enemies. They often raided this place, but had always ended up in a failure.

First of all, Samson was brought to Lehi, with his hands tied up. But God gave him strength to break the ropes, reach out his hand, and seize a fresh jawbone of a donkey, with which he defeated the entire Philistine army. This time around, Shammah was standing on the same spot, assuming the same ministry. Samson's heroic feat at Lehi must have encouraged him to stand still in the lentil field there. He knew that it would be a fight for God's kingdom, and that God would protect the inheritance He gave to David.

The testimony of holy Mount Zion is today's Lehi. All these years, our strength to fight came from Mount Zion. After reading the letters of Sis. Cecilia, we wondered: how could she stand firm in the lentil field? Where did she get the strength to fight alone under such adverse circumstances in the Edomite prison? She did it by remembering this man and this mountain. She was fighting for David and for the land which God gave David. This is why she has become a mighty warrior. This is so amazing!

The Philistines (signifying man's kingdom) did not learn their lesson despite being defeated twice at Lehi. I am sure they did keep a historical account on their encounter with Samson, a "superman" whose source of strength was unknown; and they were defeated even though they were well-armed. This time, when they came to Lehi, they thought they would not meet another Samson. Indeed they didn't. But they met Shammah who defeated them just the same. They did not understand why. This proves that God looks after the house of Israel.

In this last era, when all of God's children in the denominations have backslided, God raised up His maidservant Sis. Kong. She stood still and restored the greatest mystery of the Truth in the twentieth century. And through her, the Holy Spirit rebuilt the glorious New Testament Church. The human kingdoms were furious at her.

In 1965, when Sis. Kong wanted to come to Taiwan, the KMT denied her a visa. But later, they allowed her in but only for seven days. After Sis. Kong rested in the Lord, many people speculated that the New Testament Church would come to an end. When Ruth Cheung succeeded her mother's ministry, the New Testament Church became even more prosperous. The New Testament Church did not end. When Ruth Cheung fell from grace, again many present-day Philistines said happily that the New Testament Church was almost over.

Unexpectedly, in 1976, God raised up His servant Bro. Hong, who posed an even bigger headache to the KMT. Whenever the New Testament Church faced a crisis, she looked hopeless. But when this person stood still in the field at Lehi, which is the mountain of inheritance, the kingdom of God appeared.

In 1976, when God's servant led the children of God to stand firm in this field — the foundation laid by God's maidservant Sis. Kong — God gave the New Testament Church a great victory. Lehi testifies that the New Testament Church will not be destroyed but will instead crush and annihilate all her enemies.

Lehi was also a place where the Israelites failed and suffered humiliation. In Samson's time, the Philistines came to Lehi and demanded the men of Judah to hand Samson over. By right, these Israelites should have asked Samson to lead them to fight the enemy, but instead, they were such cowards that they requested Samson to be bound and delivered to the Philistines.

History repeated itself in David's time. At the same place, facing the same enemy, the Israelites fled from the Philistines in the same way as if they had not learned anything from their past failure. In our carnal lives, we have the same condition: We often fail on the same old lesson. And what is this Lehi in our lives? Speaking from my life experiences in all these years, I realize that we have all kinds of illnesses in our carnal lives. If these illnesses are left uncured, be they big or small, they will all gradually evolve into a symptom — disagreeing with the Lord's servant. This is Lehi in our lives. It often begins with having a different opinion from that of the Lord's servant. But if we ignore the problem and do not deal with it at once, the Philistines (carnal lives) will begin to attack us. It may appear to be a small matter at first, but we may end up blaming the Lord's servant, even disbelieving his ministry, and at the end, suffer a crushing defeat.

For example, sometime ago when the Lord's servant mentioned the benefits of camellia oil, I thought to myself: Camellia oil is indisputably a good product but it is too expensive, and not in line with everyone's budget. When people cannot afford it, how do we provide for their needs? I was dull in the spirit. Not only had I failed to respond to the message of the Lord's servant, worse still, I was nonchalant. Until one Sunday, when I was seeking for a message to deliver, I discovered that my spirit was in darkness and suppressed. I was terrified in the spirit, and wanted to run away from the service, but later I decided to pray to the Lord and asked Him to shine His light on me.

Suddenly, God spoke to me, saying, "What are you seeking for? You've been cut off from the Lord's anointing long ago." He meant that my response towards camellia oil had kept me away from the anointing of God. I was jolted to my senses. Immediately, I went to look for all the messages about camellia oil in the "Zion Spiritual Flow," and read them very carefully. I read them word by word, including all the technical terms. I realized that this was no longer camellia oil but the anointing of God, which

was upon the head of Aaron, running down on the beard and running down on the edge of his garments. At that instant, I was totally immersed in the mercy and grace of God. That Sunday, I shared with the brothers and sisters an abundant spiritual feast of the holy anointment rather than just mere camellia oil.

In our ministration, we often run into predicaments like the Israelites at Lehi: We can't continue serving any longer and are about to flee from the enemies. What else can we do? We thank God. At such a moment, He often gives us the spirit of Shammah, so we gain the grace and courage to deal with the Philistines. Where does the grace and courage come from? They will come upon us when we renew our confidence in today's David whom God has raised up, and when we follow him. This is the spirit of Shammah — to live, fight, and even sacrifice for the vessel of the era. Shammah was the mighty man the Philistines dreaded most. So, when we read about Shammah, we are full of thanksgiving in the spirit.

The Philistines (our enemies) are constantly glaring at us like a tiger eyeing its prey. They plan to plunder God's inheritance and destroy the faith of His children. Although we often fail, as long as we are determined to co-work with the vessel of the era, the spirit of Shammah will fill us. We will be able to stand firm, and the Philistines will not annihilate us. Instead, we will destroy them. We are blessed. By the mercy and choice of God, we have the chance to co-work with His servant and become the mighty men of His servant in these last days. May we all become today's Shammah.

## Shammah (2)

### *Shammah Who Devours the Enemy*

*(September 4, 1990 — Message of the Lord's servant Bro. Victor Pi during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

*The third of the famous three was Shammah son of Agee, from Harar. The Philistines had gathered at Lehi, where there was a field of peas. The Israelites fled from the Philistines, but Shammah stood his ground in the field, defended it, and killed the Philistines. The LORD won a great victory that day.*

(2 Sam. 23:11–12, TEV)

In all generations, before God revives His work, He will first raise up a vessel to lead that generation to accomplish His epochal entrustment. At the same time He will also choose a group of vessels to help the spiritual leader fulfill this work of revival. When God wanted to establish the kingdom of David, He did not only raise up David but also prepared a group of mighty men to help David. These mighty men and the Israelites needed both God and His anointed one. In the same way David also needed both God and these mighty men. They had to help one another to accomplish the work of God.

Not all vessels chosen and edified by God are the same. In the house of God, there are vessels of gold, silver, wood and clay. Some are noble, some are ignoble; some are outstanding, some are common; some are obedient, and some are rebellious.

Some vessels, because of their faith and courage, can devour the enemies. The enemies are their food. They acquire the nutrients for their growth by devouring the enemies. To them, the enemies are a feast, just as lambs are to lions. They can eat to their heart's content. Shammah was such a vessel. When the Philistines were besieging him and the Israelites

were fleeing, he still stood firm. He was a hero on the battlefield. His ability to devour the enemies could only be shown in the face of the enemies. But when there were no battles and when he left the battlefield, he would not be able to manifest this special function which God had given him.

Another kind of vessel is just the opposite. To him, the enemies are formidable. He sees himself as the prey. To him, going to the battlefield is like going to the guillotine. He would be scared and would likely flee like the Israelites as described above.

While the KMT was fighting against the Japanese, there were quite a few cowardly generals. Liu Zhi was one of them. The Japanese newspapers ridiculed him, saying, "Liu Zhi retreated 800 miles from us. Not even our (Japanese) fighter planes and artilleries could catch up with him." The Israelites, being the chosen people of God, also fled before the enemies. So it is no surprise that these godless gentiles are so cowardly.

Within the camp of the Israelites who left Egypt, there were two kinds of vessels: One who devoured the enemies, and the other one who was devoured by the enemies.

*But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: "The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, 'a land which flows with milk and honey.' Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them."*

(Num. 14:6–9)

*Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up*

*at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.” But the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.” And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”*

(Num. 13:30–33)

The twelve spies mentioned here were the leaders of the twelve tribes. They were all considered vessels. They all said that the land they spied on was flowing with milk and honey. Their descriptions of the land were more or less the same as that of Joshua and Caleb, except concerning the people there.

Joshua and Caleb said, “They are bread for us. Let us go up at once, for we are well able to overcome them. The LORD is with us. He has already defeated those gods who protected them. Their protection has departed from them.” They were full of confidence and courage.

But the other ten spies said, “It’s a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people there are giants. They are men of great stature and their cities are fortified and very strong. We are like grasshoppers in their sight.” They were so timid and cowardly, and had such low self-esteem.

In the New Testament Church, there are also vessels of these two kinds. Over the past twenty years, God has revealed vessels like Shammah, Joshua and Caleb in the New Testament Church. When Cheung and Chen turned apostate, the waves of apostasy almost swept away the entire New Testament Church. Many of the co-workers were devoured and the foundation of faith was almost destroyed. At this time, the Lord’s servant Bro. Hong stood still and saved the situation. He gave every co-worker a copy

of the 13-page letter of apostasy and let every one decide for himself. He was determined to hold fast to the Truth even if everyone else had fallen away and he was the only one left. Thus the New Testament Church — a field full of lentils — was protected and became as revived as it is today. Nevertheless, the New Testament Church has endless afflictions.

After having battled against apostasy, the persecution of the KMT began. We confronted the police, the special agents and the riot troops of the KMT almost everyday for the will of God and for the vision of Zion. The Lord's servant was dauntless. For over ten years, he fought against the wild beast — the KMT. In all the battlefields in Taiwan and overseas, both in the East and in the West, God also raised up many vessels like Shammah to face the authoritarian regime of the KMT and its all-pervasive secret agents in one accord with the Lord's servant. These mighty men of valor, whose faces were like the faces of lions, helped today's David with an undivided heart. They were vessels who could devour the enemies. They deserve to be called the mighty men of today's David.

On the other hand, there was another group of people in the New Testament Church. Some of them were even leaders of the tribes of Israel, who considered the KMT as devourers and they themselves as preys. Their hearts melted before the enemies and they fled from battles and afflictions. They were like the ten evil spies who brought to the people the evil report, saying, "How can Hong fight against the KMT? He is dashing eggs against the rock." Is the New Testament Church as fragile as an egg? If you consider the New Testament Church as an egg, let me tell you: this egg is still in one piece; she is not broken! On the contrary, those you considered as the "rock" — have been shattered! So, now you know that the KMT is not a real rock, but only a clay pot. Besides, the New Testament Church is not an egg. She is a stone cut out not with man's hand. It shall fly from the mountain and strike into pieces the great image of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay — the kingdoms of man. It's a regret that these blind guides could not see the origin and power of this stone.

What makes devouring vessels different from vessels who are devoured? It is their *faith* and *insight*. Shammah trusted David, the anointed one of God, and the God whom David worshipped. He believed that how God bore all the responsibilities of David, He would also bear his responsibilities because he co-worked with David. He must be familiar with the history of how David killed Goliath:

*Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel."*

(1 Sam. 17:45–46)

David focused his eyes on the LORD of hosts and despised Goliath. He believed that God would deliver Goliath into his hand. Likewise, Shammah believed that God would deliver the uncircumcised Philistines into his hand. And this depended on faith and insight.

A person who is spiritually blind judges by the naked eyes. Therefore, what he sees are illusions, not reality. When such a person faces the enemies, his eyes become like magnifying glasses. To him, the enemies are formidable, high and mighty, and unrivalled. When he thinks that he is going to lose his life, he forgets all about God and His anointed one. They may cross his mind occasionally but they are too insignificant to affect him. He is dismayed at the first sight of the enemies and his heart melts even before he goes to the battlefield. Such people will surely end up as the prey.

Through battles, God reveals who are Shammahs, and who are the fleeing Israelites; who are Joshua and Caleb and who are the ten evil spies.

Since God is all-knowing, why does He need to test His vessels with battles? God knows everything, but men do not. Without the battle at Lehi, how would the Israelites know their own pathetic condition of fleeing before the enemies? And how would they know that Shammah was a mighty man and the bravest of all? Moreover, it was through battles that David could decide how to grant his awards.

Brothers and sisters, God is righteous. Our reward will also depend on what we do and how we react on the battlefield today. So don't worry about being ignored and don't try to be an opportunist. Otherwise, you will not be able to stand firm before the Lord on that Day. God is in heaven and His eyes search the entire earth. We cannot hide anything from Him.

At the battle of Lehi, Shammah was the mainstay of the people of Israel. He stood still and turned around the entire situation. He brought about a great victory for Israel. Though he didn't know what a "selfless lamb" was, he was practically filled with the spirit of the selfless Lamb.

A selfless spirit is the spirit of a martyr — a living sacrifice. A person with a selfless spirit will not count his life dear to himself. He only thinks of killing the enemies, and of being faithful to the Lord's trust. He does not care about his own life and safety. Only such a vessel can fully demonstrate unrivalled power and authority.

Today, God is looking for such kind of vessels in His house. The Spirit of God is with the brave, not the timid. For God has given us a spirit of courage, not of fear. Hence, Christian soldiers become braver as they fight. Shammah brought a good victory at Lehi.

Lehi means "jawbone." Samson, the judge, had once killed a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey he found there. Lehi was an old battlefield. It was a strategic location, a place an army would fight for. Was

Shammah risking his life to fight just for the lentil field? Was he not fighting for the strategic location? Indeed, he was protecting the gate to God's inheritance.

If the gate of a house is crushed, all the properties in the house will be looted. So when Shammah secured this strategic location, the inheritance of the house of God was protected. We can see that he was not only a fighter, but also a brave and outstanding strategist who turned a crisis into a victory. He was a vessel who understood the will of God and the mind of the anointed one of God.

Lehi also has a deep spiritual meaning. In every one of us, there is also a strategic location, which the Holy Spirit and Satan fight for. At this location the Holy Spirit wants us to defeat Satan, whereas Satan wants to defeat us and devour us. This location is the key to success and life. If we trust in the Holy Spirit to defeat Satan, we are winners. But if we mind our flesh, and refuse to put our body under subjection, we will be pathetic losers. We will become captives and food for Satan.

Let's look at some Scriptural examples so that we can better understand. Joab and Abner both died a tragic and violent death. What was their vulnerable spot? Being disrespectful to God's anointing. This resulted in their tragic endings. Both Joab and Abner died on account of this fatal flaw, which was the spiritual strategic point in them where God and Satan fought. Neither of them defended this point with all their might. Eventually Satan gained the upper hand and they suffered a crushing defeat.

In the beginning, Abishai was the same as his brother Joab. He also didn't respect God's anointing and lent a helping hand in the assassination of Abner. But towards the end, he fought for David, respected God's anointing, and sympathized with David. He was victorious in this aspect and was remembered and protected by God.

Today, the failure or success of the co-workers and brothers and sisters of the New Testament Church also depends on this aspect. Where is our vulnerable spot? It is different for every individual. For some of you, it may be youthful lusts. Satan keeps attacking you with evil lusts, and wants to conquer you in this aspect. Brothers and sisters, especially the youths, you must fight against Satan and evil desires. If you overcome them, you will be the spiritual Shammah and mighty men on the spiritual battlefields. If you lose the battle, the enemies will devour you.

The Achilles' heel of some others is money. They cannot overcome the enticement of wealth. As for the rest, it could be the glory of man, praises, power, position, affection, jealousy, personal grudges, and so forth. If you cannot subdue Satan and your old self in these weak spots, you will be defeated and will not be able to enter the kingdom of God.

Brothers and sisters, you know where your weaknesses are. All you have to do is search within yourself. Whatever problematic area you have is your weak spot. You must imitate Shammah to fight against the besieging enemy, and triumph over it by the Lord's grace. This is defending God's inheritance because we are God's inheritance. God will protect all those who love His inheritance.

Shammah means "obedient." At the lentil field in Lehi, Shammah was the only person who was obedient. In any battle, the commander is the one who gives orders. He would never give the order to pull out before a battle is over. During the battle at Lehi, the Bible didn't say that the Israelite pulled out, but fled before the enemy. They were not ordered to pull out, so they were disobeying a military command. Shammah was the only person who obeyed the command to station himself, and refused to flee before the enemy. This was a very risky move.

"And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Phil.

2:8). To be obedient is to die to yourself or to deny yourself. If the carnal self is not put to death, you will fail to obey. Our Lord was obedient to the point of death. Because of His death, we live, and because of his obedience, we gain life.

In the battle at Lehi, death was at work in Shammah, but life in the people of Israel. Because of the obedience of Shammah, the battle turned from defeat to victory and the Israelites were saved from the pursuit of the Philistines. Not only was the strategic location preserved, the gate of Israel and the inheritance of God were also protected. And the lives of the Israelites were saved.

Brothers and sisters, obedience is the way to strength, and the secret to victory. Shammah is an example of obedience for us. Today, many in the New Testament Church are obedient to the Lord's servant. But this is not adequate. You must also obey those sent by the Lord's servant, even if these people may not be as good as you are in certain areas. To obey the leading of this kind of people requires death to the carnal self. Without dying to yourself, you will not be able to obey. But if you have learned to obey in this aspect, then you will be an overcomer.

# **Shammah and Josheb-Basshebeth (3)**

*(September 5, 1990 — Message of the Lord's servant Bro. Elijah Hong during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

## **The Ultimate Warrior Who Turned the Tide**

God cares for Zion and establishes her above all hills. Zion is the city of the great King, the place where the King of kings, Jesus Christ, sits enthroned. The glory, power, and abundance of God's kingdom are manifested here. Zion is the other kingdom established by God. The glorious New Testament Church is here to testify for this kingdom. Her mission is to execute God's power, and realize His kingdom. When the kingdom of God has been brought in, the kingdoms of man will be crushed.

The 1990s is the decade for God to crush the kingdoms of man. For this reason, God needs more mighty men who can help today's David build the kingdom. Lately, we have been discussing about the mighty men of David. Today, we are going to talk about Shammah.

Like Eleazar, Shammah was one of the three renowned mighty men. Eleazar defeated the Philistines by himself, and had defended a plot of barley field, whereas Shammah defended a plot of land full of lentils. The locations and the crops were different, but both were the inheritance and land which God gave to His people. Eleazar and Shammah treasured and safeguarded not only the barley and lentils, but also the land of God's kingdom.

Today, God wants us to display the same testimony. Shammah and Eleazar had the same trait. Both stood still and turned around the situation while everyone else fled. They were overcomers in times of trouble. All the mighty men of David were extraordinary. But the Scriptures mention several times that most mighty men "did not attain to the three," meaning they were not included among the three mighty men: Eleazar,

Shammah and Josheb-Basshebeth. This shows that Shammah and the other two were the most prominent mighty men. They must have had some traits that the other mighty men did not have. What made them so outstanding? They were able to stand still while everyone fled.

There are two kinds of situations when you fight alone. One is when the enemies surround you. At that time you have no choice but to fight the enemies all by yourself. The second one is when you go out to fight with everybody, but they all retreat at the critical moment. You stay back to fight alone. Only the latter is the mainstay of the group, and is able to withstand the beating of the relentless tide. He is standing on such a firm foundation that cannot be shaken.

The Lord's maidservant Sis. Kong was truly like Shammah. She left us a good example. When both the false and true co-workers left her, she remained steadfast in the faith. And when her own daughter joined the foolish co-workers to oppose her, she still stood firm. When Satan sees this steadfast attitude he will be dismayed.

Frankly speaking, the victory that the New Testament Church enjoys today was won by the Lord's maidservant who stood still alone on the battlefield, just as Shammah and Eleazar did. Sis. Kong was the vessel that brought about a great victory to the house of God. This vessel had this spiritual trait: Even if no one obeys, I will still stand on the Lord's side and hold fast to what I have.

We hope that the Lord will let us have Shammah's experience. Not everyone can simply display this testimony of being the mainstay among his fleeing companions. He must be bright towards the vision before he can stand firm on the battlefield. A person without vision can never assume such a ministry. Sis. Kong was able to hold fast to the Truth so persistently because she had a profound knowledge of the Truth. She was certain that this Truth came from God and was entrusted to her to preach.

Even if no one believed or accepted it, she would remain faithful to the Truth until the end. She was not being stubborn but steadfastly keeping the Truth of God. Only a person like her is worthy to become the leader of God's people. If a person cannot hold fast to the Truth God has entrusted him, and would give it up as soon as someone opposes him, he is not worthy to become a leader.

God has also allowed us to have this kind of battle and experience. There was a period of time when the faith of many co-workers and brothers and sisters were put to test because of some aspect of the Truth and the leading of God among us. They pointed at me and said, "Bro. Hong, you are too stubborn!" But I felt that I was not being stubborn. I was holding fast to the vision which God wanted me to hold fast to by His grace. And I was faithful to the Truth, which God had entrusted me to preach.

Brothers and sisters, if I were a person who drifts with the tide, I think it would be in vain for you to follow me. In other words, it would be valueless for you to follow someone or regard him as leader if he cannot hold fast to the vision that God gave him until the end, or if he stops preaching what he has been preaching whenever he encounters some opposition. Actually, such a person would not be the leader appointed by God.

Ruth Cheung is an example. She was once faithful to God's entrustment and had preached the Truth diligently, but later she changed her tune completely because she could not withstand the trial of losing her beloved son. She even overturned the foundation of the Truth, which Sis. Kong had laid. She was not like Shammah, who was the mainstay of God's people, and was remembered by God. As often as we mention the mighty men of David, we would especially mention Eleazar and Shammah, two of the three mighty men.

## No Personal Interests, Only the Will of God

Today, I would like to talk about the other one of the three renowned mighty men. We often mention of Eleazar and Shammah, but not this one. The third one whom we often ignore was actually the leader of “The Three.” He was Josheb-Basshebeth. Let’s read 2 Samuel 23:8, “These are the names of the mighty men whom David had: Josheb-Basshebeth the Tachmonite, chief among the captains.” Verse 9: “And after him was Eleazar the son of Dodo, the Ahohite...” Verse 11: “And after him was Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite...” Today’s English Version says that the first one was Josheb-Basshebeth, the second was Eleazar, and the third was Shammah. We often discuss about the second and the third because the Scriptures mention more about them and we neglect the first one who is the most important.

Josheb-Basshebeth was the first of the prominent three. He was the chief among the captains. He bore a lot of responsibilities and must have won lots of awards. But the Scriptures only mention that he killed eight hundred men at one time. It is not stated how brave he was or where he killed the eight hundred. He had accomplished a great deal, yet so little was mentioned in the Bible about him. If you were he, how would you feel? Well, you may say, “Thank and praise the Lord. As long as the Lord knows, it’s good enough. I am doing things before the Lord and for the Lord, not before men or for men. My reward is with the Lord, who searches the hearts of man, and watches man in secret. I don’t care if people know about my deeds or not.”

Josheb-Basshebeth’s achievements were important historical records to be read by generations, yet so little of them were recorded. As for Eleazar and Shammah, who were the second and the third, so much of their deeds were written in detail. Even so, Josheb-Basshebeth was able to withstand this trial. To him, it didn’t matter whether people knew him or had recorded all that he did. He would be happy as long as the will of God was done, the evil gangs were eliminated, and that he could help David to

establish the kingdom. It didn't matter to him when more records were made on others' battle achievements and his name was forgotten. He didn't fight for fame or seek rewards for what he had done. He only wanted to accomplish the will of God. This was the greatness of Josheb-Basshebeth and the special trait of the chief among the captains. A spiritual leader who helps David to gain the kingdom must possess this trait.

### **True and Sincere towards the Vision**

The Scriptures say that Josheb-Basshebeth was a Tachmonite. "Tachmonite" means sharp and bright. He was brought up in an environment which had both spiritual sharpness and brightness. He was certain that God raised him up as one of the mighty men to help David gain his kingdom. As long as David could gain the kingdom, he was ready to sacrifice his own glory and interests. For this reason, he always focused on God and on His entrustment, and paid no attention to what kind of work he was doing, or whether others had noticed him or made detail records of him. He was true and sincere towards the vision. This was the testimony displayed by Josheb-Basshebeth.

To attain this realm, it is easier said than done. People often tell me, "It's strange, the latest Spiritual Flow reported of the 7.21 glorious works of God in all the churches except ours. We have sent in our report a long time ago. I wonder: why wasn't it published? There were so many glorious works of God among us, but Sis. Li-chu only briefly reported some of them." For this reason, in order to record all the heroic deeds, we must print every letter we received. Some people said, "Gee! This is getting out of hand! Can we just choose a few to represent all?" I said, "You know, every one of them will want to represent others." If we are not delivered from this kind of degenerate nature we will pass our life in sorrow. I have quite a bit of experience in this.

Often times, there would be a group of youth gathering around me, calling me, "Grandpa Hong, Grandpa Hong!" If I touch the head of this

one and not the other one, that one would feel jealous. If I also touch him, he will be very happy. Man by nature likes to get attention. Brothers and sisters, this kind of degenerate nature is often exposed by God in spiritual matters. In fact, the more you hide yourself, the more God will reveal you. The more you humble yourself, the more God will exalt you. Conversely, the more you try to exalt yourself, the lower you will be brought down.

Throughout the past twenty to thirty years since the New Testament Church was rebuilt, many people wanted to be a “somebody.” Unfortunately, none of them was able to withstand the trial of being ignored. They wanted everyone to know their bravery, virtues, and accomplishments. Otherwise, they would be in agony and feel restless. On one hand, they feared that their ugliness would be exposed, and on the other, they feared that their merits would not be noticed. So, they had no peace of mind in whatever they did.

Today, God wants to acquire vessels like Josheb-Basshebeth. May we all desire for the special trait of Josheb-Basshebeth. Pray that we will be able to withstand the trial of being neglected, forgotten, unnoticed, or even of being unfairly treated. If we learn our lesson, God will be able to work more freely in us. This does not mean that from now on, we shouldn’t tell others anything that God has done through us. We shouldn’t think that by speaking out, Bro. Hong would think that we are not imitating Josheb-Basshebeth. We still have to reveal the glorious works that God has done through us.

Some people speak out in order to gain fame. They would be sad if you didn’t let them know that you had heard what they said, and that you acknowledged it. A person who has the spirit of Josheb-Basshebeth would speak to glorify God and edify men. He would not care whether you appreciated what he did or whether you had heard clearly what he told you. This is not an outward imitation, but practical learning in the spirit: I only know that I should be faithful to God and His will. I only seek to help

David possess the kingdom. I only care to defend David from the raiders. When these raiders come, I'll fight courageously and kill 800 men at one time. This is not an easy mission. Only a vessel who is pure towards the vision can accomplish this divine mission.

### **Not for Name or Gain, Nor for Fame**

Josheb-Basshebeth was the chief among the captains. He was truly outstanding. His human nature had been thoroughly refined and dealt with by God. Hence, God could work freely in him, and He was magnified through him. The immense power of God was also shown through him. We should experience what Josheb-Basshebeth had experienced. We have to display the testimony Josheb-Basshebeth displayed, and we are able to display it.

By His mercies, God has called us, and showed us the vision of the era. He separated us from the world and the denominations so we might join today's David. He wants us to fight alongside David until we establish his kingdom. How God was merciful to the mighty men of David, He will also be merciful to us.

In the days to come, let us all the more enjoy this superior spiritual realm. When our hard labors are being forgotten, may we be as surpassing as Josheb-Basshebeth was. Although not many people knew him or knew what he had done, he was still the chief among the captains. The Bible especially says that he was the chief of "The Three." His accomplishments were not written in detail but he was still the chief. Even though more was written about the second and third mighty men, Josheb-Basshebeth was still the first. The first will always remain the first. The order of God is always firm. God searches the hearts of man. He doesn't judge by appearance. So, let us imitate Josheb-Basshebeth who did not seek for name or gain, and who could withstand being "buried." God in heaven has seen and recorded all our works. Our reward is with Him.

God brought the Israelites out of Egypt and led them into the land of Canaan, where they conquered the seven tribes of Canaan. God's plan for the Israelites was to establish the kingdom of David and realize the kingdom of God on earth. Today, God wants the glorious New Testament Church — the true Israelites — to fight for His kingdom. He wants us to concretely usher in His kingdom and realize His eternal plan. This mission was symbolized by David and his mighty men who attacked the raiders and established the kingdom of David. David was very blessed to have a group of mighty men to fight for his kingdom.

Today, God also needs many mighty men to fight for His kingdom. May we all imitate the mighty men of David to be faithful in the vision, and have a pure motive in our ministration. Then the power of God's kingdom will be fully manifested on us. We shall execute this power to all nations until all the gangs of the kingdoms of the world are exterminated. The kingdom of Christ which is signified by the kingdom of David will be realized on earth, and the end-time will of God will be done!

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# Jonathan





# Jonathan (1)

*(September 8, 1990 — Discussion of Co-worker Bro. Peter Chen during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

Jonathan, the eldest son of King Saul, was a kind man with outstanding talent. Although he always loved and cared for David, he failed to keep up with God's will (the flow of the Holy Spirit) in joining the wandering David at the crucial time. He remained in Saul's camp and was killed together with his wicked father. What a regret. Jonathan's death serves as a warning to us.

The Lord's servant said that God would not use good men, much less evil men, but only the men of God. From the consequence of Jonathan, we can conclude that God blesses and shows delight not in people of good moral character, much less evil people, but in righteous people who abide by God's will. While the house of David was in conflict with the house of Saul, the house of David who abided by God's will was a group of righteous men while the house of Saul who opposed God's will was a group of evil men. It was unfortunate that within this group of evil men was the good man Jonathan. However, if a good man does not want to come out of an evil bloc, his goodness will be valueless and he will eventually perish with the evil.

## Jonathan's Sentiments and Morals

Jonathan was an outstanding individual. At the battle of Michmash, he and his armorbearer trusted in the LORD and crossed over to the enemies' camp boldly, killing about twenty Philistines within an acre of land. It was a ferocious battle and Jonathan showed his unique boldness.

The Scriptures say: "All the Philistines in the countryside were terrified; the raiders and the soldiers in the camp trembled with fear; the earth shook, and there was great panic" (1 Sam. 14:15, TEV). The LORD helped

Jonathan by throwing the Philistines into a panic, causing them to kill each other. When the Israelites saw that, they seized the opportunity to kill them and won a great victory. Jonathan was a knowledgeable, intelligent and brave military man. He was also good at making plans and decisions. While pursuing the enemies that day, Saul had placed the people under oath, saying, “Cursed be any man who eats food before evening comes...” But Jonathan said, “How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now would there not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?” (1 Sam. 14:30). Jonathan’s words showed that he had a nimble mind. Had he helped David to exterminate the thieves, he would have become one of the mighty men.

Jonathan was also a man of sympathy and kindheartedness, which can be seen through his relationship with David. The Bible says: “Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (1 Sam. 18:1). “Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul” (1 Sam. 18:3). After Jonathan died, David lamented over him with the “Song of the Bow,” saying, “I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me; your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women” (2 Sam. 1:26).

David and Jonathan were both heroes. They understood and loved each other. This friendship was built on their excellences and merits. It would be great if such excellence of Jonathan could be used to help David establish his kingdom. Then David would be king over Israel and Jonathan would be second to David. (See 1 Samuel 23:17.) They would have been complements to each other, and their nation would be a blessing.

Jonathan protected and cared for David by speaking well of him many times. (See 1 Samuel 19:4–6 and 20:27–34.) He saved him from Saul’s killing (See 1 Samuel 19 & 20), and made a covenant with David. (See 1

Samuel 18:3; 20:14–16 and 23:16–18.)

In man's concept, Jonathan had done his best to care for David who was his father's enemy. For him to brave the wrath of the king and disobey his father in helping David was something "special." In short, Jonathan was a good man. But why did he die young and end up with such a tragic end? The reasons are:

First, Jonathan was a compassionate and caring man, but not a righteous man who absolutely obeyed God's will. Second, Jonathan was a moral person, but not a righteous person who held fast to the vision at the crucial moment. He liked to maintain the status quo and failed to keep up with the flow of the Holy Spirit. He was a filial son but not a mighty man who would abide by the Truth. Jonathan was loyal to David but his loyalty could not make him a righteous man who could please God.

## **Causes of Jonathan's Tragic Death**

### *Fails to Join David on Time*

According to our analysis, the number one cause of Jonathan's tragic end was that he failed to leave his father Saul to join David, the anointed one of God. While David was fleeing from the pursuit of Saul and wandering in the wilderness, joining David and helping David fight for his kingdom had become a great flow of the Holy Spirit. At that time, many wise people were determined to join David, regardless of hardships and dangers. They were doing God's will and were blessed by God. Unfortunately, Jonathan was still undecided and failed to join the flow. Consequently, he perished with Saul. How tragic!

### *Fails to Sever the Family Tie*

Family ties and ethics prevented Jonathan from joining David. Jonathan was a sentimental man and his sentiments had obscured his spiritual sight. Saul was his father whereas David was his best friend. He loved David,

but couldn't bear to leave Saul. He could not sever the family tie for a righteous cause. So between his father and best friend, he failed to make the wise choice.

What is a wise choice? A wise choice is to choose God's will and join His anointed one. Jonathan had a passionate nature. He loved his father's house so much that he could forget about God. The Lord Jesus said, "And a man's enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:36–37). So beware!

### ***Fails to Resolutely Love or Hate***

Bound by family relations, Jonathan failed to make himself clear about who to love and who to hate. He knew very well that God had rejected Saul and anointed David to replace Saul (See 1 Samuel 20:13 and 23:16–17), but he did not love whom God loved and hate whom God hated. He chose to be with Saul instead. He did not "discard evil for what is good," nor did he "resolutely choose and do what is good." He had the heart to be a righteous man but lacked the action to be one.

Only a righteous man knows who to love and who to hate. Jonathan failed to love whom he should love and hate whom he should hate. Consequently, he perished with the wicked. How tragic! The Scriptures say, "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good" (Rom. 12:9). His failure to differentiate between love and hate should be a warning for us!

### ***Tries to Be Both Loyal and Filial***

Jonathan failed to make a resolute choice of whether to love or to hate. This is because he could not bear to hurt any of his loved ones. He tried to please both his father and his friend David. When it was time for him to

make a choice between the two, he tried to use a delay tactic, thinking wishfully that he could remain both filial to his father and loyal to his friend. He hoped that his father would treat David well, and if not, after Saul died, he would let David be the King of Israel and he himself next in rank. (See 1 Samuel 23:17.) He thought this would be good for both the house of Saul and the house of David, and good for everybody.

Jonathan tried to please everybody. He tried to be patriotic to the nation, filial to his father, truthful to the covenant and loyal to his friend. But could he achieve all these? No. The angels and demons will never live together in peace. There is no way to please both parties at the same time. When we have to make a choice between life and death, blessing and woe, or light and darkness, the deciding factors of our choice should be the will of God, the vision of the era, and the vessel of the era. Affections not in the will of God can do more harm than good.

“Affection” is a troublesome thing to handle. Since ancient times, affection has been the most touching, but also the most hurtful thing. The Chinese consider a person who overcomes affections as a “super sovereign.” Well, it is much easier said than done. How can we not be alarmed!

## **Deal with Affections and Morals that Are not in God’s Will**

Today when we discuss the story of Jonathan, we are speaking from personal experiences that are painful. There were two crises since the New Testament Church was rebuilt: the death of Sis. Kong and the apostasy of Ruth Cheung.

After the death of Sis. Kong, all those who stood on the side of God’s will and His anointed one were preserved and established. But all those who did not do so lost the vision and were devoured by the evil one. When Ruth Cheung turned apostate, all those who stood for the vision

and the Truth were preserved and established. All those who did not, lost the vision and disappeared. It was unfortunate and tragic that many Jonathans perished during these two crises.

When Ruth Cheung turned apostate, I saw that many who left with her were people of good morals. Some of them joined her out of affection because Cheung had been nice to them while others joined her out of loyalty. There were also those who left the New Testament Church because their parents or siblings had turned apostate. Some followed Cheung because they had vowed to be like-minded with her for life. The rest did so on account of their husbands and wives.

Affection, obedience to parents, sympathy, loyalty, and faithfulness are good moral conducts. But we have learned from the story of Jonathan that affection and love that is not in line with God's will is worthless; loyalty and faithfulness not in the vision is foolishness. God will not remember them. Instead, in severe cases, they may lead to destruction of a family and eternal damnation in the Lake of Fire! So, affections and morals that are not in the will of God must be severely dealt with!

Thanks be to the Lord! Many brothers and sisters who are seated here today have experienced these two crises of the New Testament Church. We were preserved by God at the crucial moments. We have made the wise choice in joining today's David to fight together with him in God's will. Now the kingdom of today's David — the glorious New Testament Church and the holy Mount Zion — has been established and fortified by God. It shall crush the kingdoms of man and usher in the kingdom of God. May we founders of the kingdom of God continue to hold fast to the Truth and the vision, and fight together with today's David until the end-time work of God is done. God's kingdom will be realized. We shall receive God's reward and enjoy His kingdom together with Him. Amen!

## Jonathan (2)

### *Jonathan's Love*

*(September 10, 1990 — Message of the Lord's servant Bro. Victor Pi during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

*Saul and David finished their conversation. After that, Saul's son Jonathan was deeply attracted to David and came to love him as much as he loved himself. Saul kept David with him from that day on and did not let him go back home. Jonathan swore eternal friendship with David because of his deep affection for him. He took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, together with his armor and also his sword, bow, and belt.*

(1 Sam. 18:1–4, TEV)

A friend like Jonathan is hard to come by. His good morals and behaviors are also rare among men. His deep affection for David and the friendship he extended to him were praiseworthy. He loved David so much that he gave him his personal treasure. He not only gave his robe and armor, but also his sword and bow. These were all rare items at that time. Let's read:

*Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, "Lest the Hebrews make swords or spears." But all the Israelites would go down to the Philistines to sharpen each man's plowshare, his mattock, his ax, and his sickle; and the charge for a sharpening was a pim for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to set the points of the goads. So it came about, on the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people who were with Saul and Jonathan. But they were found with Saul and Jonathan his son.*

(1 Sam. 13:19–22)

From the above description, we know how precious Jonathan's sword

was! The weapon of a soldier is second in importance to his life. But Jonathan loved David so much that he gave him something as precious as his own life. Such friendship was admirable.

The Scriptures say that Jonathan was deeply attracted to David because of his bravery. Moreover, David was very good-looking. The Bible described him as ruddy with beautiful eyes, handsome and brave. His bravery was shown on the battlefield, especially in the fight against Goliath. He became a hero in the eyes of the Israelites. When Goliath came in defiance, the whole army of Israel retreated; even Jonathan hid himself in a cave. But little David came out and killed Goliath all by himself, thus saving the Israelites and avenging Saul and Jonathan.

Not just Jonathan, but all the women in Israel were also attracted by David's bravery. They danced and sang, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Imagine how much Israel admired David as they even sang praises to his bravery. If these women had a chance to come close to David as Jonathan had, they would also give all their love to him. Therefore, the love that Jonathan had for David was only a natural reaction. It was a mere manifestation of a hero admiring another hero. Such love was founded on the admiration for man's bravery, not on the recognition of God's will — recognition of God's anointing. This is an inferior and fragile affection which cannot withstand tests. If David hadn't shown such bravery, Jonathan would not have loved him so much. And if someone braver came along, he would probably have changed his mind about David.

There are so many brave people, but not many are anointed by God. Just as the Scriptures say: For though you might have ten thousand instructors, yet you do not have many fathers. Only the affection based on the Lord's anointing and vision will lead to true life connection, and will inspire others to follow the vessel of the era through thick and thin to the end.

Jonathan was an unusual mighty man and a good friend, but not an enlightened person. His recognition of David did not come from revelation, thus his love for David was restricted to an earthly realm. As a result, he couldn't follow David until the end and his end was tragic. Therefore, love that is not in God's will is superficial and insecure.

God is love. Only the love according to His will is true, superior, and valuable. The Scriptures also teach us to love in the true. The love that Jonathan had for David was not in the Truth. What he did for David was not for the good of God's will either. David lamented for him when he died, saying that his love surpassed the love of women. Although his love was great, it came from human emotions. It had no value in God's eyes, and was not remembered.

As we follow the vessel of the era today, our love for him would be of no value if it was similar to the love Jonathan had for David. If our recognition of the vessel of the era is based on his appearance, competence, bravery, virtues, wisdom and eloquence, then we will turn out to be just like Jonathan, who failed to share in David's afflictions when he was driven from the house and was pursued.

Our recognition towards God's anointed one must come from revelation, and must be in the anointing of God. Our connection with him must be in God's will and with an understanding of his epochal entrustment. Otherwise, your love will turn to hatred when circumstances change, or when the words and actions of the Lord's servant no longer suit your taste. Therefore, love and affections that are not in God's will are meaningless. Jonathan is a warning for us. I hope that the love that the co-workers and the brothers and sisters have for the Lord's servant is not merely an earthly affection. When we testify for this person, we don't testify to his behavior, but to the Truth, God's anointing, and His will. This is the highest and most valuable love.

Despite loving David so much, Jonathan continued to follow Saul who persisted in seeking David's life. He followed Saul because Saul was his father. Brothers and sisters, there is nothing wrong to love our family and honor our parents. If God's anointing was still with Saul, Jonathan should follow his father. But Prophet Samuel had already announced that God had rejected Saul and anointed David to replace him. Did Jonathan know about this matter? Yes, he did. Once he said to David, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king of Israel."

Evidently, Jonathan knew that God had chosen David, but he couldn't go through thick and thin with David to share in his afflictions. Why? Because he was held back by the father-son relationship: "Saul is my father and I am his son. If I don't follow him, who will?" He felt guilty not to follow his father. He couldn't free himself from this emotional tie.

After Saul was rejected by God from reigning over Israel, everything he did was against the Truth: He killed the priests in Nob, destroyed the city, and pursued David for no reason. He was a terrible tyrant! As a son or a subordinate, Jonathan should have warned Saul not to do what was evil in the eyes of the LORD. If he had minded the heart of God, he should have picked up the sword of the Levites to cut off the earthly tie. And if he couldn't follow David, he should at least let go of his status and material comfort, and hide in the forest until the kingdom of David was established. He shouldn't have followed Saul who did evil in the eyes of the LORD. Unfortunately, he lacked the insight and courage to do so. Thus, he perished with Saul.

When the Lord's servant saw that the glory of God had left the Christian Assembly, he was determined to come out of there. He did not allow man's affections and relationships to affect his decision. The Lord's servant left the Christian Assembly the same way Abraham left Ur. By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place, which he was to receive for an inheritance. He left his country without knowing where

he was going. By faith, the Lord's servant also advanced, not knowing what would be ahead of him. And he came to Shuanglianku, which is today's Mount Zion, where he waited for the Lord's anointed one to be raised up. If Jonathan had such enlightenment and courage as that of the Lord's servant, his consequence would not have been so tragic!

When the Lord's servant Bro. Hong realized that God's anointing and entrustment were on Sis. Kong, he followed her. At that time, the denominations sneered at him, saying, "Hong is following a woman — a movie star who has married twice and divorced twice." If he didn't have the revelation, it would have been difficult for him to follow Sis. Kong.

After Sis. Kong rested in the Lord, Ruth Cheung succeeded her ministry and the Lord's servant Bro. Hong followed Cheung immediately. At that time, many people began to wonder, "Is apostleship hereditary? When a mother died as an apostle, can she pass on her ministry to her daughter?" Ruth was about the same age as Elsie, Bro. Hong's daughter.

In the eyes of man, it was really awful for a senior person as the Lord's servant to follow an inexperienced young sister. But the Lord's servant did not follow Cheung by appearance, but by the anointing of God. Since the entrustment was on Cheung, he followed her. He did not do it out of an earthly relationship or human affection, but according to the will of God. He didn't despise her because of her age. Instead, he respected her just as he had respected Sis. Kong. Cheung also respected and loved him. But as soon as Cheung turned apostate, he immediately picked up the sword of the Levites and severed the tie with her. It was not easy, but he was able to do it because his love and friendship were rooted in the will of God. But Jonathan was unable to do that in this aspect. He knew that his father had gone against the Truth and had been rejected by God, but he still chose to follow him to the death.

*David saw that Saul was out to kill him. David was at Horesh, in the*

wilderness near Ziph. Jonathan went to him there and encouraged him with assurances of God's protection, saying to him, "Don't be afraid. My father Saul won't be able to harm you. He knows very well that you are the one who will be the king of Israel and that I will be next in rank to you." The two of them made a sacred promise of friendship to each other. David stayed at Horesh, and Jonathan went home.

(1 Sam. 23:15–18, TEV)

"I will be next in rank to you" is translated as "I will be your prime minister" in another version. From this verse, we can see a motive behind Jonathan's love for David. His alliance with David was conditional — he had a personal interest in becoming the king's prime minister, a position next in rank to the king. Such an alliance was not in line with the will of God. That's why while David remained at Horesh, Jonathan *went home*. Didn't he know anything about God's anointing? Yes, he did, but very little. He knew that David would be king. He even encouraged David, saying, "Don't be afraid. My father Saul won't be able to harm you. You shall be the king of Israel and I will be next in rank to you."

Since Jonathan knew that David would be king and he himself wanted to be his governor, he should have stayed behind with David at Horesh, and said to him, "Wherever you go, I will also go. Wherever you stay, I will also stay. I will wander with you, going through thick and thin with you." But he did not. He left David in the wilderness for the luxurious life of a prince in the palace. He would not relinquish his existing benefits for future benefits. He was reluctant to let go of his present status as the crowned prince for a better future. He just wanted to wait at home to become the governor of David through the covenant he had made.

Brothers and sisters, there is a certain way and principle to exaltation. It is impossible for you to be exalted if you ignore this principle. The Lord Jesus said, "But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials.

And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:28–30). Apostle Paul also said, “If indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” Those who will be sitting on thrones and glorified with the Lord Jesus are the disciples who have continued with Him in His trials — those who have gone through thick and thin with the Lord Jesus. This is the way and law to exaltation.

Before Jonathan could enjoy the kingdom with David, he must first share in the afflictions with David. But Jonathan left David at Horesh to suffer alone. He wanted to gain without pain. How could that be possible? Our Lord Jesus is righteous. He said, “I bestow you a kingdom.” Why? Because “you are those who have continued with Me in My trials.” This is a principle that never changes.

Brothers and sisters, do you want to enter God’s kingdom, sit on the thrones and share the glory of the Lord? Today, the church, which is the Lord’s body, is still in trials. Are you sharing the afflictions of the Lord? In recent years, the New Testament Church has been combating with the kingdoms of man, and this is the body of Christ in trials. Many brothers and sisters have been fighting together with the church. And the trials they suffer will not be in vain. To these people the Lord will say, “I bestow upon you a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones.”

Jonathan hoped to be David’s governor. A governor is a public servant, an office not to be given away privately. David could not give it to anyone he wished because he feared God. So he did not promise Jonathan this position although he wished to have it. The Lord Jesus denied the request of the mother of James and John:

*Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Him with her sons, kneel-*

*ing down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom." But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father."*

(Matt. 20:20–23)

This old sister was too greedy. She had two sons and requested to have one sit on the right hand of the Lord and the other on the left. If she had three sons, then the seating of all three sons would be a problem. The Lord might have to give up His seat and let them have it all.

In ancient China, there would always be one official standing on each side of the emperor. If James and John were granted to be the right and the left officials of the Lord, this old sister would be honored because of her sons. I see the greediness of this old sister in Jonathan, who wanted to be next in rank to David. This is what happens in the kingdoms of man that constantly practice nepotism (showing favoritism to relatives). Nevertheless, the rule of God's kingdom is different. The Lord said, "But to sit at My right hand and at My left is not Mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father."

*And you shall not only show me the kindness of the LORD while I still live, that I may not die; but you shall not cut off your kindness from my house forever, no, not when the LORD has cut off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth." So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "Let the LORD require it at the hand of David's enemies.*

(1 Sam. 20:14–16)

In the covenant he made, Jonathan was paving a way for himself and his family. He made no mention of God's house or His will. Immersed in human affection, love, and selfishness, all he could think of was: "I want to be the governor. In case I die, you must be nice to my family. When you kill your enemies, you must spare my children." He knew that the house of Saul was the enemy of David, and that when Saul perished, his house would also perish with him. His affections were full of motives.

If Jonathan was still alive when David became king, would David make him the governor? Even if David were to appoint him as one, Joab would be first to oppose. Joab would never let that happen. He had fought the hard fights for David and survived. How would he allow David to make someone who did nothing next in rank to the king? Joab would have probably killed both Abner and Jonathan. Others who had been through thick and thin with David would have certainly been just as furious. That's why David never promised Jonathan the office of governor.

Jonathan was also like the other calf on Mount Carmel, being handed to the prophets of Baal instead of the prophet Elijah. Had Jonathan recognized God's anointing on David and had shared his afflictions according to the will of God, he could have been a very good vessel because he was a mighty man.

Once, Jonathan and his armorbearer went out to battle on their own. He went into the camp of the Philistines and killed countless Philistines. Unfortunately, his bravery was not in the will of God. If he had killed the enemies so boldly for David, everything would have been different. But he handed himself to Saul and in the end, he perished with his father on the battlefield.

Even until now when we read this portion of the Bible, it still makes us sigh for regret. A calf cannot choose his own destiny. But Jonathan was not a calf; he could choose his own consequence. If he had made the right

choice, his entire life would have been tremendously glorious. But he made the wrong choice and ended up tragically.

In conclusion, let's depart from earthly affections, and let all our love and affection be in accordance with God's will. This is the greatest love with high value. Jonathan was a good vessel but not a bright one. Some aspects of his personality and virtues were praiseworthy. But he was unenlightened enough not to abide by God's will and recognize His anointing. May the Lord be gracious to us. This series of discussions on the Bible characters is to edify us so that we may become bright vessels. Many of them are good examples for us to follow. As for the rest who did not please God, their failures serve as our warning. May we all become God's useful vessels!

# Jonathan (3)

*(September 8, 1990 — Message of the Lord's servant Bro. Elijah Hong during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

## Affections that Are Not in God's Will

Jonathan is highly admired by Christians in the denominations. I once heard a pastor encouraging his congregation to imitate Jonathan. Jonathan didn't seem bad outwardly but he failed to remain faithful to God's will and failed to keep his affections in God's will to the end. He knew he should love whom God loved and hate whom God hated. This was a very difficult test for him.

Just now Bro. Peter quoted the Scriptures that say those who love their children or parents more than the Lord are not worthy of the Lord. This is not a question of whether our parents, wives and children deserve our love, or whether we should love them. The question is: do we love them more than the Lord? If we do, then our consequence will not be any better than Jonathan's.

In the future, those who will gnash their teeth eternally will be people like Joab (David's commander) and Jonathan (David's friend). Why? They had followed the vessel of the era all their life, but their end was so tragic. A foolish Christian who is not clear about the vision and loves the world deserves to be rejected by God. However, people would not understand how a person who loved the Lord and dedicated his life to Him, could end up gnashing his teeth outside the City — that would be tragic!

On that Day, those who will gnash their teeth most regretfully are the people who have prophesied, healed, cast out demons, and done many wonders in the Lord's name but are rebuked by the Lord. The Lord will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" In the New Testament Church, there are brothers and sisters

who understand the Truth on apostleship, recognize the vessel of the era and often follow him out to battle. It will be most pathetic if these brothers and sisters end up like Job or Jonathan. Bro. Peter has explained it well. It is true that Jonathan was a very affectionate person but his affection was not according to God's will. As a result, he failed to join David in time and do God's will all his life. His affection was his Achilles' heel.

Today, as we walk on this path of the New Testament Church, we have learned this lesson of choosing God's will over man's affection. Some co-workers and brothers and sisters have paid a high price in this aspect. Though despised and rejected by their families, they have never veered off this way, not even a little. They have been doing well, but whether or not they can persist depends on how absolute their affection and love are towards God's will. If your love is not in God's will, or if you value and love something more than the Lord, you may one day find yourself no longer walking on the path of the Lord. And the fate of Jonathan could be yours.

### **Fails to Wander and Fight Together with the Vessel of the Era**

Affections, especially family ties, are always a test for everyone. Friendship is hard enough to overcome, and family relationships are even harder. No wonder people say, "Blood is thicker than water." Only a person who can overcome family ties for the Lord's sake can find His favor and be used by Him. This does not mean that we should be unfeeling but that we should adjust our feeling in accordance with God's will. We must know that family ties that are not according to God's will are worthless, and will cause our ministration and lives to be valueless before God.

I have seen many children of God who failed to obey God absolutely when it came to affections and feelings, especially family relationships. As a result, their spiritual condition was dark and pathetic. Their ministration

lacked spiritual power and became a ritual. I am really sad to speak about it. The story of Jonathan should teach us a good lesson. I hope that our discussion here will not be in vain. Samson fell from grace and became a captive because of affections. Jonathan also failed and perished with his father (whom the LORD had rejected as king) because of family ties.

Brothers and sisters, if Jonathan had never loved David and sacrificed anything for him, he would have nothing to say or regret about when God rejected him. But his heart had gone out to David and loved him as his own soul. He even made a covenant with David and helped him secretly time and again. He loved David so much but he perished with his father in the end!

Ittai, one of the mighty men of David, loved David “more than” his own life, and was remembered by God. Jonathan and Ittai loved David but there was a difference in depth. Some people love the Lord even to the point of death. They are the companions of the Lamb as mentioned in the Book of Revelation. They are the unreserved followers of the Lamb. Some people love and follow the Lord with a limit. They can only follow to a certain point. Actually, Jonathan also wanted to be with David and hoped that David would be king as God had promised, but he had some reservations: he couldn’t break away from the ruling system of his father’s house and cut off his relation with his father. Jonathan made a covenant with David and informed David of his father’s conspiracy to murder him so that he would not be ensnared. But he failed to wander and fight together with David, so he ended up tragically.

Brothers and sisters, this is a very solemn matter! We must never let family relationships interfere with our ministration in God’s house. Ruth Cheung had asked her mother Sis. Kong, “Why do you say that I am the successor to your ministry? Is it because I am your daughter?” Sis. Kong replied, “Because you are a vessel chosen by God. You think I would be so foolish to mix matters of the flesh with matters of the Spirit?”

Brothers and sisters, we must learn this lesson by the grace of God. None of us can confidently say, "I have learned well. I never let family affections interfere with my ministration." But we must all have this attitude: Anything that is not in conformity with God's will must be kept out from our ministration, whether it be the relationship between parents and children, or husband and wife.

Those who are deeply engrossed in family relationships will not be able to walk on the path of the New Testament Church. Once, a co-worker turned apostate, and his son joined him. This shows that the son came to the New Testament Church because of his father and not because of the Truth or vision. He let family relations control his footsteps. Therefore, when his father left the New Testament Church, he also left. His ministration has no value in the eyes of God. On that Day, when he meets the Lord, he will be shocked to find out that everything he has done is not remembered. The Lord will say to him, "Who are you? I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

### **Fails to Draw Out the Sword of the Levites**

The Lord Jesus said it well: "A man's foes will be those of his own household." We must watch out for these "enemies." If these enemies are not dealt away with, our ministration will not have any spiritual authority or power. Worse, we will not escape the tragic fate of Jonathan. The reason why the Levites were chosen by God to administer to matters pertaining to the tabernacle was that they were able to draw out their swords to cut off family ties.

When God wanted to deal with Aaron and His people for making the golden calf, He had a calling through Moses: "Whoever is on the LORD's side — come to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every

man his companion, and every man his neighbor.’ “ So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day (Exod. 32:26–28).

That was how the sons of Levi put an end to their family relationships, friendships, and love. This is what we call the *swords of the Levites*. If we can take out the swords of the Levites and slash, we will be able to minister before God. Jonathan failed to take out this sword, so he was rejected by God. We must be absolute when dealing with earthly relationships.

Moses also said, “Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother” (Exod. 32:29). Who could enjoy the blessings of God? The Levites who pulled out their swords! This seems like a heartless thing to do, yet it is the way to gain God’s blessings.

Brothers and sisters, if you cannot overcome relationships, you might as well return to the way of the world. I don’t like saying this, but I don’t want you to waste your entire life, losing both heavenly and earthly blessings. It is not worth it. You have renounced the pleasures of this world and suffered so much on this path of the New Testament Church, only to be rejected by God in the future? I hope that we all have the swords of the Levites with us.

If we closely examine the noble vessels who were greatly used by God, we will notice that they were all able to pull out the swords of the Levites. They would never allow family relationships to interfere with their ministry. These people include all the prophets and the servants of God in both the Old and New Testament. Even the Son of God, our Lord Jesus in the New Testament, had this special trait.

Once, at a wedding in Cana, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “They have no wine.” How did Jesus reply? He said, “O woman, what have you

to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.” The Lord Jesus called His mother “woman.” He was not respectful at all! Is this the image of the Son of God, the Word who became flesh, who came to this world to be our Savior? Can we take after such an example? Besides, Mary was saying it out of sincerity, not out of evil intention. She just informed the Lord Jesus that they were running out of wine. How could He be so blunt to her?

Brothers and sisters, from this incident, God let us see how the affections and family relationships of Jesus the Nazarene — the Son of Man — were in accordance with God’s will. We can also see how He faced the test before the appointed time of the Father. His affection in God’s will was absolutely pure. And His ministration was not influenced by family relationships. Only such ministration pleases God.

On another occasion when the Lord Jesus was twelve years old, He followed his parents to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. When the feast was over, everybody left, including his parents. But after a day’s journey, His parents realized that He had not come with them. They began looking for Him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for Him. After three days, they found Him in the temple. His mother said to Him, “Son, why have You done this to us? Look, your father and I have sought You anxiously.” This is true parental love. How would we respond in such a situation? We would think: “Oh no! My parents are here looking for me. They have been anxiously looking for me. I must comfort them. At least I should say: Mom, Dad, I’m very sorry that you had to look for me three days.” But how did the Boy Jesus respond? He said to them, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” What a heartless reply to His anxious parents!

If we were His parents, I am afraid we might cry out in anger, “What! We gave birth to You. And we had to flee for our lives in order to protect

You ever since You were born. It has not been easy to raise You for the past 12 years. You should have told us You wanted to stay at the temple in Jerusalem. You made us search for You so anxiously for three days. Now, we have finally found You and this is how you talk to us? We feel extremely heartbroken. Forget it.” But brothers and sisters, this is the example set by the Son of Man Jesus Christ who was the Word that became flesh. His ministration had never been contaminated by family relationships.

May we all imitate the Lord Jesus in this aspect. Only then will we be able to love and follow the Lord to the end. We will not end up like Jonathan who made a covenant with David but failed to wander and fight together with him; who later died tragically on the battlefield with his father. Jonathan did not have the chance to see David, the one delighted and anointed by God, become king. Much less had he the chance to help David establish the kingdom of God. What a regret! What happened to Jonathan should be a solemn warning to us. Let us learn well in dealing with family relationships.

Young or old, all of us have to learn. I’m not telling you to disregard your family and become an unfeeling person, thinking, “All right, I must follow the Lord single-mindedly. From now on, I don’t care about my parents, my wife, or my children.”

Brothers and sisters, the Lord doesn’t want us to be a passionless person. Rather, He wants our passion and love to be completely in accordance with the will of God. Love that is according to the will of God is true love, which is meaningful, valuable, acceptable, and blessed by God.





# Barzillai





# Barzillai (1)

*(September 15, 1990 — Discussion of Co-worker Sis. Victoria during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Assuredly I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Matt. 19:23–24). It is hard for a rich man to find grace but today, we will discuss an exceptional one — Barzillai. He was one of the mighty men who helped David possess the kingdom, and was one of the few rich men who found grace. He had several outstanding characteristics which are worthy of our imitation.

## **Lives in Riches but Is Wandering and Afflicted in the Soul with David**

Lately, the Lord’s servant reminded us of the hidden loopholes in our lives. With a heavy heart he said, “In those years when Zion was in great distress and reproach, and when we were wandering in hardship, our hearts were filled with peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. But after we returned to Zion and started to live an easier and more comfortable life, the peace and joy we used to have began to diminish. All these conditions reveal our degenerate human nature.”

2 Samuel 19:32 records Barzillai as a very wealthy man. Though living an easy life, he was in the same mind with David while David was wandering in affliction. He had the same spirit, vision and footsteps as David. Both David and Barzillai followed the footsteps of the Lamb. They had a manifestation of an abundant life in them.

Paul said, “I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need” (Phil. 4:12). Many Bible char-

acters also had the same trait as Paul. For example, Moses, who grew up in the palace in Egypt, esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. (See Hebrews 11:26.) Daniel also lived in a palace, but he was mindful of God's will and testimonies. All these outstanding characteristics are the manifestations of an abundant life.

The easy and comfortable life in the West has become a great test to us. The Lord's servant has been very concerned for the ministration and the learning of life lessons of the co-workers in the West. When we were in the West, we had heard that the co-workers and saints in the West lacked the spirit of Zion. Although we didn't know where our problems lay, we were aware that our ministration lacked the presence of the Holy Spirit. Later, the Lord's servant told us that we had become vague about the vision of the cross.

Among the many factors was our uncertainty towards the one sent by God, and our disrespect towards the anointing of God. That was related to our easy life. We lacked breakings and learning life lessons. Once I heard the Lord's servant say, "May the Lord add more afflictions to the co-workers in the West." The Lord's servant was compelled to say this for our own benefit. Later, true enough, wave after wave of afflictions came upon us, and the Spirit of God began to work on the co-workers and brothers and sisters.

### **Offers Up Timely According to God's Will**

Barzillai offered up timely and without reservation according to God's heart. His offering helped to accomplish God's will. Such offering is comparable to that of Mary, who broke an alabaster flask of very costly perfume and poured it on the Lord. Such offering is worthy of being spoken of for generations. (See Matthew 26:6–13.)

*Now it happened, when David had come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the people of Ammon, Machir the*

*son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim, brought beds and basins, earthen vessels and wheat, barley and flour, parched grain and beans, lentils and parched seeds, honey and curds, sheep and cheese of the herd, for David and the people who were with him to eat. For they said, "The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness."*

(2 Sam. 17:27–29)

Barzillai's genealogy and every item of his offering were clearly stated in the Bible. This shows how much he was pleased and remembered by God. When David was about to die, he specially mentioned Barzillai's kindness to Solomon. Barzillai's unreserved offering had certainly captured the heart of both David and God.

When David and all the people with him fled from Absalom and came to Mahanaim, they were extremely hungry, weary and thirsty. Throughout history, some intelligent military strategists won the battles without losing a single man just by cutting off the food supply of the enemies. Cutting off the food supply means cutting off the lifeline. Therefore, ample food supply on the battlefield strongly affects the results of a battle. While David was fleeing from Saul, the affliction and hunger he suffered were also unbearable.

*Now David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech was afraid when he met David, and said to him, "Why are you alone, and no one is with you?" So David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has ordered me on some business, and said to me, 'Do not let anyone know anything about the business on which I send you, or what I have commanded you.' And I have directed my young men to such and such a place. Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found." And the priest answered David and said, "There is no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women." Then David answered the priest, and said*

to him, “Truly, women have been kept from us about three days since I came out. And the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in effect common, even though it was consecrated in the vessel this day.” So the priest gave him holy bread; for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread in its place on the day when it was taken away.  
(1 Sam. 21:1–6)

Though David broke the law, the Lord Jesus said: “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” (See Matthew 12:3–8.)

David was God-fearing. He would not deliberately go against the law. He ate the showbread, which he was not supposed to eat, because he was very hungry. For this reason, the Lord Jesus was full of mercy and didn’t condemn him. From this, we can imagine how unbearable it is for someone to be hungry while running for his life. Barzillai’s timely supplies had saved the lives of David and his followers. His timely help also saved the kingdom of David, and accomplished the will of God.

### **Offers Up Voluntarily and Willingly**

At that time, there were several wealthy people but not all of them found grace. Among them was Nabal. When David was under the pursuit of Saul, he sent some servants to Nabal, saying, “Pray, give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David.” David was asking very politely, but Nabal refused his request and even reviled him. His

spirit was evil and cruel, and was against the anointed one of God. As a result, the hand of God came upon him and he died.

Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, met David with provisions while David was fleeing from Absalom. But he did it out of a deceitful spirit so as to gain some benefits from David. (See 2 Samuel 16:1–4.) However, Barzillai didn't need anyone to remind him to be good to David. He offered up voluntarily and willingly.

While the Lord's servant was wandering at the Hsiaolin Riverbed and after he was savagely assaulted on May 10, 1986, God also revealed many mighty men like Barzillai in the New Testament Church. Especially the companions of the Lamb in Hebron, Bethel, Kwong Ming Iron Works Factory, Mount Tabor and others — they worked hard to make money and offered up unreservedly. They provided food, daily necessities, and medicine, and supplied the needs of all the sacred work of the Grace of Jesus Christ Crusade. The Lord's servant was very comforted and God was very pleased.

### A Pure Spirit

*And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim and went across the Jordan with the king, to escort him across the Jordan. Now Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty years old. And he had provided the king with supplies while he stayed at Mahanaim, for he was a very rich man. And the king said to Barzillai, "Come across with me, and I will provide for you while you are with me in Jerusalem." But Barzillai said to the king, "How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? I am today eighty years old. Can I discern between the good and bad? Can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any longer the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant be a further burden to my lord the king? Your servant will go a little way across the Jordan with the king. And why should the king repay me with such a reward? Please let*

*your servant turn back again, that I may die in my own city, near the grave of my father and mother. But here is your servant Chimham; let him cross over with my lord the king, and do for him what seems good to you.” And the king answered, “Chimham shall cross over with me, and I will do for him what seems good to you. Now whatever you request of me, I will do for you.” Then all the people went over the Jordan. And when the king had crossed over, the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he returned to his own place.*

(2 Sam. 19:31–39)

Sometime ago, the Lord’s servants talked about Jonathan, whose spirit was not pure. When he made the covenant with David, he wanted to become next in rank to the king and also asked David to be gracious to his children in the days to come. However, Barzillai was different. From the above verses of the Scriptures, we can see that his offering was unconditional. He did not think of receiving anything in return. This was a freewill offering out of his love and admiration for David. In simplicity and purity, he co-worked and united with David.

The Bible records that Barzillai was advanced in age. He was an eighty year-old man, but he was still bright in the spirit. Many people become stale, bossy, weak, foolish, crafty and useless when they get old. But Barzillai became brighter, more useful, purer, and more lovable when he got older. He was like wine, which becomes more fragrant with age.

## **The Life of a King**

When David’s end was near, he charged Solomon, saying, “But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table, for so they came to me when I fled from Absalom your brother” (1 Kings 2:7). This is evidence that God’s judgment is just. Though God hadn’t rewarded Barzillai, He would reward his children so that they might eat at the king’s table.

The Lord Jesus said, “But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:28–30). So, to eat with the king indicates that Barzillai had the life of a king. The life of Barzillai was very mature. It is worthy of our imitation. What he had done was worthy of remembrance in generations to come.

## **Barzillai (2)**

### **The Timely Offering of Barzillai**

*(September 15, 1990 — Message of the Lord's servant Bro. Victor Pi during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

Now it happened, when David had come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the people of Ammon, Machir the son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim, brought beds and basins, earthen vessels and wheat, barley and flour, parched grain and beans, lentils and parched seeds, honey and curds, sheep and cheese of the herd, for David and the people who were with him to eat. For they said, "The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness."

(2 Sam. 17:27–29)

And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim and went across the Jordan with the king, to escort him across the Jordan. Now Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty years old. And he had provided the king with supplies while he stayed at Mahanaim, for he was a very rich man. And the king said to Barzillai, "Come across with me, and I will provide for you while you are with me in Jerusalem." But Barzillai said to the king, "How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? I am today eighty years old. Can I discern between the good and bad? Can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any longer the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant be a further burden to my lord the king? Your servant will go a little way across the Jordan with the king. And why should the king repay me with such a reward? Please let your servant turn back again, that I may die in my own city, near the grave of my father and mother. But here is your servant Chimham; let him cross over with my lord the king, and do for him what seems good to you." And the king answered, "Chimham shall cross over with me, and I will do for him what seems good to you. Now whatever you request of me, I will do for you." Then all the people went over the

*Jordan. And when the king had crossed over, the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he returned to his own place.*

(2 Sam. 19:31–39)

*But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table, for so they came to me when I fled from Absalom your brother.*

(1 Kings 2:7)

The Bible verse written on the blackboard for this morning is 1 Peter 2:5. It says “to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” I believe every Christian has something to offer to God. But only the offering made according to God’s will is a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice to God.

Just now Sis. Victoria described Barzillai’s provision for David as timely, out of his own freewill, unreserved, and without hidden motives. Barzillai was truly so. His spirit of offering was so pure and sincere. He could perfectly understand the anointed one of God and was thoughtful and considerate. At such an age, most people would be pretty satisfied if they don’t get Alzheimer’s disease. Though Barzillai was old, his spirit was still fresh and bright, and his mind was clear and sharp. The older he was, the more enlightened he became. He was a godly man that was hard to come by. We admire him. He is a good example for us, the older generation. Let us become today’s Barzillai in the last journey of our life.

Barzillai brought David beds and basins, earthen vessels and wheat, barley and flour, parched grain and beans, lentils and parched seeds, honey and curds, sheep and cheese of the herd... David could have all these things in the palace. But at that time, David was not in his palace, from where he left hastily with his servants and army when Absalom’s forces pressed on to the border. They did not bring anything with them, so they were hungry and thirsty in the wilderness. This reminds me of today’s Middle East. At the refugee camps in Jordan, the people fought over a

piece of bread and a cup of water when they were hungry; a hungry man is an angry man.

I recall in the summer of 1949, the Kuomintang (KMT) retreated from the Yangtze region after a crushing defeat. As their supply of provisions was cut off, the KMT soldiers robbed to fill their stomachs all the way while fleeing from the enemies, because without food and water they had no energy to run. In contrast, King David loved the people as his own sons. His army would rather starve than rob the people of their food. Also, an army cannot fight without supplies.

In the military, there are two common slogans. “The rear is more important than the front line” and “Rear services are more important than fighting the battle.” Rear services and the front operations are the two main pillars on a battlefield. They are just like the two tracks of a railroad. While confronting the powerful army of Absalom, David’s army had no food supplies. They were cold and hungry, and their fighting power was greatly reduced. It is not hard to imagine how desperate David was. Just when they were badly in need of supplies, this lovable old Barzillai took care of the rear services of David’s entire army. As a result, at the battle in Mahanaim, Absalom and his army were defeated. Due to the important role played by Barzillai, David won an overwhelming victory.

Barzillai was a bright vessel with outstanding strategic insight. When the two armies confronted each other, he knew exactly what David needed and he offered up at once. His timely offering helped David’s army out of the predicament. So, it is invaluable to offer up timely. It would be too late and unnecessary if Barzillai would only help after David was defeated, or only after David had returned to the palace in victory.

Barzillai offered at the right time. He helped when David needed it most. You can imagine how pleased and comforted David was. He not only saved David and his entire army, but also prolonged the glory of the

reign of David. No wonder David always remembered what Barzillai had done for him.

When he was about to die, he specially charged Solomon, saying, “But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table, for so they came to me when I fled from Absalom your brother.” The offering of Barzillai was unforgettable to David and would also be remembered by God forever. When the later generations read this portion of the Bible, they will all praise old Barzillai for what he had done.

Unreserved and timely offerings are the most beautiful things that capture the Lord’s heart. Timely offerings are most valuable in God’s eyes. Our Lord had once praised a woman for her timely offering:

*And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head. But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, “Why was this fragrant oil wasted? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.” And they criticized her sharply. But Jesus said, “Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.”*

(Mark 14:3–9)

The Lord praised her in three points:

**(a) She has done a good work for Me**

We have done many things in our lives, but are they good works for the Lord? Only the things done for the Lord (or on the Lord’s body) are good.

So, what should we do in order to be good in the Lord's eyes? The church is the Body of Christ. All the works we do for the church are for the Lord, so they are good and beautiful.

**(b)She has done what she could**

*She has done what she could* means that she has offered up everything. She offered up her love and her everything by pouring the fragrant oil on the Lord. This is a fragrant offering. Even until now when we read this portion of the Scripture, we can still smell the fragrance. This sister had made herself a name forever and the fragrance of her offering had reached all the way to heaven.

**(c)She has anointed My body beforehand to prepare for My burial**

Mary had a timely offering. If she was a bit late, the Lord would have been buried in the tomb. If the Lord had been buried, would He still need any fragrant oil then? If the Lord had risen and ascended to heaven, would He still need fragrant oil? So our offering must be made timely. At present, the Lord's body (the church) is still on earth and the day for the church to be caught up is drawing near. If we want to offer up, now is the time. After the church has been taken up, it will be too late even if you offer up all your riches. All the riches that you have saved up throughout your life will turn worthless. You may be rich on earth but you will be poor in heaven. Some of you may have offered up a lot, but the Lord will not look at how much you offer. He looks at how much you are keeping to yourself.

Once, the Lord praised the widow who offered two copper coins. He said that she offered more than all the others. Why? Because out of her poverty she had put in everything — all she had to live on. (See Mark 12:42–44.) Blessed are those who offer unreservedly and timely, because they will be remembered by God. Their offerings will have eternal value. The Lord said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.” Indeed, what this woman did is remembered even until today.

Thank the Lord. Many brothers and sisters in the New Testament Church are like Barzillai. Just as how David and his servants wandered in the wilderness, the Lord's servant and the companions of the Lamb also wandered at the Hsiaolin Riverbed. When we just arrived at the riverbed, we slept out in the open. We had no tents and we didn't even have a tree to shade us from the scorching sun. When it rained, the river overflowed its banks. It was a place infested with poisonous snakes and insects. At that time, many brother Barzillais and sister Barzillais came to visit from the East and the West. They offered up money, clothes, blankets, food, vegetables, fruits, tents, umbrellas, medicine, and other necessities. They even came and joined the Lord's servant at the riverbed to brave the hot sun in the summer and the cold in the winter. It was a touching scene.

When we returned to Zion in October 1986, we found our homestead in a complete ruin and desolation. We really did not know where to begin rebuilding. Barzillai brothers and sisters in the whole world, including those from the consecrated lands, once again offered up their timely help. They worked hard with little sleep; and by being thrifty in their own food and clothing, they offered their best for the construction of the highway of Zion. Their contributions had made Mount Zion beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole world. (See Psalm 48:2.) Zion is built with the hard-toiled money and the pure love of brothers and sisters — Barzillais of today. The Lord's servant is very comforted and God is even more pleased.

There were many rich people throughout history, but few spent money on the will of God. They were not masters of riches but slaves of riches. Barzillai, who was a master of wealth, supported David with his riches. The Lord Jesus said, "And so I tell you: make friends for yourselves with worldly wealth, so that when it gives out, you will be welcomed in the eternal home. Whoever is faithful in small matters will be faithful in large ones; whoever is dishonest in small matters will be dishonest in large ones. If, then, you have not been faithful in handling worldly wealth, how can you be trusted with true wealth? And if you have not been faithful with

what belongs to someone else, who will give you what belongs to you?” (Luke 16:9–12, TEV).

Riches come from God. They are being put in man’s trust temporarily. Those evil servants use God’s money in revelries, extravagance and sins, provoking God to wrath. Only servants like Barzillai are faithful stewards who use the worldly wealth according to God’s will and bear fruits of righteousness that abound to their account. (See Philippians 4:17.)

Today, those billionaires of the world are no better than the rich man recorded in the Gospel of Luke who feasted sumptuously everyday instead of laying up treasures in heaven. Like the late An Wang who was a Taiwanese billionaire, could he take a penny with him when he died? People are that foolish. But let us be wise. Be today’s Barzillai, and be faithful stewards of God’s riches. Then God will open for us the windows of heaven and pour out so much blessings for us that there will not be room enough to receive it.

The Lord Jesus said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.” The Lord didn’t say, “It is absolutely impossible.” If there was a rich man who had gone through the eye of a needle, then he had to be Barzillai. This wealthy man gave the whole army of David a timely provision. His offering had met the needs of the Lord’s anointed one and was precisely within the will of God.

Barzillai’s offering was a sacrifice, showing that he had gone through the eye of a needle. So his offering led him to the kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus also said, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matt.

13:44–46). Barzillai is a good example.

## **Barzillai (3)**

*(September 15, 1990 — Message of the Lord's servant Bro. Elijah Hong during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

Thank the Lord. Sis. Victoria had a good discussion on Barzillai. She has learned her lessons very diligently through these Bible characters. From her discussion, we can see that she is not studying them to seek some knowledge. She practically takes their good and bad points as a mirror on herself. Studying the Scriptures in this way is beneficial to her. Through the rich man Barzillai, she can see the light and realize that the co-workers and brothers and sisters in the West are not like him. They cannot overcome the temptations of the material comforts of the West. Her discovery and feelings are invaluable. She is not studying the Scriptures for others.

### **Knows How to Abound**

Barzillai was a wealthy man and he had a mature life like that of Paul. He could withstand the test of having riches and he knew how to abound. His riches were not for his own enjoyment but entirely for God and His will. He didn't forget God and His will when he became rich. He was still mindful of God's will and His anointed one. For that reason, when David was fleeing and wandering in the wilderness, he could provide for David immediately. It is obvious that this wealthy man was different.

When David was about to die, he charged Solomon to do three things: one concerning Joab; another concerning Shimei; and the last concerning the sons of Barzillai. How important these three things were!

The first two were to recompense by righteousness those who deserved punishment. And the third was to reward Barzillai for what he had done. (See 1 Kings 2:7.) A rich man who is mindful of God is well-remembered by God. If a person does not spend his riches for God's sake, his wealth

will be meaningless and valueless.

God doesn't plan to let us live in poverty. He just wants us to do everything for Him. Thank the Lord. Bro. Paul and Sis. Jeannie are here. They remind me of their mother, Sis. Wu. When she was still alive, she was a "Barzillai." Her riches were not for herself but for God — for His sacred work and will. She was very thrifty but she offered the best to God, to His servant, and to church. She knew how to work for God with the riches that God gave her. So God was very delighted in her.

### *Isn't Concerned About Food and Comfort*

Barzillai was not concerned about food and comfort. He said to David, "I'm an aged man. Can I still taste what I eat or what I drink?" Unlike other rich people, Barzillai was not mindful of good food. He knew that God made him rich not for feasting but for His works. Sis. Kong gave us a very good example in this aspect. After she was called by God, she was moved to offer up everything. When she was sent to Southeast Asia to preach the full gospel, brothers and sisters offered up unreservedly. But she didn't take a penny with her when she left. She gave all the offerings to the local places.

Today many preachers make preaching the gospel as a means of gain. They seek profits out of the gospel. Why are many preachers working diligently? They work for gifts and donations. They covet the riches of the saints. How vile and pathetic they are! But God's maidservant Sis. Kong offered to God all that He had given her. Even when she was about to die, she charged brothers and sisters to be thrifty with her burial and to save the money for the sacred works of God. She was a maidservant of God who passed the test of riches. The characteristics of Barzillai were vividly seen in her. Let us all find grace in this aspect and learn from Barzillai so that we may become children of God who know how to abound.

### *Works for God with the Riches He Gives*

Why does God give us riches? Are they for feasting and enjoying a comfortable life? No. I think the brothers and sisters of Tahiti have also found much grace in this aspect. Most of them are affluent but they don't plan for their own comfortable life. They offer up for God's sacred work, and so, the grace and blessings of God all the more abound in them.

Many brothers and sisters in the New Testament Church also have such trait of offering their riches to God and have found much grace. Whenever I see them find grace, I always thank God for them. I am reminded of what Paul said in his epistle to the Phillipians. Paul was very thankful and joyous for the church in Philippi because they took care of the needs of Paul and his co-workers, and their contribution was well pleased by God.

Paul said, "Now you Phillipians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities" (Phil. 4:15–16).

Some people might say: "Paul, of course you praised them — they gave you gifts." But Paul said, "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account" (Phil. 4:17). Paul knew that when the Phillipians took care of Paul's needs, they were bearing the fruit of righteousness and their reward before God would be great in the future. And so he said, "Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, and acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God" (Phil. 4:18). "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Phil. 4:10–12).

Paul knew how to be abased and how to abound. He was not saying these because he lacked anything, nor did he want gifts from the Philippians. Paul knew that what they had done was a sacrifice acceptable to God. Barzillai also knew how to abound and to work for God with the riches He gave him. How blessed he was.

Once, someone said that if he had the money, he could spend \$1000 on a meal, and if he had no money, he could eat a banana for a meal. He said this to show that he knew how to be abased and how to abound like Paul. But I feel that even if I had the money, I wouldn't spend \$1000 on a meal. If I ate a \$1000-meal, I don't think I could pray anymore.

Brothers and sisters, if we are faithful in managing the riches and the blessings God gave us, He will bless us even more. If we cannot withstand the test of riches, God will not reward us with more riches. So, all the riches must be for God. God is our priority. His sacred work, His will and His servants are all our priority. Now you may say, "Bro. Hong, here you go again: The Lord's servant is the priority?! You want to be first in everything!" Well, if you want to put it that way, I will imitate what Paul said: "I am not saying this because I am in need."

This was what happened when Elijah was with the widow in Zarephath: The widow only had a handful of flour and a little oil left. But Elijah wanted her to make him a little cake first and afterward make for herself and her son. Such request was too unreasonable. The woman was a widow and her son was an orphan. Moreover, there was a famine. They were ready to eat the last meal and die. How would anyone dare make such a request from such a helpless widow? Elijah, you are a great prophet. How could you ask a widow for food? Aren't you too daring to ask? But Elijah knew that when he did so he would help the widow of Zarephath bear more fruit of righteousness. She would be doing a good thing, an offering accepted and delighted by God.

We want to imitate Paul. We also hope that all the New Testament churches will imitate Barzillai and the Philippians to share our afflictions and be like-minded with us. Paul said to the Philippians, “It was good of you to share in my troubles.” (See Philippians 4:14, *NIV*.) How did the Philippians share in Paul’s troubles? Once and again they sent people to take care of Paul’s needs. This was how they shared in Paul’s troubles. This was also what Barzillai did for David.

Brothers and sisters, troubles that are not in the will of God are meaningless. However, sharing the troubles of God’s anointed one, the vessel of the era, is invaluable and is a good thing. While we were wandering at the Hsiaolin Riverbed, many Barzillais appeared in the New Testament Church. Almost the entire New Testament Church was Barzillai and we shall never forget this. Thank the Lord. That’s the reason why God accepts and blesses the New Testament Church.

We must keep this virtue and use our riches of the will on God. Don’t forget that our riches should be for God. If they are not for God, they are useless no matter how much we have. People like An Wang and Yong-qing Wang are so rich that they lost count of their possessions. But what’s the meaning and value of all this wealth? Let us learn how to abound and be people who can withstand the test of wealth. We shall not take the riches by God as our personal possession. We shall use these riches not for our personal comforts, but for the benefits of God’s will.

### **Wander with the Vessel of the Era in the Spirit**

Barzillai could fully understand the feeling of David who was in wandering. He offered timely help to meet David’s needs, which are also God’s needs. He delivered supplies to the wilderness for David and his followers because he knew that they must be hungry, weary, and thirsty. Providing food for David was a dangerous thing to do because Absalom was in hot pursuit of David. But Barzillai didn’t care. He only knew that David needed aid then.

The Scriptures seldom list out what people offered, but in the case of Barzillai, his offerings were recorded in great detail. Every item he bought was listed: beds and basins, earthen vessels and wheat, barley and flour, parched grain and beans, lentils and parched seeds, honey and curds, sheep and cheese of the herd. All these were for David and the people who were with him to eat. For they said, “The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness.” (See 2 Samuel 17:27–29.)

If Barzillai couldn’t understand the feeling of David and his men who were in wandering, then he wouldn’t have thought of these items. David was fleeing to the wilderness. What he and his people needed was not gold bars but food and items that could keep them warm. What Barzillai provided were exactly the items that met the urgent needs of David. So offering should be both timely and suitable.

Take for example the refugees in Jordan; giving them gold bars would do them no good. What they need are bread, water, and tents. We saw on television people in Jordan fighting over a can of water. Giving a bottle of water to someone in a desert is more practical than giving him gold or American dollars. When Barzillai provided for David, it showed that he was wandering together with David in the spirit. He could plan everything out so well for David, because he really understood David.

### **Offering Up with a Pure Heart**

Barzillai offered up with a pure heart. There was no ulterior motive behind his offering. This made Barzillai precious in God’s eyes and he is worthy of our imitation. When we offer, we often have hidden impurities and motives. Whether we offer money or time or energy, our carnal self tends to expect something in return so as to satisfy our ego. Such offerings are not pure or simple. So a freewill offering must be pure.

Some people offer willingly, but they expect some praises in return. Though such offering is not terrible, it is imperfect and not that pleasing to

God. When Barzillai contributed to David, he didn't say: "I know David is the anointed one of God. God allows him to be pursued by his son and suffer in wandering, but I believe his fortunes will be restored to him some day. I know this is going to happen. I must do something to leave a good impression on him. When he returns, he will reward me." Barzillai never had such thoughts.

When David returned to Jerusalem, he said to him, "Barzillai, come over with me; stay with me in Jerusalem and I will provide for you." What a melody from heaven! But Barzillai declined with gratitude, saying, "I am today eighty years old. Can I discern between the good and bad? Can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Your servant will go a little way across the Jordan with the king. And why should the king repay me with such a reward? Please let your servant turn back again" (2 Sam. 19:35–37).

From what he said we can see that his offering was absolutely pure. Only this kind of offering is pleasing to God. God abhors offerings with hidden motives. Let us avoid having selfish motives, and offer willingly and with purity.

Most people have heard of how Abraham offered up Isaac. When Abraham offered up Isaac, his only son, without reservation and hesitation, God not only returned Isaac to him but also let him experience Jehovah-Jireh (The-LORD-Will-Provide) and blessed him greatly. Some people want to imitate Abraham in offering Isaac but with a different mentality. When they offer up Isaac, they were hoping, "O God, as soon as You see what I am doing, You must quickly say, 'Don't lay your hand on the lad. I will provide.' Let me see Jehovah-Jireh." They only want to take out their knife for a show before God. They are holding the knife but they are not going to slash at the sacrifice. They are waiting for God to stop them. This is an offering with high anxiety. He is hoping for the Lord to provide before he slashes so that he can take back his offering. Such mentality is

horrible and must be removed in the light of the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, when we offer up, do it unconditionally. Offerings made in all sincerity to God are never regrettable. Someone said, “I regret offering to God. I made a mistake.” When I asked why it was a mistake, he was speechless. I thought to myself: “You didn’t make a mistake in offering, but you made a mistake in offering with a wrong motive. Your offering was with conditions. You expected something in return. When you were not rewarded, you regretted and said, ‘If I knew it, I would...’” Such an offering was impure.

Barzillai’s offering was pure and according to God’s will. He would definitely not regret. God will always remember pure offerings that are made according to His will. Even when David was about to die, God moved him to charge Solomon to show kindness to the sons of Barzillai.

Thank God that we learn our lessons from these Bible characters. As God’s blessings abound in us, He always wants us to share with others His goodness. Brothers and sisters, He wants us to be the distributors of His blessings. God blessed Abraham so that through him all nations would be blessed.

God transformed Jacob into Israel so that he might testify to His honor and glory, and bless all nations. God doesn’t want us to retain all the blessings to ourselves. If we do, we will be like ticks or vampires that suck blood until the stomach is swollen. When God gives us grace and blessings, He expects us to share with others. Only a person who can share will be able to inherit greater blessings from God.

The Lord Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches and My Father is the vine dresser.” The more succulent grapes are, the more juice can be pressed from them. What is the purpose of having more juice? Is it just for show? “See how big and juicy I am. A bunch of me needs two men

to carry..." No, it is for the good of others. The heavenly Father nurtures me so that I can be fruitful to supply the needs of others. This is the law of life.

We have a hymn entitled, "The Measurement of Our Life." This is a recognition obtained through pondering the life of a vine. The entire life of a vine is to provide for others. After the grapes are ripe, they are harvested and put into the winepress and trampled for juice. Afterwards, the juice is brewed into wine for people to enjoy. This is the life of a vine. The composer of the hymn displays the law of life through the life story of a vine. "He who has the greatest suffering will have the most to share; he who treats himself most severely is the best for God to gain; he who hurts himself most deeply can most comfort those in pain."

On the contrary, he who saves himself the most will have the least joy in life. The ability to give what God has given us purely and without reservation is a display of an abundant life. Barzillai is a good example. God let him become rich, but he offered up all he had for God and His will. He also offered all he had to God's anointed one. It was a pure offering without any ulterior motives. It is truly a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God and a good thing blessed by God. May we all have the quality of Barzillai and hold fast to what we have. May our life become richer as the days go by.

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# Abigail





# Abigail (1)

*(September 22, 1990 — Discussion of Co-worker Sis. Nan-yi during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

1 Samuel chapter 25 describes Abigail as a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance, but her husband was harsh and evil in his doings. According to man, this marriage was a mismatch. She was too good for him. It is very sad and stressful for a woman to be married to such a man, because she does not know when he will lose his temper and become violent. If she is timid, she will be nervous and in distress everyday. If she is bold enough, she will probably confront him and contend with him everyday, turning their home into a battlefield. However, Abigail was not so. She didn't complain nor did she quarrel with her husband. She let her unhappy marriage work for her good. She lived before God, learned her lessons, and accepted breakings. Therefore she found grace before God, and acquired the life of a king. In the end she became David's wife and shared the glory of his kingdom.

Nabal was so ill-natured that no one could speak to him. Who would want to work with him and help him? Obviously his riches were not from his own accomplishments, but were due to Abigail's wise management. The Scriptures say, "Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies" (Prov. 31:10). Let all the sisters imitate Abigail and be good wives. The brothers should also have the spirit of Abigail, lest you become Nabal.

While David was in wandering, his brothers and all his father's household joined him. Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented, gathered to him. (See 1 Samuel 22:1–2.) There were all sorts of people following him, but David feared God, and his followers were well-behaved. (See 1 Samuel 25:15–16.) David and his men were about six hundred in number. The need for such

a large group of people was huge.

At the time when David was most in need, he sent messengers to Nabal. But Nabal refused to help. Worse still, he insulted David. (See 1 Samuel 25:10–11.) Nabal was indeed foolish and stubborn. His riches were not for offering to God but for himself to enjoy. (See 1 Samuel 25:36.) He knew who David was. But he didn't revere God and His anointed one. He didn't know that contributing to David was offering to God. And such contribution would accomplish God's will and fulfill His promise towards His anointed one. Nabal also didn't realize that it was most blessed and rewarding to help David, for it was a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

Nabal not only lacked spiritual eyesight but also earthly ethics. David and his followers helped him look after his servants and his flocks day and night so that nothing was missing. Instead of expressing gratitude to David, he humiliated him. Such a spirit was against God and His anointed one. Thus Nabal had greatly provoked God's wrath, so God smote him dead. (See 1 Samuel 25:28.) God said to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 13:3). Thank the Lord, for there is no spirit of Nabal in the New Testament Church. While today's David was combating, wandering or returning to Zion, all brothers and sisters followed him closely and helped him unreservedly. How blessed they are. The work of God will soon be done and all nations will be blessed.

David was very angry after Nabal insulted him. He took 400 men with him and planned to kill the whole house of Nabal. When Abigail learned about it, she dealt with the matter very wisely. Her action and advice to David revealed her good judgment and broad understanding. (See 1 Samuel 25:23–30.)

After Abigail learned of what happened, she didn't confront Nabal

with her carnal self. Instead, she made haste and prepared gifts to see David, without Nabal's knowledge. She lived in the spirit, and didn't act according to the flesh. She knew what to decide at different occasions. She spoke and acted according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. She would not discuss with flesh and blood.

When Abigail saw David, she fell at his feet and said, "Upon me alone, my lord, be the guilt." This is a spirit of bearing all responsibilities. I often lack this spirit. Whenever there is a blunder, I would blame this and that, and seldom take the responsibility on behalf of the flock and companions. But the spirit of bearing the responsibility is very abundant in the Lord's servant Bro. Hong. Once, a sister told me, "I'm sorry. I went to talk to Bro. Hong when I couldn't agree with you." I asked, "What did Bro. Hong say?" She replied, "He said it was his fault and that he was sorry." The Lord's servant had shouldered all the shortcomings and weaknesses of the co-workers and brothers and sisters without their knowing. We thank God for giving us such a minister who bears our responsibilities. We must imitate him.

Abigail was certain that God had chosen David and promised to make him ruler over Israel. She also knew how David had fought the battles of the LORD and she was very attentive to the actions of the Throne. Though she lived in an affluent home, her spirit was wandering with David. She was very respectful of the anointed one of God. She risked her life to advise David not to avenge himself, lest he shed the blood of the innocent and lest he be troubled with guilt when he became king over Israel. Joab was different. As the commander of David, he did not admonish David from committing sins so as to protect the ministry of David. Instead, Joab took the opportunity to deal with David when he sinned — this is a big contrast to Abigail.

Abigail had a breakthrough in human ethics. Nabal was her husband but she said to David, "Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as

your soul lives, let your enemies and those who seek harm for my lord be as Nabal. And the lives of your enemies He shall sling out, as from the pocket of a sling.” She spoke curses against her own husband. Only a person whose natural affections have been broken can do that. It’s evident that Abigail lived in the spirit and was filled with God’s righteousness at that time. When her natural affection conflicted with God’s will, she chose to stand on God’s side. When ethics conflicted with the Truth, she chose the Truth. She was bright in the spirit, faithful to God, and had God’s mind in her.

After hearing what Abigail said, David was astounded by her advice. David said to her, “Blessed is the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! And blessed is your advice and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand!”

So David received from her hand what she had brought him, and said to her, “Go up in peace to your house. See, I have heeded to your voice and respected your person.” The good judgment of Abigail saved the whole house of Nabal and averted the crisis. (Only Nabal was not spared because God wanted to smite him.) God’s name was praised and God’s anointed one was consoled.

We often hear the Lord’s servant praise Sis. Rachel for having a clear understanding of the leading of the Holy Spirit. She acts according to the mind of God and the feeling of His servant, and handles everything appropriately. No wonder she was able to lead the brothers and sisters in Singapore and Malaysia to fight every battle so dynamically. Like Abigail, she can truly comfort the vessel of the era.

In contrast, I often fail in this aspect. At 10 A.M. on May 23, 1990, the northern tribes went to assume ministry against Edom at the Malaysian Airline office in Taipei. The Kuomintang (KMT) came and dispersed us,

seized our banners and flags, and assaulted us. We fought for our cause until 5 P.M. Before leaving, we lined up in front of the Malaysian Airline office to sing and proclaim. We could have been able to leave in triumph right after that, but because of some untimely proclamation I made, a ferocious battle erupted.

It is no doubt that God was still controlling everything and in the end He showed His glorious works. But because I lacked good judgment, I fell short of the Lord's servants and the brothers and sisters. I felt very sorry. Also, I am often not careful with my words, and hurt the feelings of the brothers and sisters when I speak. How important it is for a vessel to act and speak with prudence and understanding! May God help me.

The LORD smote Nabal and he died. (See 1 Samuel 25:38.) And David sent and proposed to Abigail, to take her as his wife. Abigail rose in haste, took five of her maidens, and followed the messengers of David. (See 1 Samuel 25:40 – 42.) Abigail had just been widowed, but she arose and went to David regardless of others' criticism and concepts of morality. She left behind the enormous wealth from Nabal and followed David immediately by the will of God. It was very unusual indeed.

Abigail followed David to wander and suffer. She fought with him for the kingdom. Then she bore him a son named Chileab. Other than this, the Bible doesn't mention anything else about her. Neither is there any mention of her and her son causing trouble to David, or of her having any strife in David's house.

In contrast, children borne by other wives of David brought him much trouble and distress. For example, Amnon defiled his half-sister Tamar and was killed by Absalom. In another case, Absalom rebelled against David. Also, Adonijah pronounced himself king over Israel. In the case of Solomon, even Bathsheba petitioned for her son Solomon to become king. Of course God had predestined Solomon to become king. But if some-

one could petition for her son to become king, Abigail had all the reason to do so. After David's firstborn Amnon died, the second son, Chileab, should have been next in line to the throne. But Abigail didn't seek for that. It is obvious that when she came to follow David, she didn't seek any selfish gains. She did not come for fame or gain but for God's will. Abigail helped David possess his kingdom, look after his house and educate his children. She was a big help to him. May the LORD establish the spirit of Abigail in us so that we will become vessels who truly help David establish his kingdom.

## Abigail (2)

### *The Wisdom of Abigail*

*(September 22, 1990 — Message of the Lord's servant Bro. Victor Pi during the morning prayer service on Mount Zion)*

Abigail was an extraordinary woman. 1 Samuel 25 relates about her wisdom. While David was wandering in the wilderness, he sent messengers to Carmel to see the rich man Nabal, hoping that Nabal would provide him and his men food and necessities. Unexpectedly, Nabal refused to help, and even humiliated David in front of David's servants, who went back to tell David all that Nabal had said. David was very angry and led 400 men with swords, determined to kill all the males in the house of Nabal. Fortunately, his wife Abigail averted the situation. She prevented David from avenging himself by his own hand and shedding the blood of the innocent.

Brothers and sisters, I deeply feel that wisdom prevails over wealth. Wealth might fail to save lives, but wisdom is always useful during crises. From this chapter of the Bible, we see that wisdom could save lives. How does wisdom come about? The Scriptures say, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." Wherever the fear of God is, there the wisdom will be. The two are inseparable. So, the fear of God prevails over wealth. In other words, *the fear of the LORD* is our true riches. We thank God that most of the brothers and sisters of the New Testament Church have a reverent heart towards God. This is pleasing to God.

There is nothing good or bad about wealth. It all depends on the user. If you use it correctly, it is your blessing; if not, it is your woe. Blessed is he who fears God and uses his riches wisely in God's will. He will help others find grace and even save others. Barzillai was a blessed person. He was a wealthy man who used his riches in the will of God. Unlike Nabal, when David and his army needed supplies in the wilderness, he provided

for them. This offering that met the need of the LORD's anointed one was especially accepted and blessed by God. It was also well remembered by David. When David was about to die, he specially mentioned Barzillai's kindness to Solomon. To date, his story is still being told. But if one spends his wealth in revelries and feasts, it will be his woe. Nabal was one of these examples.

There was an ancient story in China about a retired high-ranking official. One day, he gave away all his riches to the poor. His relatives and friends asked, "Aren't you going to save some money for your children?" He answered, "Riches will ruin a capable and virtuous person." Meaning: If my children are capable and I still give them money, it will spoil them. He also added, "Riches will make a fool sin even more." That is to say, if my children are foolish, money will only increase their transgressions. So, whether the children are good or bad, money will do them no good. This official's remarks later became well-known sayings among the Chinese. But to us, his level is still low. Only Barzillai had reached the highest level by using his money in God's will. This is laying up riches in heaven.

Nabal and Abigail were an odd couple. The husband was foolish and wealthy but his wife was intelligent and beautiful. What a mismatch! It was truly the grace of God for such a foolish fellow to be so lucky. Unfortunately, he wasted the money which God entrusted to him, and abused the grace of God. Didn't God give him so much wealth to provide for His anointed one? But Nabal missed his chance to please God. He was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. He lived in luxury while leaving God with nothing. How he had abused the wealth God put under his care! Worse still, he had no regard for God and man. Did he not know that David was the anointed one of God? He certainly did. But he humiliated him intentionally. Thus he had provoked the wrath of both God and His anointed one. Consequently, God smote him dead. He lost his wealth, his wife, and even his life. So, it is very important to have a God-fearing heart.

Abigail was just the opposite of her husband. She had wealth, wisdom, and most precious of all, a God-fearing heart, which can be seen from her words. Regrettably, this beautiful woman married a worthless man who did not fear God.

We understand that no one is perfect. But because Abigail revered God, God gave her what she lacked — a good husband. God removed her evil husband and later gave her a good and God-fearing husband. The Bible says that the young lions lack and suffer hunger, but those who seek (fear) the LORD shall not lack any good thing. These words are so true for Abigail.

Nabal didn't know God, neither did he fear God. He even disgraced the one whom God had anointed. Hence, God took away all that he had, including his life. Even his beautiful wife was given to the man in whom God was well pleased. The Lord Jesus said, "For to everyone who has, more will be given." Those who fear God and are faithful to Him are the people *who have*, and they will be given more. But from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. If a person has no wisdom or fear for God, whatever he does will be in vain.

How were Abigail's wisdom and reverence for God revealed? They were revealed through the way she handled the crisis and through the words she spoke. As soon as she learned that Nabal had offended David, she knew that there would be a great slaughter in the house of Nabal on account of his folly. At the critical juncture, she lost no time to prepare two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five sheep already dressed, five measures of roasted grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded them on donkeys. By giving gifts to David, she had pacified him and prevented him from shedding blood. How wise she was!

When Jacob left his uncle's house for Bethel where God had appeared

to him, his brother led 400 men to meet him — a great slaughter could be around the corner. How did Jacob appease his brother's wrath and save his family from being killed? He prepared goats, rams, camels, bulls, ewes, milch camels and their colts, male and female donkeys, and presented them to his brother. Jacob hoped that by doing so, his brother would not avenge him for stealing his blessings from their father and for robbing him of his birthright.

Let's read: "And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:1–2).

All have sinned and deserve death in the lake of fire, which burns with brimstone. But our Lord Jesus Christ had made atonement for us on the cross, and appeased the wrath of God. He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by His wounds, we are healed. Our Lord Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself on the cross to atone for our sins. What Abigail did was also under the principle of atonement.

In the Bible, not many women were wise like Abigail. Abigail's spirit was sharp and her thoughts were meticulous. She responded so quickly to the crisis and handled it so wisely. Had she been a bit slow, her whole family would have been killed. Therefore, we say that wisdom can save lives, and riches in the hands of the wise can also save lives.

Also, Abigail's wisdom can be seen in her words:

*Now when Abigail saw David, she dismounted quickly from the donkey, fell on her face before David, and bowed down to the ground. So she fell at his feet and said: "On me, my lord, on me let this iniquity be! And please let your maidservant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your maidservant. Please, let not my lord regard this scoun-*

drel Nabal. For as his name is, so is he: Nabal is his name, and folly is with him! But I, your maidservant, did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent. Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, since the LORD has held you back from coming to bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hand, now then, let your enemies and those who seek harm for my lord be as Nabal. And now this present which your maidservant has brought to my lord, let it be given to the young men who follow my lord. Please forgive the trespass of your maidservant. For the LORD will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord fights the battles of the LORD, and evil is not found in you throughout your days. Yet a man has risen to pursue you and seek your life, but the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the LORD your God; and the lives of your enemies He shall sling out, as from the pocket of a sling. And it shall come to pass, when the LORD has done for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you ruler over Israel, that this will be no grief to you, nor offense of heart to my lord, either that you have shed blood without cause, or that my lord has avenged himself. But when the LORD has dealt well with my lord, then remember your maidservant.”

(1 Sam. 25:23–31)

When Abigail gave gifts to David, she first confessed and repented of her trespass. She pleaded for herself and also for her husband. Repentance is always the unchanging principle of finding God's grace and salvation. The Scriptures say, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

The precious blood of the Lord is forever powerful and effective. This is the only way for mankind to be atoned. The Word of God also says that God will not despise a broken and a contrite heart. A spirit of confession and repentance is most acceptable to God. Abigail confessed and repented of her trespass as soon as she met David. This action was crucial to the deliverance of her household.

Sis. Nan-yi was right in saying that Abigail protected the ministry of David. This was another important thing she did. How did she protect the anointed one? She stopped David from avenging himself and shedding innocent blood. David had brought four hundred men with him, ready to kill not only Nabal who reviled him, but also his entire house. Fortunately, Abigail showed up timely, or else the consequence would have been unimaginable. Abigail had safeguarded the anointed one of God. Because David didn't shed innocent blood, he didn't end up with a guilty conscience.

Job was just the opposite of Abigail. He lent a helping hand to David when he sinned. However, Abigail managed to turn David from sinning with her words of wisdom and with a gentle heart. How precious she was. She guarded David's reputation, and made him acceptable before God and man.

From what Abigail said, we can see that she recognized God's anointed one — she knew that David would be king someday. She was certainly a bright vessel with enlightenment. When David proposed to her after her husband died, she did not hesitate but forsook everything and followed him at once. This proved her absolute confidence in the Lord's anointed one, which is a prerequisite for following the vessel of the era. Being bright in the spirit, she was able to follow David immediately and surpass the moral concepts and criticism of man. Just now Sister Nan-yi mentioned that Abigail's husband had just died, how could she remarry so soon? This shows that Abigail was not restricted by earthly concepts and would not follow the way of the world. Today, as we follow the Lord's servant to serve God according to His will, we often find ourselves going against man's common practices — not conforming to the concepts of man. Some who are less surpassing can be easily influenced by the traditions and ethics of the human kingdoms.

For example, some people may criticize that the New Testament Church

is following and exalting man. If we are bright in the spirit, we will not be affected by man's words. We know that if the person whom we exalt and follow is not raised up by God, then we are exalting and following man. But if the man is sent and anointed by God, then we are following God and not man. Abigail following David was one of the examples of following God because David was chosen by God.

Brothers and sisters, does the person whom you are following have the anointing of God? Does he have the entrustment from God? Is he chosen by God? Is he sent by God? You must recognize this clearly in the spirit. Abigail's recognition of God's anointed one was profound. When she was called, she humbly put aside everything and followed David. She said, "Here is your maidservant, a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord David." This woman was truly outstanding, wise, knowledgeable, and full of reverence for God. She is truly a good example for brothers and sisters to follow. Let us be like Abigail.

Thank the Lord. All these Bible characters are our models. The more we discuss, the more enlightened we become. These discussions are for the edification of vessels. May all the brothers and sisters be able to see greater light in the light.

# Abigail (3)

*(September 23, 1990 — Message of the Lord's servant Bro. Elijah Hong during the bread-breaking service on Mount Zion)*

## **Faithful with Good Judgment**

The Scriptures describe Abigail as good, understanding, and beautiful — a woman whom David called knowledgeable and praiseworthy. But her wealthy husband, Nabal, was harsh and evil. He had many servants but no one dared to speak to him. This shows how fierce he was. Nabal means “folly.” The reason why this foolish man became so rich was because of his prudent wife. His wife was faithful and also had spiritual understanding. A faithful person without good judgment will not succeed, but will instead bring disaster.

David said, “Blessed is the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! And blessed is your advice (good judgment) and blessed are you.” Blessed be the LORD and blessed be the judgment of Abigail! From David's words you can tell how precious and important Abigail's good judgment was in God's eyes. To David, the LORD God was precious; the advice of such an understanding woman was also precious. The LORD God is blessed, so is the advice of a person with good understanding.

## ***Sharp Discernment and Quick Decision***

Abigail's sharp discernment and good understanding can be seen when she handled Nabal's offense to David and when she followed David. At that time David was in a rage. He led 400 men out and planned to kill all the males in the house of Nabal. When Abigail heard what the servant told her, she took immediate actions and kept David from avenging himself with his own hands and from bloodshed. How did she do it? It is written:

*Then Abigail made haste and took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five sheep already dressed, five seahs of roasted grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded them on donkeys. And she said to her servants, "Go on before me; see, I am coming after you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal.*

(1 Sam. 25:18–19)

From these verses we can see that Abigail had good judgment. She had a sharp discernment and was quick in making decisions. Her husband despised and insulted David. He treated God's anointed one as an escaped criminal who had rebelled against his master. He had actually condemned God when he condemned David, God's anointed one. He had greatly sinned against God and this was a very grave matter.

Abigail felt the seriousness of it, but what should be done? Here is her wisdom: She didn't immediately go and vent her anger on her husband, but made haste to resolve the crisis first. She quickly prepared gifts for making reparation, and told her servants to quickly go on before her and that she would come after.

As Abigail was riding on the donkey and coming down by the hidden part of the mountain, she met David and his men, all girded with swords. At this time, David was furious. David had said, "Surely in vain I have protected all that this fellow (Nabal) has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belongs to him. And he has repaid me evil for good. May God do so, and more also, to the enemies of David, if I leave one male of all who belong to him by morning light." (See 1 Samuel 25:21–22.)

For this reason, as soon as she saw David, she quickly got off her donkey, bowed down before David with her face on the ground, and spoke wisely to him. Later, Nabal died and David sent messengers to ask her to

become his wife. Again, without hesitation, she rose in haste, rode on a donkey, and went with the messengers of David. She left all her wealth behind, and only brought with her five maidens. From here we can see Abigail's discretion: in times of crises she remained calm and steady. She handled matters quickly and appropriately, depending on the urgency of the matter.

### *Calm and Steady*

Many a time, we are faithful and willing, but we just lack good judgment. Something that has to be done immediately, we procrastinate, from morning to noon, and from noon to evening. When evening comes, we think we still have tomorrow. We procrastinate time and again until it is too late. So we miss many opportunities and leave many things undone. At times, we failed to take immediate action to resolve the crisis, resulting in severe consequences. If Abigail had procrastinated in going to meet David that day, a horrifying scene would have occurred. For a vessel to resolve a crisis and reverse the situation he must not only be faithful but also quick to judge and take action. He cannot afford to hesitate or be slack. So let's be on guard at all times. Often, we are more alert during a battle, but when it is over, we tend to slack off.

Abigail was wise in dealing with problems. When she should be fast, she was fast and when she should be slow, she slowed down. She acted befittingly in every situation. She knew she had to tell Nabal about her meeting with David, but she didn't mention it to him immediately. Why? Because at that time Nabal was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. For Nabal (which means "fool") was his name! All he cared about was feasting; he was not aware of the great disaster befalling him! Seeing that Nabal's heart was merry within him, and seeing that he was drunk, she told him nothing. Abigail's patience was another manifestation of her wisdom.

Sisters who are seated here today, may I ask: How would you feel if

you were Abigail and had such a husband who always got into trouble without even realizing it; and after helping him avert a disaster, you came home only to find him eating and drinking away until he became drunk? Would you be fuming with rage? Abigail could withstand it until the next morning, and told him about the meeting with David only after he woke up. She was not dealing with this matter as urgently as when she wanted to meet David. Again, this was her good judgment.

A wise person is like a good car. It can run and it can stop; it can go fast and it can also go slow. When it should go fast, it goes fast, and when it should go slow, it goes slow. It can go at the required speed. There are also times when we need not act or speak so quickly.

We have a sister who is undoubtedly faithful but I feel that she lacks good judgment. She is quick to respond. She doesn't distinguish her audiences, the circumstances or the time. She speaks her mind all the time. Sometimes, I would confront her, saying, "Enough, you have talked enough." I almost wanted to tell her: "People won't think that you are mute if you talk less."

It is troublesome if you cannot be fast when you need to, and it is a problem if you can't slow down when you have to. Being too slow will make you late. And being too fast will get you into trouble. Neither "too slow" nor "too fast" is proper. What about not too fast and not too slow? That is not right either! What I am trying to say is: When God wants you to be fast, be fast; when God wants you to be slow, be slow. This is what we call "just right."

Some who are quick in nature want to do everything quickly while others who are slow in nature do everything slowly. Even if you try your best to train them, they still can't get things done right. They become either too fast or too slow, which is another extreme.

It is different in spiritual training; you learn to live in the spirit. When the Holy Spirit wants you to be fast, and you obey, then you will be fast. When the Holy Spirit wants you to be slow and you obey and slow down, then you will be going at the right slow pace. Keeping pace with the Holy Spirit is the appropriate fast and slow. A person with good judgment and understanding can be quick or slow according to God's will. Everything he does reveals the will of God. Abigail was an example.

Nabal had been foolish in offending the anointed one of God, but Abigail didn't stretch out her own hand to do anything with him. She was convinced that God Himself would look into the matter. The next morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, Abigail told him all the things that had happened, and Nabal's heart died within him so that he became like a stone. True enough, about ten days later, the LORD smote Nabal, and he died.

### **Bears the Mistakes of Others**

When Abigail saw David, how did she use her wisdom to stop David's wrath? She said to David, "On me, my lord, on me let this iniquity be." Brothers and sisters, Abigail had the virtue of bearing others' faults. She not only admitted her own mistakes but also bore others' mistakes willingly. She was a great vessel with understanding. She was able to appease wrath and avert the crisis timely.

Brothers and sisters, bearing others' faults is a sign of spiritual greatness. It is reasonable for a person to bear his own mistakes. However, this is not enough. He will only be great if he bears others' faults.

Brothers and sisters! If someone makes a big blunder like Nabal did, it is useless to point fingers at him at this time for it won't solve the problem. You should bear his shortcomings like Abigail did. She said, "On me, my lord, on me let this iniquity be." This is the spirit of the cross of Christ, the spirit of the slaughtered Lamb — the Lord Jesus who bore the sins of the

world. May the Lord give us the spirit of bearing others' faults. When problems arise, don't blame others.

The priests of the Old Testament era had the names of the twelve tribes not only on their breastplates, but also on their shoulder pieces. The breastplate signifies the priest's care for God's people, while the shoulder pieces signify the priest bearing the shortcomings of God's people. So, we can only assume the ministry of the priest in the New Testament well if we have the spirit of bearing others' shortcomings.

I repeat: This spirit of bearing others' faults is a sign of spiritual greatness. This is the spirit we must have before we can serve this generation. The serving in the New Testament Church especially needs the spirit of bearing others' shortcomings. "O Lord, let these shortcomings be upon me!"

Brothers and sisters, it is not for show but for real. If someone has to be punished for his wrongdoings, I am willing to be punished on his behalf. If we can readily bear others' faults, the spiritual life of the entire New Testament Church will be abundant beyond imagination. All the problems in the church will be wonderfully resolved. May we learn well in this aspect. Also, Abigail had such virtue of bearing others' faults because she had a sacrificial spirit. In order to deal with the terrible situation, and be respectful to God's anointed one and stand on his side, she sacrificed and denied herself, and did not save herself.

Later, Abigail answered David's call and became his wife. She wandered and suffered with him and was even held captive once on his account. She gave much help and comfort to David while he was wandering in affliction. The Bible highly appraises her. Brothers and sisters! Let us long to be like Abigail, to be a faithful vessel with sharp discernment and good judgment. Let us learn to bear others' faults and respect God's anointed one. Let us also be sacrificial and selfless vessels, who care only for God's

will, and avert all kinds of crises and stand in the gap in the house of God. In this way God will all the more be glorified among us.