

Knowing Times and Seasons

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Chapter 1

Natural and Spiritual Seasons

Before we look at the Spiritual Seasons and Divinely appointed Times of God, we need to lay a foundation. That foundation will be found in the natural seasons, for it's a principle that the Natural Realm speaks to us of the Spiritual Realm. This is why the seven Feasts of the Lord (Lev 23:4-43) are associated with agricultural seasons. And of course the Feasts in the "natural" speak of their fulfillment in the "spiritual" through the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the natural flow of seasons there's clearly a pattern; Summer, Autumn, Winter, and Spring. This never changes except perhaps for the shortening or lengthening of some seasons occasionally. Even the seven days of the week are patterned for us, with the last day becoming a day of rest, the Sabbath. (It's important to note that only the seventh day of the biblical week was given a name; the other six days are simply known as the "first day", the "second day", etc. [Gen 1:5 / 2:3 and Exo 20:11]. This highlights the importance and sanctity of the day.)

So patterns become vital in our understanding of spiritual issues. We recall that Moses wrote down the pattern for the building of the Tabernacle Tent (Exo 25:8-9), just as David handed onto his son Solomon, a pattern for the building of the first Temple (1 Chron 28:11-12).

As we read Scripture it's obvious that patterns occur over and over, especially in the Old Testament and finally surfacing in the New.

"These things became examples [Lit: a shape, pattern] for us, so that we may not lust after evil, even as those indeed lusted." 1 Cor 10:6

“...who serve the pattern of and shadow of heavenly things, even as Moses was divinely warned, being about to make the tabernacle: For He says, See that you make all things according to the pattern being shown to you in the mount...” Heb 8:5

According to Leviticus the Tabernacle pattern was recorded in exacting detail. Why? Because the Lord desired that we should understand patterns and thereby have insight into His mind and purpose. Even the placing of the Tabernacle furniture shows a fascinating pattern, as does the layout of Solomon's Temple (See my study manual “From Tent to Bride”). Great truths can be found hidden in patterns, if only we had eyes to see and hearts willing to search.

Now, back to the natural seasons. Scripture indicates that the four seasons of the year began AFTER the universal flood of Noah's time. Prior to the flood there was a fairly constant temperature together with a gentle vapor that daily watered the earth, there being no rainfall at that time (Gen 2:4-6). From creation until the flood there was neither rain nor seasons as we now know them.

It was after the flood that the arrangement of seasons were established unceasingly, just as God declared to Noah. This regularity is what's called “the Principle of Uniformity” by scientists. However, this was instituted (and promised) by God to be a regulated sequence of Seasons, together with a fixed cycle of Day and Night periods (Gen 8:22) - a pattern ordered for quite specific purposes by God Himself.

Though these seasonal patterns are now part of what is called “natural” it was in fact ordered by “the Divine”. Here we have the beginnings of the great conflict between the theory of evolution and the biblical account of a divine creation. Scripture tells us that seasonal patterns were instituted as far back as Creation itself: “And God said, Let luminaries be in the expanse of the heavens, to divide between the day and the night. And let them be **for signs and for seasons, and for days and years.**” Gen 1:14

“Seasons” here doesn't mean the four seasons we identify now, because as we've seen, that didn't happen until after the Flood. In the above text it refers to the generality of order in relation to the sun and moon, and probably stars. “**He appointed the moon for seasons; and the sun knows its going down.**”Psa 104:19

There are obviously seasons and periods that are controlled by God through the influence of celestial bodies like the sun, moon and stars. Consider the monthly menstrual cycle of a woman, the daily tides of the oceans, the effect of a full moon on fishing, animal breeding times, bird migrations, etc. All these, and much more, are governed by God's providential ruling over “the luminaries” to effect the daily business of life on earth.

Interestingly these are directly associated with “signs” (Gen 1:14). The word refers to that which is a “signal, beacon, monument, prodigy, evidence, mark, miracle, or token” (Strong's H226). The Hebrew is based on an associated word meaning “to come” (H255), indicating that something or someone is yet to come, of which the luminaries give assent. Some have seen in these signs evidence of the coming of the Messiah (“The Witness of the Stars” by E. W. Bullinger).

As we've seen, the seasons belong to the Lord God of the universe. They are entirely and completely in the hands of our God. Yes, man may influence them due to his bad

environmental practices, but generally the four seasons that God has set, still continue on. Likewise too are His specially appointed divine seasons; these having a particular unique fulfillment in God's grand purpose.

The Lord's will is continually being done on the earth by those whom He has called out to do this task. He moves sovereignly over all things in heaven and earth; it is He who appoints times and it is He who fulfils them. It is also He who reveals such things to His faithful ones even before they are brought to pass. The Apostolic Ones play a particular role in this, for they, in harmony with the Prophetic Ones, are those who will piece together such knowledge.

We who live temporarily in this earth realm have our lives dictated by the natural seasons. In most places there are the normal four seasons we have come to know so well, but in other places there are only two discernible seasonal changes, such as in the extreme polar caps, and the tropics.

Nevertheless our familiarity with the four seasons causes us to do certain activities at certain times entirely dependent on whether it's hot or cold outside. In regard to plant life, we know when it's time to plant bulbs, sow seed, when to fertilize, etc. And when we do plant the seed, we do so knowing there's a certain period of waiting required, and we are content to allow the seed to follow its set course of hibernation awaiting the moment of bursting forth.

This may be so in the natural realm, but it shouldn't necessarily be so in the spiritual. While indeed there are seasons of "waiting" and seasons of "reflection" in the spiritual, it's wise to constantly be vigilant and alert in these quiet seasons. In the natural we are content and even tolerant of these cold seasons, but it should not be so during the spiritually barren seasons.

In the Word we are exhorted to remain active during all the seasons that come our way. As hard as it is during the "barren" seasons we should not allow ourselves to become barren within our spirit-man, and simply wait until a better season comes upon us. No, in the spiritual realm we are to still seek for any opportunity to sow a seed into someone's life, or to cultivate something in our own life, and to seek for a reaping where possible. So many of us have allowed a cold spiritual season to dictate to our inner-man and we've become inactive, almost waiting for better times with a negativity that robs us. Our thought is, "Times will get better, I just have to hold on and get through this season of lifelessness".

This however will not do for those who desire to move into spiritual maturity. There's a need for us to bring our inner-man to attention, to take stock, to make a decision that we WILL draw from such barren seasons all the beneficial lessons that we possibly can. It's important that we don't waste our sorrows, but learn to discern what's going on with our emotions. I like how Francis Frangipane puts it:

"There will be times when, to obey God's will, we must fight our very instincts for survival. Plan on it. There will be seasons when you will hurt terribly or be deeply troubled inside. Perhaps even facing severe depression, yet to fulfill God's will, you cannot excuse yourself because of heart sickness. In utter defiance of your own feelings, you will have to say, "Yes" to God. It is at this juncture, beloved, that true spiritual progress is being made."

Once more it has to do with times and seasons, and particular our response to them. Most of us **react** to situations rather than **respond**; a mature person in the Lord is one who has learnt to respond to issues and not be dictated to by the issues.

All believers will experience these barren seasons, but let us not think that Satan has sent them. It may feel like he has, and obviously he'll take advantage of us during such times, but it is God, our God, who ordains both the natural and spiritual seasons. Paul discovered this precious truth: **"But I want you to know, brothers, that the things concerning me have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel..."** Phlp 1:12

Don't blame every season of discontent on Satan. In God's mysterious yet wonderful purpose, there are seasons of "The Opposites", and God would have us realize this early-on in our walk with Him. Think for a moment: perhaps you're a person who enjoys the warmth of the sun, bright blue skies, and the abundance of leafy trees that give shade. If you're such a person, as you soak up the sun and gently smile at the clear blue sky, you mind may well say "God is good to me - I so enjoy this kind of perfect weather".

But what happens when the cold and damp of winter arrives, and the rain makes you feel miserable, the biting wind truly does give you a shudder, and the grey monotonous skies seem heavy above you. Does your mind then say "Satan has sent this miserable weather, and I don't like it one bit".

Of course not. We accept that at one period it's simply time for the sun and birds, the blue sky and lovely evenings, just as we accept that the season has changed and now the cold has come and the days are dark and somber. We don't think that God has sent one and Satan the other. That would be ludicrous! So why do so many people think that God only sends the good times and Satan sends the bad? If we accept that in the natural seasons there are opposites, why don't we accept it in the spiritual seasons?

Any believer who has walked the walk for some time will soon know that the Christian life isn't easy. It has many struggles, many valleys and peaks, many triumphs and certainly many sorrows. But ALL the opposites are in fact part of God's purpose, and it is He who "works all things together for good..." (Rms 8:28). God allows the difficult seasons to come for our maturing, not to burden us down and cause unnecessary anxiety.

Part of this maturing depends on adjusting to the different spiritual seasons we find ourselves in. It's a requirement of spiritual maturity that we both discern what's going on, learn from it, and seek God's counsel about it. We are to use our time wisely, appropriately, and to ever be ready in response to the season we find ourselves in. Note what Jesus the Pattern Son has to say about this: **"My time is not yet here, but your time is always ready."** Jhn 7:6

One of the great characteristics of maturity is how we use our time, and how we respond to the seasons of life, whether good or difficult. We are apt to be more content with the changing seasons in the natural than we are in the change of spiritual seasons. This must be addressed if we are to advance in spiritual maturity.

As we've seen earlier, there are many types of seasons, both natural and human, which are influenced by the gravitational pull of the various celestial bodies. What we are now to consider is how the word "seasons" can be used literally or figuratively to describe periods of

time determined by God according to His grander purposes. Some of these different types of seasons are found throughout Scripture.

“I will give the rain of your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, and your wine, and your oil.” Deut 11:14

“And he (the righteous man) shall be like a tree planted by the rivulets of waters, which will give its fruit in its seasons, and its leaf will not wither, and all which he does will prosper.” Psa 1:3

“All of them (the creatures) wait for You to give them their food in due season.” Psa 104:27

“O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer; and in the night-season, and there is no rest for me.” Psa 22:2

“To all there is an appointed time, a season, even a time for every purpose under the heavens.” Eccles 3:1

“For though I made you sorry with my epistle, I do not regret it: though I did regret it (for I see that that epistle made you sorry, though but for a season).” 2 Cor 7:8

“Preach the Word, be urgent in season, out of season, convict, warn, encourage with all long-suffering and teaching.” 2 Tim 4:2

“Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through many temptations.” 1 Pet 1:6

So we find that “seasons” can be used with a wide variety of meanings, ranging from the natural through to the spiritual. In the natural we are more or less assured at the approximate length of a particular season, but this isn’t so in the spiritual. While we know very well that summer will last approximately three to four months, we can never be sure how long a spiritual season might last.

This is where our faith is really tested because we simply don’t know how long we’re in a particular season for, especially if it’s a “barren winter” season, the so-called “dark night of the soul” experience.

So what’s needed is an understanding of how to personally deal with each spiritual season. Usually most of us are pretty good at giving advice to someone else who’s going through a rough patch, but if we’re honest we often don’t apply that same advice to our own situation.

Actually I find that giving “advice” is generally unhelpful; the more accurate biblical type of help is “counsel” based firmly on the Word. Note that I didn’t say “counseling” but “counsel”.

“For I did not keep back from declaring to you all the counsel of God.” Acts 20:27

Here the word “counsel” means “consolation, deliberation” and also (God’s) “will or purpose.” In context Paul is declaring the purpose of God’s plan of salvation, but the basic meaning of the word is still helpful for us to consider here. Only once in the New Testament does the

word mean “decision”, once it means “motives”, four times it means “plan”, but five times it means “purpose”.

So to give somebody biblical counsel means to declare to them God’s purpose and plan. It’s to this purpose that their problem should be anchored. Once we can link our problems with God’s declared purpose, then we see clearly to move forward. However if we focus on the problem without putting it into the context of the divine purpose, we’re likely to go around in circles.

So biblical counsel is better than human advice. Giving human advice isn’t always helpful because it’s based on man’s experience, often devoid of the truth of God’s grander purposes. “Counsel” has behind it the idea of reaching an end through a practical solution. It’s through consulting the principles in the Word of God (often with the assistance of a mature believer) that enables us to deliberate the issues and arrive at a beneficial answer to our situation.

That’s why “counsel” is usually found as the object of a verb, expressing the idea “to take” or “to give”. The idea behind biblical counsel is not to try and solve the problem of somebody who might be going through a dry spiritual season; rather it’s the “giving” of biblical counsel about how to respond when we do find ourselves in such seasons. Then, it’s up to us individually to “take” the counsel, based on eternal principles, and to implement them in our own lives. By doing this our seemingly barren spiritual season is put into a greater context and we see things as they truly are - in light of God’s greater purpose.

Ideally it would help if we’ve been through a similar experience to the person we’re trying to help; but if that’s not the case, then we can always safely revert to what the Word counsels about situations. Naturally we’re not going to find something in the Word that fits even situation of modern life, but you can be sure that the principles are there. So I encourage people to look for principles in the Word that will help them through, not ready-made answers to the problems of modern life as if the Bible is a kind of “Self-Help Dictionary of 1,001 Instant Answers”.

The “giving” of biblically accurate principles based firmly on the Word of God, followed through by the “taking-in” of this counsel, will always ensure a way ahead. It also has the by-product of not making the counselor the focus, because all the counselor has really done is to fathom out the riches of the Word and offered them as a solution. We see this kind of counsel throughout Proverbs, and a study of this book will greatly enlighten us.

One of the most pressing needs of the Church today is the adjusting of the mind to God’s purposes. We who live in the western world are beset by an attitude that screams at us, “Be an individual”, “Do your own thing”, “Don’t let anyone judge you”, “Stick up for your rights”.

This is not a biblical mentality; it is human wisdom and it’s fraught with danger because it actually sets us against God. There’s an urgent need for the Church to take stock, re-visit the Word of God, be willing to adjust to it, and move on in obedience. By doing so we’ll have a much better chance of discerning the various seasons that come our way, both good and bad. For example, it’s hopeless to think we can navigate the treacherous reefs of a barren spiritual season if we’re not firmly on-board the vessel the Lord has provided for us.

Noah in the ark is a good encouragement for us. He didn't have all knowledge about what the flood was going to accomplish. He obeyed, he trusted in his God, and he waited out the difficult season he was in. His place in the whole scenario was to trust and obey; God would see to the rest. It was only after the flood that Noah began to understand the season he was in, and even then it was still step-by-step.

So it is for us now. Many of the spiritual seasons we find ourselves in bewilder us. We get confused, we cry out for God to intervene, and at times He seems a very long way off. The season we find ourselves in tends to make us focus on self. Have you ever noticed that? When things come against us and the normally comfortable walk of faith is suddenly pushed aside by some tragedy, problem or illness - our immediate reaction is to focus on self. "Why is this happening to ME?" "What have I done to deserve this?" "Doesn't God care about ME?" "Look at MY situation?"

This is really the same as when we physically hurt ourselves. Cut your finger with a knife, knock your knee on the tow bar of your car, sprain an ankle. Where does your thought fly? To where the pain is. That's where our attention goes to, to the problem area; we focus on the spot where the pain is. This is quite normal and there's nothing wrong in it. But it does serve as a lesson for us when we're injured in our soul life, when a domestic problem arises, or someone at Church betrays you, or a loved-one is diagnosed with cancer, etc.

Our minds fly to the problem; we focus on the pain, and it's not very long before we're thinking of all the possible consequences that will soon follow. Financial worries race through the mind; emotional stress builds; how will I cope; my whole life has taken a king hit; life is suddenly in a turmoil; how will I get through the months and years ahead? What throws us off balance is not just the situation and its consequences, but all that surrounds the problem. This weighs us down as much, or even more so, than the actual issue itself. There's a tendency within us to leap from the situation we find ourselves in, to the foreboding consequences that will accompany it.

I recall one very difficult patch we as a family endured. All the above things plagued our minds and we were in a very dark season indeed, with great stress, grief and a heavy sense of despair. We were very much like David when he said:

"I am bent down, I am bowed down exceedingly; I go mourning all the day. My loins are filled with a burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am exceedingly benumbed and crushed. I howl from the groaning of my heart. My Lord, all my desire is before You, and my sighing is not hidden from You. My heart throbs; my power forsakes me! And the light of my eyes is no longer with me." Psa 38:6-10

This was a dark season for all of us. But one night as the awfulness of the situation seemed to get worse, I went outside to put out the rubbish bin for pickup next morning. As I walked back to the house, heavy of heart, I looked up at a clear night sky and saw the myriad stars of the Milky Way in all its beauty. As I looked up my heart cried out to God, not to intervene, not to change things, but to speak. Instantly I heard a deep echo within, that consoling voice that simply said, "The stars will still shine tomorrow."

I knew heaven had spoken. Hope had been imparted. What a relief it brought to my troubled soul! What refreshment it gave to my anxious mind! Even my flesh was relieved from the build-up of stress in it. God had answered, not by delivering us out of the horror of the

season, but by assuring us that whatever the outcome, “the stars would still be shining afterwards”.

You see, they were His stars, He had set them in place, and for me it served as a perfect reminder that He had appointed them for signs and seasons. In the end we were delivered from much of the negativity of the season, but we still had to go through a great deal of it, enduring much heaviness. When that particular season had passed us by, I knew we had to learn from it, as horrible as it was. But He was there, with us in the season, not forsaking us, but speaking hope. God was eliciting a response from us by speaking to us of hope, faithfulness and stability.

All of these very things came to pass out of that season, and it has brought a different level of maturity and discipleship to us. It has also made me become much more aware of the hurt and pain of others, and I am able to more closely identify with people in similar situations. Bless His name! Indeed it is very true:

“...that the things concerning me have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel...” Phlp 1:12

I share these things, not to draw undue attention to myself, but to encourage you that whatever seasons might befall us, He is totally and utterly aware of them, and fully aware of our feelings, emotions and pain during such times. Sometimes we can only truly learn something by going through it. I say this not to ignore the reality of the pain and suffering, but to highlight the reality of being transformed by it.

I refuse to speak platitudes to people now; they did me no good when we were suffering and good-minded saints spoke platitudes to us (a little like Job’s friends I suppose). I know their heart was toward our situation but in the end we were going through it, not them. I don’t mean this to be an accusation in any way: loyal Christian friends are extremely supportive and their prayers most valuable. But I now realize what we needed most were words of wise counsel based on Scripture, not advice out of man’s experience. Above all we needed to hear what heaven had to say!

Such episodes in a believer’s life add to the experience and knowledge of understanding seasons and times. I’ve heard it said that African Christians look into another believer’s eyes searching for the Cross. In other words they want to know if you’ve been with Christ “in the fellowship of His sufferings” (Phlp 3:10). Whether the saying is true or not, it certainly makes the point.

The point is, grace is always available in any season; it’s just that in some seasons it’s more apparent than in others. The work of grace upon one’s soul can be seen to act in two distinct ways. One work of the Holy Spirit on the soul is to break down all our self-centeredness. Another work is to exalt Christ as “above all”, particularly over our soul-life. The result of both is for the full salvation of one’s soul, and the glorification of God.

The Lord will use all, and any season, to bring this about. Our seeming difficulty is discerning what the seasons mean, what is to be learnt, and how to stand firm while we undergo the season of change or trial. It’s usually too late to learn the lesson if we haven’t prepared for such times beforehand. This is why dying daily unto one’s soul-life (Lk 9:23) is vital.

It's important to take advantage of the good seasons and beneficial times as they come to us. Use such occasions for the benefit of your soul. Go into the secret place (Psa. 91:1 and Mtt 6:6) and there learn of the Father's ways. By regularly doing this in the good seasons, we prepare ourselves for any difficult season that may come. It's then far easier to stand during the times of uncertainty. Strange as it may seem the best lessons are learnt in seasons of affliction. So we do need to prepare for them. It's in those seasons when temptation, distress, trouble and humiliation abound, that we learn the wonderful secrets of heavenly wisdom. Why? Because during such times we discover our own weakness, the folly of trusting in the flesh, as well as the sustaining power and love of a faithful Father.

I realize only too well that sprouting Bible texts doesn't always bring comfort and relief in seasons of perplexity, whether you're saying them to yourself, or someone else says them to you. Our soul can so easily want to give up, to walk away, to blame God, and yes, even to accuse Him of letting such things happen. But He has called us, and He remains faithful to us.

So we find ourselves holding on when there seems to be little to hold onto. We almost want to throw it all away, yet strangely we keep on coming back. The Bible seems veiled to us, empty of power even; but still we look at that Book on the table and feel guilt because we know that in it are the truths that will fill the void. We want so much to come out of this dry, barren, deathly season, but we know so frustratingly well, that we cannot hasten its time. Slowly we begin to understand the eternal truth that "the times and seasons the Father has set by His own authority" can be counted on (Acts 1:7). And when He sends the season of favor, nothing but nothing, can hold it back!

The seasons of one's life, like the seasons of creation, will continue under the awesome oversight of our Father in heaven. Take heart, we are being taught by Him and sooner or later all whom He has called will know the full measure of that special season when He sends "rain and fruitful seasons to us from heaven, filling our hearts with food and gladness." Acts 14:17

Chapter 2

The Hebrew view of Time

"And God said, Let luminaries be in the expanse of the heavens, to divide between the day and the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years."
Gen 1:14

The "luminaries" in the heavens (lit: skies) were to serve as an observable natural chronometer for mankind, showing the division and calculation of the three main units of time: Days, Months, and Years. Now just as we needed to lay a foundation of the natural seasons in order to understand the spiritual seasons, so too we need to follow the same principle in dealing with these three units of time. It wouldn't help at all to begin our study of spiritual cycles (appointed times) by using our western (or Gregorian) calendar in attempting to understand time cycles. We need to identify the way in which the Hebrew mind used calendars, which was based on a lunar cycle and not a solar cycle (as in the Western or Gregorian calendar).

Some background will help here. The Hebrews kept time in a rather unique fashion based upon what God had said to them rather than by man's ingenuity, science or philosophical thinking. The sacred calendar (Exo12:1-2) was how their relationship with God functioned, and their civil or agricultural calendar was how commercial and daily life operated. It was the sacred calendar that reminded Israel of its great historical events and divine encounters.

In this modern era Judaism still preserves itself through the functioning of festivals and holy-days, even without the presence of a Temple or Priesthood. All that makes historic Judaism tangible can be found in its adherence to the yearly cycle of feasts and fasts prescribed by God Himself. The Jewish faith is kept intact by a regulated, structured and finely-timed set of practices celebrating their history.

Locked into these cycles is a specific way of keeping time. The Hebrew mindset is firmly embedded in "time" and counts it from one specific event - the creation of the universe. Paradoxically this "timing" and all the events of Israel that occurred within it, is regarded as "timeless". For the Hebrew mind to live in the world, in time and space, is a response to an event or a series of events - namely, God's dealings with them. All the occasions when God met with Israel, challenged Israel, blessed Israel, and chastised Israel; all these are remembered and even rehearsed in the holy-days of Judaism. It's like a timeless calendar anchored to time.

Our western mind-set in regard to "time" is based on the idea of linear time. Imagine world history as a horizontal line with the left hand side being the "beginning" and the right hand end of the line representing the "end". In between we have certain periods and events marked off, such as the age of the dinosaurs, the age of certain empires (like the Roman, Greek, etc), the age of the industrial revolution, the age of the space race, etc.

We've all seen these time-lines in school books for example. That's how we in the west consider time to be: a straight line, beginning at some point and ending at another. Even our own lives are seen in this fashion. Next time you're at a funeral listen to the eulogy and you can be sure that in people's mind that's how they're thinking about the deceased's life - like a horizontal timeline, from birth through to death.

The person giving the eulogy usually starts with the time and place of "Sam's" birth. Where he went to school, what his first job was, his favorite holiday spot. We think of the time dear old Sam met his future wife, Mary, and married. Then they moved from one city to start work in another and there they had the good fortune to meet some neighbors who introduced Sam to golf. Sam was so taken with this sport that he won many trophies. This brought more money in, so Sam and Mary bought a bigger house and travelled a lot. In their travels they...etc. You get the story I'm sure.

What's happening in this type of linear thinking? Life is dictated mainly by outside, and often, impersonal circumstances. Something causes Sam and Mary to embark on another stage of life. Cause and effect. It's a scientific principle we're so familiar with we hardly even consciously think about it. All human life is dictated by this "cause-and-effect" principle; it's inescapable. But this is NOT how the Hebrew mind considers one's time-line, especially in relation to eternal things.

The Hebrew idea of time (corporate and personal) is linked to how an individual or a group (e.g. the nation of Israel) **responds** to an event of which they are generally passive

recipients. Hence the story of God's dealings with His chosen people, Israel, were (and still are) associated with a non-human event outside of their control, the "Day" (or "Days") of Creation.

It's in the **responding** to the event that's important, not the **re-acting** to its happening. In the west we're more likely to ask the question "What's the point of our existence on earth?" (a rather abstract and detached question), whereas the Hebrew mind would ask "What does God want me to do while I'm here on earth?" (a very practical and personal question).

Westerners aren't connected to the greater picture as much as those with a Hebrew mind-set. The Hebrew or Biblical view of time is to do with God's acts in history and our response to them. The Biblical texts are predominately to show forth the rhythms of God's redemptive purpose and their transforming power when we respond to them. The Hebrew mind-set sees a God who is able to transform both humanity and the world, actions that He performed and which require us to either respond to or react against them. In other words, God acts and this action requires us to think through what it means to us, not in a remote philosophical way, but through us engaging with it in intimacy and trust.

Biblical thinking requires us to fix our life to what the Creator and Finisher of all life has purposed. This is why in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, we're encouraged to be mindful of our beginning and our end.

"Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies with Christ, even as He elected us in Him before the foundation of the world, for us to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, predestinating us to adoption through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will..." Eph 1:3-5

"If, then, you were raised with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right of God." Col 3:1

"I am pressing on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me." Phlp 3:12

Hebrew (and therefore Biblical) thought anchors itself in experiences (natural and spiritual) that are accepted as realities. It's by responding to these realities that one comes to truly "know" - through experience, not through the acquisition of facts and information. To "know" in Hebrew is associated with the words "to listen" (Shama = is a verb meaning "to listen," but can also mean "to obey," or more correctly "to respond". In responding correctly there is true knowledge and practical wisdom).

Interestingly, in some ancient Hebrew thought the seat of intelligence was regarded as residing in the ears, not the brain! For the Hebrew it's the ability to properly listen that comes first, not intelligence. That's why they believed anyone could hear from God as long as they were open to the spiritual experience first, rather than analyze the experience.

Intelligence was believed to be a gift from God to be used wisely, not the ability of the mind to simply gather information and digest it. Knowing something wasn't just the ability to observe and make deductions from that observation, it was by experiencing what you were observing that imparted correct understanding.

For example, in the Hebrew way of understanding, to simply observe a person's behavior wouldn't give you an accurate understanding of them, their beliefs or values. You had to walk with them, experience them, listen to them, live with them, and out of those experiences make a correct deduction about them as a person. Hence Jesus said, "Follow me"; and Paul wrote **"Be imitators of me as I also imitate Christ."** (1 Cor 11:1)

Knowing someone in ancient Hebrew thought involved having an intimate attachment with, and commitment to, that person. So true knowing is a direct result of first-hand experience. This discerning knowledge is therefore more to do with revelation than with analyzing facts. That revelation to rightly hear from God is a gift, which when responded to, brings blessing.

"The LORD has opened my ear and I did not rebel; I did not turn away." (Isa 50:5)

The above verse highlights the importance of having a "listening ear" first, which is only then followed by "obedience" to the given word. So for the Hebrew mind, attentive listening comes prior to doing. Note how the following text illustrates this way of thinking. **"And Moses took the book of the covenant, and read in the ears of the people. And they said, All that the LORD has said, we will do, and be obedient."** (Exo 24:7)

It's like saying; "We will do, THEN we will obey". To our western way of thinking this seems back-to-front. We generally learn something and then act based on the accumulated knowledge. Western thought processes aren't wrong, just different. However when attempting to understand biblical concepts related to Times and Seasons we need to focus more on the Hebraic way of thinking. And as we've seen such thinking relates to a personal encounter with God at a time appointed by Him.

At an appointed time God created the world, at an appointed time He chose Israel, He made known His will at an appointed time, He guided and instructed in appointed seasons. Israel's part in this was to respond by trusting that the One who had spoken was true, faithful and reliable. So that even though "time" is connected initially with a "past" creative act it's also very practical as it unfolds through the events of history "now". For the Hebrew mind, the world is connected to creation, and history is man's experience of this unfolding.

The dimensions of "time" and "space" are not theories to the Hebrew mind, but realities of which they partake and experience. "Time" for the Hebrew mind is definitely not an abstract notion but a reality connected to each individual's life. Hence when celebrating the Passover for example (an event we would call "in the past") the Hebrew mind rehearses the going-forth from Egypt in such a way as to infer that they are personally enacting it "now". The feasts and holy-days are a re-entering of the event, not in "the past" but as a kind of actual event for each succeeding generation.

The Exodus therefore wasn't something that simply happened "to them" way back in Moses' time, but something that keeps on re-happening in this age also. The participant of a Passover celebration is actually re-doing the same thing "now" as it happened "back then". It's as if the participant is personally re-living the Exodus and thus identifying with that great God-directed event.

"In every generation each person should feel as if he personally had come out of Egypt, as it is written: And you shall tell your son in that day saying: This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt." This comes from the

Passover Seder meal, where a participant at the meal asks the father of the household the question “Why are we doing this?” The father’s response is taken from Exo. 13:8 and corporately personalized for those present.

In the west we’re a little familiar with this kind of thinking, when we remember the crucifixion on Good Friday for example. But we don’t carry the same sense of life-rhythm within us that the Jews do in regard to their festivals.

Our celebrations of events like birthdays, wedding anniversaries, religious observances, etc, are somewhat disjointed from the daily rhythm of life. They are more like events that impinge on our life each year; they are like events we view, rather than events we’re anchored to. For us an anniversary of any sort is a joyous celebration of a good event that crops up annually on a time-line; something in the past that happened and now we remember it by “re-viewing” it.

I don’t know about you, but when there’s a family celebration or a national observance happening, even though I’m partaking of them, I still feel I’m also watching the process from a distance. I look around, take stock of what’s going on, look at people’s faces, watch the cutting of the cake or people sing the national anthem, etc. I “view” the spectacle as much as participate in it. It’s both an involvement in it as well as a viewing of it happening. It might just be me, but I sense this is how westerners generally partake of such celebrations.

We’re even prone to disassociate our minds for a moment while we look lovingly upon Grandma’s face as she opens her 90th birthday present. We take in how her eyes brighten as she unwraps the gift, the smile on her lips, all the time recalling with fondness something she did for us or said to us way back. In that brief moment we reflect on her, her nature, her character, who she really is. All the while we’re there in the room, packed in with other family members, but a little distant as we mentally draw back and reflect. We’re there participating, but also viewing the scene as if from a short distance. And then someone begins to loudly sing “Happy Birthday” and suddenly we’re back in the room as it were, joining in with the celebrations.

For the Hebrew mind-set an important personal or corporate “life event” is attached to something greater than one’s own life and history. It’s attached to what God has done as far back as the very beginning of time” itself. Paul even says that our personal history is connected to God “before time began” (2 Tim 1:9 and Eph 1:4). What an astonishing thought this is!

So, in this chapter we’re considering the difference between Greek/western thought and Hebrew/eastern thought. Both cultures view their surroundings, lives and values in ways that are fundamentally different to one another. But this doesn’t mean that one is right, and one is wrong. They are merely “different”, but I would stress that in attempting to understand the appointed Times and Seasons of God we should try to think through the Hebrew mind-set to gain the most accurate understanding of our subject. So it will be very helpful to keep some of these ideas in mind as we continue.

Re-capping some main principles now:

1. Greek (western) thought sees history as linear, like a horizontal time-line. Hebrew (eastern) thought sees history more like a rhythm or as cyclical. However this shouldn’t be

taken to mean that the Hebrews believed in history constantly repeating itself, or in the erroneous doctrine of re-incarnation.

2. Greek thought sees the world mainly through the intellect, i.e. abstract thought. Hebrew thought sees the world mainly through experiences of the senses, i.e. “concrete” thought.

3. Greek thought tends to describe objects in relation to their appearance. Hebrew thought describes objects in relation to their function and use.

4. God calls us to respond to His encounters, rather than to react against them. We are to engage, rather than remain aloof from, or reject such encounters.

5. To truly know God is to listen attentively first, before any action is taken. Spiritual knowledge is mainly gained through first-hand experience rather than by accumulating information gained from outside sources.

6. For the Hebrew, festivals and celebrations are not something to simply remember and enjoy, but rather something to “rehearse” and re-visit in each succeeding generation as if they were historically and personally present.

7. We best understand a person not by observing them and accumulating facts about them, but by being with them and becoming committed to them.

8. Life, both individual and corporate, is anchored to the great purposes of God, and so can only be truly understood and appreciated when this view is fostered in the daily or annual cycle of historical life-events.

Chapter 3

The Feasts foreshadow Seasons

“Have I not written to you excellent things; of counsels and knowledge, that I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may answer words of truth, to those who send to you?” Prov 22:20-21

Truth is certainly “meat in due season” for those who desire to move into maturity. However, truth is only meat if we’re prepared to receive it. Revelatory truth is given step-by-step by the Lord; He waits to see how we respond to that which He has already imparted before giving us the next insight. Obedience to truth has always been a condition of moving on into the more wonderful aspects of the Lord. Therefore I encourage you to be open to as much truth as you can; check it against Scripture; earnestly seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit; do not be fearful, but yes, certainly be discerning.

The Lord has said that He will meet with man three times. Israel was therefore commanded to meet God at His appointed Feasts three times a year (see Exo 23:14 and Deut 16:16).

“Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.”

At these Feasts they were not to come “empty handed”, prophetically meaning they were to come prepared and ready to encounter their God. For Israel this was an “excellent” thing to

do. The following explanation from Strong's concordance deepens the insight to the word "excellent" used by King Solomon in Proverbs 22:20.

Shalosh or *shaw-loshe* from Strong's Hebrew word number 7969, means a triple, i.e. (as a musical instrument) a triangle (perhaps a three-stringed lute); a three-fold measure (perhaps a treble ephah); also (as an officer) a general of the third rank (upward, i.e. the highest): a captain, an instrument of music, great lord, a great measure, a prince, three. So the word in Hebrew for "excellence" has the connotation of "three" or "great measure". Since the Lord is excellent above all things, it's not surprising that He has revealed Himself as three, and desired to meet with man in three dimensions.

In each of these encounters the Lord has promised to meet with us so that we might experience Him in these realms. The three great Feasts are types and shadows of what we are meant to literally enjoy from the Lord. Not only are we to individually experience these truths, but so is the Body of Christ corporately. Note too that these experiences are sequential. We are meant to move into each one progressively as we learn and encounter the different levels and dimensions. The Body will never come into maturity until we engaged each of these revealed truths and live them from the heart. Only then will there be a perfected people having entered into the fullness of the life given by Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus has fulfilled each of these truths in His own life and ministry. The Church historically has already encountered the first two experiences of Passover and Pentecost, and we are now on the verge of meeting with the Lord in the Feast of Tabernacles. The question is: will we personally be prepared to appear before the Father "not empty handed"? May the Spirit of the Living God grant us the wisdom needed to appreciate and experience these truths for ourselves.

Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles

As we have noted, God has said that He will meet with man three times. He has given us symbols of these "meetings" in the three Feasts He ordained Israel to keep, and commanded that they not appear before Him "empty handed". They were not simply to witness the Feasts, nor just to participate in them. They had to bring something costly! How sad that many Christians hope to come to these Feasts today thinking they don't have to pay a price. Certainly all of God's works toward us are of grace. They are free, unmerited, and undeserved; but nevertheless given by Him as a great act of divine generosity. This is grace! How dare we then think we can simply walk into His Presence and partake of these wonderful Feasts laid before us without due consideration of the truths they hold.

It will require the laying down of our own soul-life, our ambitions, our desires; even our own opinions must be crucified. This is what we bring in our hands when we come to His Feasts. As we study them it's paramount that we learn of them in order to BECOME them! The Feasts were for ancient Israel to keep; they are for the Church to "become"!

As we look at these Feasts we'll see that they have been perfectly ordered in their timing, their symbolism and their sequence, to give us the clearest possible understanding of what God intends for us to experience in His appointed seasons.

In Scripture we find there are actually seven Feasts of the Lord all contained in three separate seasons. The seven feasts are: the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened

Bread, the Feast of Firstfruits [together known as “**Passover**”]; the Feast of Weeks [called “**Pentecost**”]; the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles [collectively called “**Tabernacles**”] Lev 23:4-34. Prophetically the number “seven” stands for perfection, and “three” stands for excellence. So we have something of perfection contained in excellence.

Why study these Feasts? First because the Lord said they were His Feasts (Lev 23:2) and anything belonging to the Lord has great treasure inherit within it. Second, because the Feasts are symbols (or types) of what was to come later they are of utmost importance.

Jesus fulfilled these three Feasts in His own life time in a personal sense, and corporately the Body of Christ has already experienced two of them (Passover and Pentecost), and we now await the third and final Feast!

An important aspect of the typology of the Feasts is that each individual Christian is meant to experience these in a personal sense. Passover is the born-again experience; Pentecost is the infilling of the Holy Spirit; and Tabernacles is coming into full maturity. Hence the first Feast speaks of Jesus; the second, of the Holy Spirit; and the third, of the Father.

This is why we need to both understand the Feasts, and personally experience them! Great treasure and innumerable blessings wait for those who spiritually attend and experience these Feasts today!

The seven Feasts of the Lord are in fact God’s timetable. The word “feast” comes from the Hebrew meaning “an appointed or set time or season”. In these Feasts we have God’s redemptive plan as it wonderfully reveals the ministry and work of the Messiah. To have an understand of these Feasts gives us the ability to appreciate the plan of redemption and Jesus’ role in it. It is through the Feasts that we begin to see the wonder of God’s greater purpose.

By the way, it’s important to understand the difference between God’s PURPOSE and His PLAN. His “purpose” is to bring many sons into glory; this is what Paul’s “mystery” in Ephesians and Colossians is about. God’s “plan” however concerns the redemption found in Christ. They are not the same, neither can we use the terms interchangeably. The “Purpose” is the main thrust, and the “Plan” brings it about for fallen man.

Significantly the total number of “Feasts of the Lord” are seven, which speaks of “completeness”. So the seven Feasts declare to us the fulfillment of God’s purpose accomplished through His plan of redemption. I have more to say in this area in my eBook “The Three Prophetic Feasts”. Here however we’ll just look at a brief overview of these seven amazing Feasts. The following outline gives an insight to the historical and prophetic aspects of all the Feasts. It’s important to understand that the Feasts appear exactly in the order delivered by God to Moses, and that they’ll be fulfilled precisely in that same order.

FEAST OF PASSOVER

Held on the 14th day of Nisan, the first month.

From Egypt to Freedom=from the old life to new.

The lamb’s blood to be shed=the Lamb of God sacrificed.

Lamb's flesh to be eaten=symbolism of the Lord's Supper.

It was in the month of Nisan that the Jews were delivered from Egypt.

FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

Starts on the 15th day, and lasts for 7 days.

Regarded as a joint feast with Passover.

Old Israel (law) gives way to the New (grace); now Bread of Life.

FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS

The 16th day after Passover.

Jesus is the Firstfruits from the dead.

It is the start of the harvest season!

The sheaf was waved before the Lord in the Temple the day after the Sabbath. In fulfillment Jesus was "waved" (=presented) to His Father in " His resurrected state the day after the Sabbath.

FEAST OF PENTECOST

The 50th day after the Passover

Also called the Feast of Harvest or the Feast of Weeks

Jesus was on earth for forty days after His resurrection. Ten days later the Holy Spirit was sent upon the Church.

Pentecost was a "new" feast, having "new" meat. (Lev 23:16)

It was a harvest feast. Note that 3,000 came into salvation at Peter's sermon

Pentecost is a harvest but only of the Firstfruits. More to come!

FEAST OF TRUMPETS

Trumpets (shofars) were used for four purpose (see Numbers 10:2-10).

1. A call to assemble
2. Journey to the camps
3. Prepare for war

4. Celebrate a festival

Note the precise sequence of use here: called, assemble, fight the good fight, then celebrate with festivities (at the Coming of the Lord)

We are called, warned and are to be prepared to celebrate the victory.

DAY OF ATONEMENT

There are ten days (called The Awesome Days) which lead up to the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), during which every Jew had the time and opportunity to prepare to stand clean and untainted before the Lord for the coming year.

This speaks of a period before the Lord closes this Age during which we are given time and opportunity to prepare to meet our God!

FEAST OF TABERNACLES

This ultimate of all Feasts has been referred to by many names which are attempts to express the great encompassing meaning of this event.

Feast of Unity (Lev 23:40 and 42). Not institutional unity, but organic and spiritual by the Holy Spirit.

Feast of Joy (Deut 16:14). The past 2,000 years of Church life has been a drought more or less, bringing a lack of joy, except during revivals.

Feast of Ingathering (Exo 23:16). Reference to the ingathering of the harvest, during the time of the rains.

Feast of Rest (Lev 23:39). The Feast of Tabernacles heralds the closeness to the time of resting from laboring in the field.

The Feast of Glory (Exo 40:17). This symbolizes a foretaste of the glory to come with the Lord Jesus. The Church will pass from the realm of the natural to the realm of the spiritual. In the hour of tribulation, the Lord will reveal His glory!

Feast of Restoration (Ezra 3:1). After the Babylonian exile the remnant restored the original, but neglected, Feasts. They had opposition from both the inside and outside of their city. Hence they learnt the lesson that each man had his own set place and set ministry.

Feast of His Appearing (Jhn 7:14,37). Jesus went up and appeared in the middle of the Feast of Tabernacles (vs. 14) and also appeared on the last day (vs. 37). This is prophetically important as we are given a glimpse of His return at this last Feast - He shall appear twice during the Feast at the end of the age!

When Jesus came He fulfilled the first three Feasts (Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits) on the precise days and in the exact order as God gave them. The fourth Feast (Pentecost) was then fulfilled precisely ten days after the ascension of Christ.

The final three Feasts (Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles) still await fulfillment, and are directly associated with His Second Coming. They too shall occur precisely “on time” as God has appointed them. The outworking of these Feasts highlights the sequential pattern of the prophetic events they portray. They also show us the INCREASE of blessing that accompanies each stage. All seven Feasts are associated with the Sacred Calendar and linked to agricultural seasons. The following chart will help us understand when each Feast occurred during the cycle of the year. Note that the Feasts of the Lord were associated with harvest periods, and that the three main Feasts (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles) were pilgrim feasts.

At these Feasts the pilgrims would come to the Temple to “appear before the Lord” (Deut 16:16) celebrating with great joy. At this assembly the males were to bring with them the fruit of their labors, that is, they were not to come empty-handed. Prophetically this speaks of a time when all believers shall stand before the Lord bringing with them “the fruit of their labor”.

We shall all appear before Him, and the evidence of our prayer-labor, witnessing-labor, good deeds-labor, fasting-labor, missionary-labor, preaching-labor, prophetic-labor, etc, will be on display. This is such an awesome thought that it should make us re-assess our opportunities while we’re still on this earth!

The Lord God is a God who sows. He is also the One who reaps what He sows, so it’s no co-incidence that the three main Feasts occur at harvest time. After the Feast of Tabernacles is finally fulfilled there shall be a world-wide harvest of souls, and we shall appear before the Lord in all His glory. Let’s not stand before Him empty handed!

NOTE THAT EACH FEAST CONSISTS OF **History** - a past remembrance; **Harvest** - has agricultural and seasonal links; and **Prophecy** - past, present and future applications

These three aspects are highlighted in the following chart by showing how the Feasts relate to Israel, the Lord Jesus, and the individual Believer.

Without a doubt the Word of God tells us that of the seven Feasts, the greatest and most profound, is the Feast of Tabernacles (or *Booths*). The Feast of Tabernacles prophetically speaks of maturity and Sonship. This may account why those today who desire to spiritually experience this Feast are being persecuted by others.

We can see throughout Church history that the “movement” that gave birth to a new spiritual “child” ends up persecuting the very one it brought forth. For example; the Methodist/Wesleyan church came out of Anglicanism, which immediately attacked it. Out of Methodism and other Protestant churches came the Pentecostal movement, with the former persecuting the latter. Now there are those within Pentecostalism who desire to taste the Feast of Tabernacles, and we often find strident accusations against them from inside the Pentecostal movement. To enter into the spiritual truths of Tabernacles will demand perseverance and single-mindedness in these days. The “mother” will seek to kill the “child”.

Yet there are many who are now yearning for something more than doctrinal “truth”. When Jesus declared Himself to be the “Way, the Truth and the Life” He was clearly telling us that these things cannot be found in doctrines, movements or ideals. They are a Person -

Himself! The Feast of Tabernacles is not about a doctrine. It is not about “new truth”. It is not even about “a place”, the Holy of Holies. It is about a **Person** - the Father!

In the Hebrew understanding, the term we translate as “the Holy of Holies” is actually something more like “**the Holiest of all Holinesses**”. What a truth! This place we call “the Most Holy Place” is not a place at all - it’s a **Person**. Beware that you do not seek to enter this Feast-realm just seeking an experience of deeper truth. For even looking for the experience of this Feast will rob you. We come to seek Him, and in the process we will experience the Feast. Don’t seek the Feast experience, but seek Him to whom it points! Why then has the Lord made sure that of all the Feasts, this one stands out as the “greatest”? Because there are great things ahead for us. “**But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.**” 1 Cor 2:9

If only we had eyes to see and a heart to believe we would sense what is on the horizon for the Body of Christ. There’s a Trumpet blowing. (The Feast of Trumpets heralds the Feast of Tabernacles proper). Those with spiritual ears have already heard it calling - it’s a call to **spiritual warfare**, a call to **gather as one**, a call to **set out on the journey** that will finally take us into the promised Rest of God, and a call to **celebrate** with great rejoicing before the King! God follows a pattern of His own making, and the Feasts show us this in outline. We are at the third Feast stage. Any who desires may attend. There is now but one question: Are we ready to come to it? Are you one of them?

Chapter 4

Be like Issachar

The tribe of Issachar were those who knew about timing and seasons (1 Chron 12:32). They had the spiritual ability to inquire of God, use their discernment and act in wisdom. They have become a symbol for many who move in the prophetic, and for those who desire to know the times and seasons of God.

We are in a season when we are to be wise, buy oil for our lamps, keep the wicks finely trimmed, and be ready for action. As one who belongs to the “spiritual tribe of Issachar” I hope that the following insights will enlighten you, and encourage you to press in for the wisdom that’s so necessary if we’re to correctly discern today’s Times and Seasons.

An important prophetic principle to grasp is that **whatever is in the natural, has a spiritual counterpart**. This is particular so in regard to the Tribes of Israel. There are “spiritual tribes” today which amazingly still carry the same characteristics within them as did their forebears, the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve tribes.

For instance, those who belonged to the natural tribe of Issachar have their counterpart in the spiritual tribe of Issachar. In the natural the symbol of Issachar, which is a donkey, is regarded as a strong animal of burden; in the spiritual, Issacharites tend to have great inner strength, even if their natural appearance is otherwise.

This is a direct working out of the principle stated above. Issacharites were born to bear spiritual, and sometimes natural and emotional burdens. Where another person would buckle under the pressure, an Issacharite still manages, by grace and his calling, to carry on.

Clearly the pivotal text about Issachar is found in 1 Chronicles 12:32. **“And of the sons of Issachar, having understanding of the times, to know what Israel should do.”**

This was the text that jumped off the page at me way back in 1984. It was then that the "Issachar Ministry" was birthed in me spiritually. Issacharites tend to be men and women of understanding; they want to know what's going on in the world - for this reason they devour news items on the TV, radio and papers. They tend to be researchers, love reading, and they want to know things, especially spiritual issues. They are insightful about many different things, though not necessarily masters of many! Nevertheless they do have a good range of general knowledge and a whole bag-full of spiritual knowledge, which is part of their anointing.

Bear in mind that this insightfulness is NOT a natural gift; it's something from the Father. Issacharites know this only too well and will testify that their insight is certainly not because they have a good academic mind (even if they do happen to be bright!).

But you can't always get them to reveal what they know, as they're often still digesting something they began to first understand some time back. They'll digest the knowledge, rummage through it, test it against Scripture, test it again, and then file it away. They have learnt not to cast their pearls before swine, and have come to the point where they discern who's really thirsty for the deeper things of the Lord - and who's just "interested".

Even when they do bring it out much later, they're likely to test it all over again. They want to be certain, and they are usually good discerners of spiritual issues. Do they make mistakes? Of course they do, but they do check and double check, and probably put things through a Biblical sieve more so than many other believers. For this reason they are usually teachers of the Word, and love to impart what they have thoroughly digested and found to be true themselves. Those who belong to the spiritual tribe of Issachar gradually learn not to sow their seed, finance or energy into anything that is fleshy. They see knowledge, finance and time as being very precious, and tend to support ministries that are about God's business and not man's.

An Issacharite knows only too well the intoxicating and seductive influence of popularity. Because of this they tend to shun the limelight and shy away from promoting themselves on the stage of human recognition; but they will seek out those with a truly teachable spirit. So you won't find Issacharites on the religious merry-go-round of "churchy" conferences. This doesn't mean they keep to themselves, but they are discerning where they should go, and to whom, and for what purpose. Once recognized however, they will give their all.

Those who spiritually belong to Issachar know the timing of things. However they need others around them who can also discern in this area, as an Issacharite will tend to want to go through the "season" step-by-step. For example, my wife Colleen is prophetic. When the Lord shows her something she sees the end-of-the-matter. I however, don't see it quite that way, but I do accept what she gets. My calling causes me to work the issue through one step at a time with understanding. However, Colleen, having once seen the end of the issue, relaxes and stands back, knowing the Lord will bring to pass what He's already shown her in the Spirit.

For this reason we've learnt to be patient with one another. Colleen sees what's going to happen; I believe her but must work it through giving it time to manifest. Colleen however

doesn't give time to the issue as she knows the outcome already. Certainly she prays about it, but beyond that, she stands back and lets God work. However, my calling as an Issacharite causes me to work it through with wisdom and understanding. I understand that there are certain steps that must be walked through before the end of the matter arrives. I want to know the lessons that come from the process. By going through this I'm actually enriched by the process as it gives me more insight!

I share this only to show how an Issacharite hungers for deeper understanding and desires knowledge of the ways of God more and more. It's both delightful and yet frustrating at the same time. Delightful because of the deeper understanding I get about the ways of the Lord; frustrating because I also realize there's so much more to understand and appreciate - and one life time isn't at all sufficient. So, thank the Lord for eternity!

The Issachar Anointing. This is a term coined by some prophetic ministries, and usually refers to the ability to discern and understand prophetic times and seasons (see 1 Chron 12:32 for example).

Over the past 18 years I have come to see that this particular anointing deals with Wisdom and Maturity. I base this on my own experience as one who "belongs to the spiritual tribe of Issachar", and on what Scripture says about Issachar, both as a son of Jacob and a tribe of Israel. I'm convinced that wisdom and its accompaniment "discernment", will be greatly needed as we approach the End Times. "Wisdom" is an end-time characteristic. It's the third in the sequence of divine revelation. The first being Knowledge, the second being Understanding, and the third being Wisdom.

We can all gain knowledge. But what's required is an understanding of that knowledge. More than that, we need wisdom to apply this knowledge and understanding to daily life. Wisdom is actually applied spiritual knowledge. It's this that we're particularly called to walk in as mature believers, as Sons of God. This combination of discernment coupled with applied spiritual knowledge (wisdom) is what we call "the Issachar Anointing".

The practical outworking of this will mean that as the End Times come closer and closer to fulfillment we'll see the Lord release an anointing on those who are of a willing heart, to receive increased discernment (and the wisdom that accompanies it) to assist the Last Days church to come to maturity of both soul and spirit.

Nothing is more needed in these days than correct discernment and maturity. The maturity we're talking about needs to be both in the spirit and soul realm. This is one of the major issues that the church of the 21st century will have to face. As the End of the Age approaches it will not necessarily be the anointing that will carry us through the trials ahead, but the fruit of maturity deposited within us. In fact, though many talk of "the anointing" these days, there's a danger we can become so transfixed by wanting the experience that we'll miss the point, and find our souls weakened as a result.

We can see this by briefly comparing the lives of two men from the Old Testament period. First there was Samson who had the anointing of great physical strength but lacked inner maturity, and was therefore able to give vent to his anger, lust, etc. Now compare him with Joseph, and we see that Joseph had an anointing but was also instructed by the Spirit in maturity, and hence became a ruler and preserver of his people Israel.

In this brief comparison we have an indication that the outward appearance of one's "calling" or "ministry" is not so important as the inner maturity that should guide the outward work.

Now let's note this text which is commonly referred to by many ministries as if it applies to the anointing of the Holy Spirit present in a meeting, or even upon someone's life. "...**the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing.**" Isa 10:27

The text is generally used to say that where there's some kind of bondage, problem or "yoke" over a person's life, the presence of the Holy Spirit's anointing will break it off the person and set them free. However it doesn't refer to that kind of anointing at all, and is translated as "fat" or "grease" in the original Hebrew (Strongs number H8081).

In Biblical typology "fat" refers to the energy that lies within our inward parts. See for example Psa 17:10; Psa 92:14 and Psa 119:70. For further insights regarding Biblical Typology and the meanings of symbols in Scripture, see my eBook of the same title which has extensive examples.

So prophetically speaking this refers to the "inner fat" of the maturity of the inner man (=spirit, or "soul" in the OT). So this actually means that the yoke is destroyed by our inner maturity and not by any special external "anointing", even though the latter may be a blessing to us in many ways. Makes you think!

Others may have their own definition, but as one who has been in this ministry for nearly 20 years I can safely say from a Biblical perspective, that wisdom and discernment (beyond that which the church currently regards as such) is truly "the Issachar Anointing".

Knowledge, Understanding and Wisdom. The Book of Proverbs (in Hebrew it's called The Proverbs of Solomon) is a book of truths of a King. It's representative of the truths found by one who was a king by divine decree. Because we too are called to reign with Christ, we should take notice of the many principles and truths that are contained in that book, especially if we wish to understand Times and Seasons.

Solomon instructs us in his writings to understand the three fold sequence of having knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. These three can be defined in the following ways:

Knowledge is the *acquisition* of facts.

Understanding is the *interpreting* of those facts.

Wisdom is the practical *application* of these facts.

We can have much knowledge, but unless we apply it, we'll never be wise! "**A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel.**" Prov 1:5

I believe that the Book of Proverbs is an End Time book for the final age of the Church. Why? Because it instructs us to seek for wisdom! "Wisdom" is an End Time characteristic of the Last Days Church. Wisdom in particular will be vital in our understanding of the different types of Times and Seasons that the Church will experience as the End draws nearer. In the End Times we'll need to speak great truths, preach solid doctrine, prophesy extraordinary words, and teach deep revelations. All these require the use of words. How can we be pure

in this calling unless we are controlling our tongues? So all of these need to be tempered and delivered with wisdom!

“Knowledge” in the Greek language of the New Testament has three meanings that are important for us to consider. This is primarily found in the Book of Proverbs. **“To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding.”** Prov 1:2

The three fold sequence of Knowing, Perceiving and Receiving must be understood and applied by the Church if it's going to come into full Sonship, into maturity. The three Greek words found in the New Testament, for “know” and “knowledge” are as follows:

The first word is **GNOSIS**.

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.” 2 Pet 3:18

According to Strongs Dictionary (G1108) “gnosis” means, “knowing the act”. By implication it means “knowledge” or science. Its more accurate meaning is “to know by experience”. Also see Jhn 8:22 and 17:3. So we see that there's a type of knowledge that can only be “known” through “knowing the act” or by experiencing what we know. This is a profound concept and should really challenge our superficial concepts about “knowing” something!

The second word is **EPIGINOSKO**.

“Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him, and He vanished from their sight.”Lk 24:31

According to Strongs (G1921) the word epiginosko means “to know upon some mark, to recognize, to become fully acquainted with, to acknowledge; to have knowledge, to take knowledge, to perceive”. Its more accurate meaning is to know “fully” through revealed knowledge.

So in this type of knowledge we discover there is an understanding that passes beyond knowing something just from experience. Here we are told that we can know a truth fully by becoming intimately acquainted with it, just as the disciples at Emmaus did with the risen Jesus - even though it was only momentarily.

The third word is **EIDO**.

“None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother saying, "Know the LORD" for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.” Heb 8:11

In Strongs (G1492) the verb “eido” means (either literally or figuratively) “to see”. By implication the word means “to know; be aware, known knowledge, look on, be sure, behold, consider, perceive, see, tell, understand”.

The more accurate meaning is “to know absolutely.” What a truth! We can actually “know” knowledge to such a degree that we know it absolutely! This is invaluable as we attempt to discern the Times and Seasons of God in our lives. So we see that there are three important stages in the development of “knowledge”. We should be diligent in applying these truths and insights so that we don't simply remain at a very superficial level of understanding.

To recap all this, first we come to **know by experience**. Most people stop at this point in their Christian growth.

Then as we mature we come **to know more fully** by revealed knowledge.

Finally we come **to know absolutely**. To “know knowledge” as it were!

I have labored this point about the degrees of knowledge because it relates to the calling and anointing of those who possess an Issachar-spirit, as it were. It also raises the principal that as preachers and teachers we should never speak out what we have not yet entered into ourselves (see Prov 5:15).

How many times have you sat under some teaching, that might've been sound, helpful and even relevant, yet somehow lacked power? This kind of teaching comes when the preacher has come across some knowledge of truth in a book or at a conference, but hasn't yet had a personal encounter with that truth. In his zeal to share the new found revelation it's presented as important and even current - but in fact the preacher himself has never experienced it for himself. So it becomes “stale water” and does not accomplish very much except perhaps to impart information to us. Our soul and mind benefits, but not our spirit man.

The calling that rests upon an Issacharite, is to acquire the relevant spiritual knowledge, to digest it well, and in due time to present it as fully as possible. Knowing “timing” (1 Chron 12:32) is so much a part of the Issachar calling, that it would be beneficial to cry out to the Lord for this anointing. So how can we receive and walk in this Issachar revelation?

The following few suggestions may help.

- a) Study the Word to see what it declares about Issachar, both as the Tribe and the Son.
- b) Write down any special insights and revelations that come your way as a result.
- c) Be willing to seek out others who you know move in the ability to discern Times and Seasons.
- d) Cry out to God to become sensitive to His Spirit, who alone is the Discerner of times and seasons.

Prophecies about Issachar

There were two prophecies spoken over Issachar. One was by Jacob to his son Issachar, as he did to all twelve sons, just prior to his death.

“Issachar is a strong ass, crouching between the sheepfolds. And he saw a resting place that it was good, and that the land was pleasant. And he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a tribute slave.” Gen 49:14-15

The other prophecy was spoken by Moses just prior to his death also, but in this case it was to the Tribe of Issachar, who sprang out of the loins of Issachar the son. In this case Moses spoke to Issachar's close ally, Zebulun, as well, linking the two in joint ministry.

“And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, O Zebulun, in your going out, and O Issachar, in your tents; to the mountain they call the peoples; there they shall offer righteous sacrifices for they shall suck the bounty of the seas, and treasures hidden in the sand.” Deut 33:18-19

In Jacob’s prophecy we see the clear calling on Issachar’s life: to bear his own burdens plus those of others. This is interesting when we see that many Issacharites are scholars and teachers of the Word. They bear the double burden of seeking to understand the Word for themselves, and of attempting to impart it to their students. Any teacher, whether secular or spiritual, will readily see this point. True teachers always carry within themselves the burden of duty to understand as much as they can personally, coupled with the burden of trying to pass that knowledge onto others.

For this very reason an Issacharite is also seeking for rest-time and a pleasant place to lay down. The double burden weighs heavily upon him and he longs for rest, but he always knows in the background there’s another burden waiting to be picked up. Even though in the natural the son of Jacob was conceived through being bought (Gen. 30:14-18) he himself will not be bought. He refuses to be bought with either gold or accolades. Money and fame cannot buy his knowledge, loyalty or ministry - he is NOT FOR SALE this time!

This is one reason why the religious church hates the Issacharites; they cannot be bought at any price; they refuse to lay down with the harlot. They would rather live in poverty and seclusion rather than compromise their identity in God. **“And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Oh Zebulun, in your going out, and Oh Issachar, in your tents...” Deut 33:18**

Moses’ prophecy over the Tribe of Issachar is quite remarkable when taken into deep consideration. Here we find Zebulun and Issachar linked; the former rejoices in going out, the latter by staying at home.

Now this doesn’t necessarily mean that only those who belong to the spiritual tribe of Zebulun “go out” and that Issacharites are “stay-at-home” types. It has more to do with calling than anything. Those who belong to the spiritual tribe of Zebulun find it easier to get on and get out doing business, because they are often entrepreneurs at heart. They are good at making wealth and dealing it out, hence the Jewish tradition that says they are to support their spiritual brother Issachar, while he “stays at home” and studies the things of God.

The Issacharite would prefer to be in the Word, delving into its treasures, writing about it, preparing a new teaching, etc. But when he knows the Spirit is urging him to go out, he’s ready. Once out there on the road, teaching and sharing about the treasures he’s found in the Word, he’s totally at home, content and delighted that others want to know as well. He will not be found ministering at the big conferences, but sharing in the secluded villages of Africa or Asia, or the small homes of some city suburb; generally unnoticed, not recognized or acclaimed, but totally happy in his lot.

The prophecy goes on to say that together Zebulun and Issachar “shall call people unto the mountain”. This means they complement one another very well, and are engaged in the same business of drawing others to the mountain of the Lord, that is, to His presence and purposes. Further it declares that “they shall suck the bounty of the seas, and treasures hidden in the sand”. This refers to the harvest that Zebulun and Issachar will jointly bring in.

“Seas” in Scripture usually refers to the nations, to the people of the world. These two tribes will bring in a harvest from the lands of the earth, not of wealth or produce, but of souls.

This will not occur through what we popularly call “witnessing” or “evangelism”, rather it shall come through the opening up of the Word in truth. Issachar in particular will bring understanding and insight of the Word of God through the wise knowledge he has stored up within himself over the years. The unraveling of truths and the disclosing of God’s ways by Issachar will reap a mighty harvest of those who want more than the popular teaching that marks many of today’s church meetings.

Often the treasures hidden in the sands cannot be easily found; they require diligence, a keenness of eye, and a stick-ability of purpose to bring them forth. Today, those who belong to the spiritual tribe of Issachar, still carry within them these two prophecies of Jacob and Moses. The Issacharite will bear the burden of teaching and impartation of truth, and he’ll stay at home studying the Word for all its worth. He’ll then go out and reap a harvest, not by evangelizing, but by deep insightful teaching. He’s a discerner of Times and Seasons. He’s keen to suck the bounty and dig for treasures hidden in the Times and Seasons of God. He is of Issachar and it’s in his spiritual DNA to be like this and to do this - he can do none other!

Chapter 5

The Wise shall understand

Who can know times and seasons? The Word is quite clear about this: “**And not one of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand**.” Dan 12:10

The wise ones in the Lord are able to understand the things of God. This is why wisdom is so important, why it’s an End Time characteristic, and why we should seek the Lord for its impartation (Jms 1:5). Wise ones see the things of God, they hear the things of God, and they do the things of God. Spiritual discernment enables them to know what the Times and Seasons are about.

However, even though discernment is a gift, it still needs to be nurtured, developed, and definitely treasured. The ability to flow in discernment requires a quieted mind, and a soul that’s in order with the ability to control one’s thought-life. A believer with a “loose” mind, one whose mind is forever darting here and there, will find it hard to discern in a consistent manner.

I’ve noticed that “discernment” by itself isn’t the issue; it’s the ability to consistently discern issues with clarity that counts. Most Spirit-filled believers are able to discern, but for many it’s rather an ad-hoc thing. What’s needed most is mature believers who can regularly discern what’s going on and are able to counsel what to do with the knowledge, based on the Word.

Sadly far too many believers today let their minds float here and there, not disciplining their thought-life. I once heard a pastor say “You can speak in tongues, but can you think in tongues?” There’s a point to that question, because “thinking in tongues” (as strange as it might seem) helps to control loose minds and wayward thoughts. Try it for yourself; there’s a definite benefit in it. The Holy Spirit will show you how; lean on Him, He’s your Teacher. So,

discernment will flow deeper and richer if we learn to keep our thoughts in check. I've found that this is really one of the pre-requisites for moving freely in the gift.

Spiritual discernment is a gift from the Lord that enables our spirit-man to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in making correct and beneficial choices. The Holy Spirit moves in the gift to show the Body what its Head wants it to do. He influences the assembled saints so that they can discern what to do. The operation of the Spirit amongst the believers is to exalt Christ as Head of the Body, and to bring the Body into a greater measure of maturity. Such maturity only occurs within the context of corporate relationships and accountability.

Individuals who move in discernment are wonderful assets to the Body because they help it to adjust to what the Lord wants. It's a particularly important gift when sizing up the times and seasons that confront us as believers. Discernment can save us much time, as well as much heartache! Discernment forewarns the believers about issues; it alerts the elders about potential problems that are momentarily hidden; and it can quickly identify a person with a wrong spirit, or the presence of an evil spirit.

It's most helpful when wrong doctrine is being aired, even though the language might sound "biblical". Quite a few times I've heard someone start to preach, share or instruct, when all of a sudden the Holy Spirit has quickened discernment within me to warn of pending error. And sure enough, a little later into the sermon or teaching, some erroneous doctrine surfaces; usually it's the favorite subject of the person, and they're going to tell you about it one way or the other.

At times like this discernment helps the eldership to head off such things, and to deal with the issue quickly and efficiently. On one such occasion I had to intervene part-way through a message to politely but firmly warn a guest speaker. He was gracious enough to accede to my request, I allowed him to continue with his message, and afterwards the eldership dealt with it in an amiable but biblical way, adjusting the brother where it was needed.

This had a three-fold benefit: the congregation was guarded from hearing something that was unhelpful and potentially distracting; the brother involved was gently chastised and corrected; and the public use of the gift strengthened the reality and importance of that gift to all present. All good things, and the brethren were edified by it.

Some general principles relating to discernment might help at this point in our study:

1. It must not be human intuition, nor the "wisdom" of the learned and power-brokers.
2. It must not be supposition based on human experience, even if it seems "good".
3. It may be subjective, but must be subjectivity based on the objectivity of God's Word and character, not on the subjectivity of man's opinions or desires.
4. It must not be man's interpretation of what might happen through vain imagination.
5. A marked consequence of proper discernment is that it'll re-align people and situations back to God's will, if it's acted upon.
6. For yourself: moving in discernment doesn't necessarily mean your life will be trouble-free!

You'll know that the gift of discernment is operating when:

1. There's a clear focus on the Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ;
2. Agape love is the governing factor;
3. The issue at hand is "What does Scripture tell us?" and we're pointed to the Word in a clear and concise manner without man's opinions getting in the way;
4. The brethren are encouraged, educated and strengthened by the use of the gift;
5. Rather than bring division and hurt the operation of the gift binds the unity and brings healing, even though there may be a momentary sense of tension or unease;
6. It will cause the unruly, the unteachable and the proud to show their true colors;
7. It causes those present to value the giftings more highly, and there's a heightened desire to move in them more often;
8. It exposes error, cuts through confusion, sets things in order, and provides a biblical way out of the problem or situation;
9. And finally, it warns those who may be in sin to turn back to the Lord for restoration; the use of this particular gift will often bring strong conviction, even to the one who's done the discerning.

How can we become more sensitive to discernment?

1. Regularly check to see if you're loving the brethren.
2. Ask yourself if you're accountable for the words you speak, on small issues as well as big ones.
3. Abide more often in His presence.
4. Never fail to acknowledge and honor the Holy Spirit's place in the expression of the gift.
5. Walk daily in humility.
6. Learn to quieten the mind and pay attention to those fleeting, passing thoughts that come (often they're suggestions from the Holy Spirit).
7. Act quickly but not hastily, always obeying the urgings of the Spirit.

The connection between discernment and the ability to know Times and Seasons is two-fold: humility and a desire for inward truth. Over the years I've especially noticed that those who move well in this gift are those who've learnt the lesson of humility. They're also those who have an insatiable thirst for truth. Not the "truth" as voiced popularly at the latest conference or in the most recent Christian best-seller. But the truth that seems to be ever-present in the deep recesses of the heart; that nudging of the Spirit that whispers softly but firmly that

there's more to know; that sense of being satisfied yet not fully satisfied; that ever-increasing sense of mystery and awe.

These things engage the heart of the seeker more and more and when the gift of discernment operates all sorts of echoes seem to go off deep inside. You know you've touched something supernatural and very precious. It's a most unusual, startling and delightful thing, this gift of discernment. While the gift is most commonly used to "check things out" as the Holy Spirit gives direction, it however leaves a residue behind. Those who see the gift operating in a church meeting, or during an evangelistic outreach, or at a prayer meeting, cannot but be impressed by the immediate effect it has on those present.

There seems to be something quite tangible happening as a word of discernment is spoken. The recipient is often taken quite by surprise, the onlookers (if they're believers) are delightfully encouraged, and the other (unbelieving) onlookers are a little stunned. The atmosphere is frankly, a little electric! All present know that something's just happened quite out of the ordinary, and it challenges their logic. You can almost feel the "buzz".

I love it when it happens like that! It's like the rug has been pulled out from under someone and they're forced to consider that there might be a God after all. It's as though God has snuck up on them from behind, confronted them, and made them sit up and take notice. Great stuff! However, when such occasions happen and the gift has been operating, a residue of anointing seems to linger in the one who discerned and gave the word. It's as though each time the gift is used something more is added deep inside the person to discern even greater things. Things like "times and seasons". If you think about it, there's a definite connection between discerning something about a person or situation, and discerning certain times and seasons of God. They're both to do with revelation and timing.

Discernment focuses on accuracy, and it's this accuracy that makes people sit up and take notice. So whether it's discernment used on a one-to-one basis, or discernment used to define a certain time or season, the accuracy of the gift is it's great virtue.

To discern well we must continually abide with Him who is the Fullness of Revelation. As we dwell with He who is holy, we become holy. As we gaze upon He who is truth, we become truer. As we spend time with He who is the Great Discerner, who become more discerners ourselves. We are increasingly changed into His likeness. We become like that which we gaze upon - this is one reason why God forbade idol worship. Discernment sharpens issues and brings into light things that are out-of-order. Light will always bring order. As discernment operates it exposes lies, deceit, barriers and blindness, and any accompanying confusion.

"The entrance of Your Word gives light, giving discernment to the simple." Psa 138:24

When discernment tests Times and Seasons it puts things into an eternal focus. Should an individual or a congregation be going through a time of despair and confusion, the gift of discernment sheds light on the issue, letting us see things as God sees them. We're allowed to see as Heaven sees. In a flash, that which was difficult to comprehend, that which made our head whirl, that which made us focus on the negatives, is all re-arranged so we see the greater picture.

Mind you, we never fully see the complete picture, but we do get a comforting glimpse of what's really going on. This is nearly always accompanied by a re-assurance from the Lord that there's an answer. I find this to be one of the great blessings of discernment; it brings divine re-assurance. With all this comes a wonderful sense of security. Peace seems to reign; the heart and mind become rested. Thus we can discern whether the discernment is truly from God or not, because His discernment brings a sense of peace.

Having said all that, there's that inevitable exception to the rule. A revelation that God is in control can actually make us feel "out of control", and lacking inner peace. We see this happening to Daniel:

"But you shall shut up the vision, for it shall be for many days. And I Daniel, fainted, and I was sick for days. Afterwards, I got up and did the king's business. And I was amazed at the vision. But there was no understanding." Dan 8:26-27.

And I said... sorrows have overwhelmed me because of the vision, and I have no strength left. As for me, there is no power left in me; there is no breath left in me. Then one as in the form of a man came and touched me, and made me strong." Dan 10:16-18

Here we find Daniel physically shaken and emotionally stretched as he considers the revelations given him. He is sick, and he's distraught. While peace usually accompanies insight from God, it can also bring great un-ease.

A young man in our Fellowship testified that he came into salvation after hearing the audible voice of the Lord in his house. He was living alone at the time, seeking for direction, looking for God, when the Lord graciously spoke to him. He said it was an actual voice, but like nothing he'd ever experienced. Loud, invasive, filling every nook and cranny of the house. He said the building literally shook, and he was scared out of his wits!

This kind of thing is more common than generally supposed; and its biblical (1 Sam 4:5; Psa 29:8; Psa 68:8; Isa 6:4). A reaction to this can be to cry out to God to stop! In the Psalms David actually cries out to God to stop gazing upon him because he's losing his strength: **"Remove Your gaze from me, and let me recover my strength."** Psa 39:13

The young man mentioned above has since said that he really doesn't want to hear God's voice like that again. It was too much to bear! So it can be when discerning people, circumstances, or times and seasons that a physical and emotional reaction happens. Why this is so is not clear, but no doubt it has something to do with the Eternal touching the temporal. Our physical frame simply cannot cope with too much of the spiritual reality, so it reacts. We also see this in Scripture when people are confronted by an angelic being.

Nevertheless in normal discernment the accompanying sensation to the deliverer is one of peace. This acts as a kind of confirmation for the source of the discernment.

In regards to discerning times and seasons we need to be extremely cautious. We've all heard teachings and "prophecies" that indicate a certain time or season of God is about to happen. This is a regular feature of the Jehovah Witnesses, who regularly change and juggle dates once a set date passed without evidence. It also happens in what we call "good Bible believing" ministries. I have a publication on my bookshelf that boldly declares all

things pertaining to the End would be completed by the year 2000, and if it didn't the author would cheerfully give a refund on the price of the book. I don't think any further comment is needed on this!

We've all heard of such things. So what do we do about discerning times and seasons? Is ignoring it all the safest bet? Or should we dabble a little in it, but not get too involved? Some people of course simply give up altogether. But surely, like all things in the Word, there's revelation waiting for those who are diligent, humble, true seekers of truth, and patient.

One thing is certain: if we approach discerning the times and seasons with an attitude of humility, then we're more likely to see the truth than not. Those who do not seek to "push their own barrow", but have a proper attitude of patient waiting on God, will certainly discern the truth when it's due.

I cannot but stress this last point too much; when it is due. If you want to know the secret of God's precise timing then you'll probably be disappointed. "Timing" is part of God's special economy and He doesn't share that insight very widely, and certainly not flippantly. "Timing" is one of God's secrets kept for a very few of His choosing. He's more concerned with the rest of us knowing "what to do" as the time approaches.

When the set season is due for manifestation God may well allow us to glimpse something of what's coming, but usually what He desires is that we act wisely and appropriately as the season unfolds. So God isn't so much concerned with us knowing the timing, but us knowing how to respond. Hence our discernment doesn't so much see what's coming, but rather it alerts us to what is expected from us during the season.

It's therefore more a matter of knowing what the specific season is highlighting, what we are to do, what sacrifices are required, and what may be gained for the kingdom as a result, rather than knowing the actual moment. Nevertheless the Lord does teach truth and understanding to the wise ones. **"And He changes the times and the seasons; He causes kings to pass away, and sets up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals the deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells in Him."** Dan 2:20-24

So we find that Daniel, the recipient of great truth and insight, understands that the Lord could actually change times and seasons. Daniel then links the changing of times and seasons to the removing of Kings and governors over nations. But Scripture makes it abundantly clear that wisdom and knowledge are given to those who already have certain attributes; wisdom is given to those who are already wise, knowledge to those who already have understanding.

"He gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to those who have understanding."

Here we see a whole new level of discerning times and seasons. The wise receive more wisdom, and those who already understand receive further understanding. Much of this multiplying of revelation comes from how the recipient handled truth in the first place. It's a basic principle in the Word that we only receive more insight when we've been faithful to earlier insight. Many believers fail to move into the deeper things of God simply because they've either been unfaithful with, or complacent about, earlier revelation.

This actually happened to me during a time in my life when I cried out to the Lord to receive an anointing for wisdom. Graciously the Lord gave me a measure of insight and revelation about people and circumstances that proved wonderfully beneficial in my ministry. It gave me an incredible buzz and my spiritual life rapidly sprung forward. During times of counseling I found that the gift of wisdom rose up quite often, and was just the word needed to rectify the situation in a person's life. This naturally gave me a great thrill, as well as giving help to those who came for ministry. The only thing was that over time I unwittingly became proud.

The kind of pride that I had wasn't so much one of arrogance, but of complacency. As the gift of wisdom began to operate more freely and more often in my ministry I tended to rely on myself rather than the Holy Spirit. The result was that the gift began to dissipate. When the Spirit of God convicted me of my complacency, the anointing I had almost entirely disappeared.

This caused me much heart searching and angst. Upon realizing my folly I sincerely repented and asked for the Lord to restore wisdom back to me in the time of His choosing. Sadly I can say now that it's never returned in quite the same measure. To this day I still cry out to the Lord that in His timing, He might restore to me an even greater measure of that wonderful gift.

I share this personal insight to encourage you not to be either complacent nor proud when asking and receiving the gift of wisdom, or indeed any gift from the Lord. It's a very precious thing to receive God's gracious gifts, we therefore need to be extremely wise and sensitive in honoring Him as the giver.

That's why I am totally convinced that operating in the gifts of knowledge, understanding and wisdom requires humility and great sensitivity to the Spirit. If I could give you some true biblical counseling it would simply be this: never take the Lord's blessings for granted at any time. (The wise will understand this). In fact not being thankful for God's blessings will actually cause us to move in a spirit of complaining and criticism. Think for a moment of some believer you might know who's like that; forever grumbling and picking fault. You can be sure that they've become complacent about being thankful to God for His gracious blessings.

How often we've missed the best of what God has for us because we simply didn't care enough to seek or search diligently. And how often we've missed God's best because of pride, complacency or foolish laziness. We have a wonderful access to the heavenly Father through faith in Christ, the work of the Spirit and the precious gift of prayer. So let's be among those that seek His face "continually" with thanksgiving. It's not only a wise thing to want to move in wisdom, it's also a wise thing to appreciate the presence of wisdom once you've received it.

Spiritual understanding comes only through the vehicle of the Holy Spirit, whether He uses the Bible, a dream, a brother or sister speaking truth to us, or that precious "inner voice". It cannot be mentioned too often that the Holy Spirit is the One who moves upon our hearts and minds, whilst in the heavenlies Christ prays for us. This is a glorious thing and we should probably reflect on it much more than we do.

Here I want to look at some of the things that will help make us wise. Now that sounds strange doesn't it? How can we be "made wise"? Well there are some very fundamental principles that every believer should get straight before embarking on any spiritual quest. I would like to address some of these now, because if we heed them we'll find wisdom will make a place in us out of which we can live and minister. By taking to heart some very important spiritual principles we're honoring the Spirit that imparts heavenly wisdom; it's in this way that we gradually "become wise". The Holy Spirit always responds to spiritual activity on our part, that is, when such activity keeps Christ pre-eminent in our thinking.

Wisdom is both a gift from the Lord as well as something that can be "learnt". I've found that by slowly and reflectively reading through the Book of Proverbs a very great deal of wisdom is imparted - simply by reading! Try it and see.

Let's now look at some fundamental but rich foundational principles relating to the work of the Spirit upon our spirit.

- 1.** While faith in Christ makes us a regenerated believer, it's obedience to the Holy Spirit that makes us a spiritual believer. These work in tandem to bring about the mature man within us.
- 2.** Faith in Christ deals with the sin of the flesh, while obedience to the Holy Spirit makes us more aware of the flesh. Why is this? Because the more spiritual we become the more we confront the flesh. This is why great men and women of God, who attain to certain spiritual heights, struggle so greatly with the flesh. Hence there's a fundamental need to deal strongly with the flesh at the start, so that we can grow spiritually strong afterwards. It's an intriguing truth that a good work done at the Cross will lead us onward to the Holy Spirit, and it's the good work of the Holy Spirit who'll often lead us back to the Cross if we haven't allowed it to do a deep work in us in the first place.
- 3.** What's required most in order to become wise, is a willingness of heart to fulfill the conditions for an ongoing anointing of the Spirit. Preparation is vital if we're to understand things of the Spirit, especially times and seasons.
- 4.** Hence it's very important not only to believe in the Christ, but also to obey the Spirit. By doing so our inner-man is greatly made alive, and wisdom is increased in us mightily.
- 5.** So what makes a spiritual man become a wise man? It's the recognition that Christ desires our soul and body to be kept sound and blameless awaiting His return (1 Thess 5:23). We need to ask ourselves if we're co-operating with God for this to happen?
- 6.** A spiritual man is one who's been taught deeply by God's Spirit, and sanctified by Him through and through. The life and work of the Spirit has entirely saturated such a person so that he functions out of the Holy Spirit's life, not his own.
- 7.** A spiritual man doesn't live by his emotions, desires, ambitions or the soul. He has learnt to bring all these under the direct control of the Spirit of the living God, so that these no longer operate independently in his mind.
- 8.** A spiritual man is one who belongs to the Holy Spirit, and is governed by the sanctified inner-man.

These are only a few of the many principles that enable us to become wise sons of God. Like almost anything in the spiritual life, it's easy to read and talk about but difficult to walk in. Nevertheless that shouldn't deter us from embarking on such activity, otherwise we'll always be learning but never arriving.

It may sound bold to say it like this, but the secret of a blessed spiritual life is to Obey the Word and Trust the Holy Spirit. Any vulnerability in either area is likely to weaken our faith walk. Like anything in the spiritual realm the way forward is really quite simple, yet paradoxically it's difficult to appropriate within oneself. The knowledgeable will understand this truth, but the wise will act on it!

Obedience and trust are co-partners with faith, and faith is part and parcel of understanding times and seasons. Faith actually endures time. When we can't fathom out what's going on in life, we'll have to endure a season of waiting, but it's faith in Jesus Christ that enables us to endure time. A wise believer is one who's learnt to "hope in hope" no matter how long a time it will take until the breakthrough comes.

For most of us this is a life-long learning process. That might sound despairing but God isn't as worried about time as we are. What He's most concerned about is whether we learn the lesson of preparation during that time. The Father's great desire is to bring many sons into glory (Heb 2:10) and sons aren't born, babies are! We have to become sons, we have to grow up, we have to become wise. One of the greatest acts of wisdom you'll ever possess is when you know the difference between God's Purpose and His Plan.

The Father wants us to know, truly and really KNOW what His Purpose is for us. We usually know quite well what His Plan is - salvation through Jesus Christ. It's the Purpose that's not so well known, and frankly not even preached from many pulpits. To know this Purpose, to really know it deep within, requires revelatory vision. Without such vision everything we see will be fragmented and partial. So our vision, and therefore our wisdom will be limited. But once we seek the Father and yearn to know His Purpose as well as His Plan (see page 34 footnote), then our vision rapidly expands and we begin to know that God sees from eternity unto eternity.

Now that's a truly precious word: eternity! It sums up everything we're about as believers in Jesus and as Sons of the Father. Eternity. Eternal. These are more than words, they are truths that echo deep within a believer's heart. They make us quiver a little, they make us rise up, our inner-man begins to stir at such amazing concepts as "eternal", we feel linked to something grand, great, awesome, something...**eternal**.

If you feel like this then be wise and pursue God's ways more and more. Pursue Him, seek for wisdom, cry out for it, desire it, yearn for it, and by so doing you'll indeed possess "life". You will possess Him who is Life because He who is that Life will actually possess you! Read again (and again, and again) the Book of Proverbs, especially chapters 1 to 9, slowly and prayerfully. I can't but stress that in order to understand times and seasons, we need wisdom.

There's a fundamental and practical truth I'd like to share that might help us here.

When you begin to sense a spiritual growth happening to you, when you start to feel that God's bringing forth something new in you, when you intrinsically know that you're moving

out of one phase into another, then it's very important to give time to that change. You'll need to give time and space to what's going on within you.

This is precisely what a woman does when she learns she's pregnant. What is new within gets all the attention. She gives time to herself, reflects on the wonder of a new creation within her, she muses over it, smiles about it, even giggles about it. The "new thing" hidden within begins to captivate her feelings, her thoughts, and her actions. In some way this is the same as when a "new spiritual thing" is birthed within you. You are spiritually pregnant - so give time and attention to it!

You can do this by setting aside a certain time of the day to pray through what's pregnant within you. Perhaps even put aside, for a short season, your regular devotional time in order to focus more sharply on what's stirring within. Then having willed yourself to give time to this fresh stirring, start to reflect on specific Scriptures that you sense are associated with it. For example; say you feel that the Lord is leading you from moving in Words of Knowledge to ministering with Inner Visions, where instead of receiving words of knowledge in your mind, you actually begin to "see" things about people; then look for places in the Bible where these things are mentioned.

Start to read the Major and Minor prophets of Scripture. Read about the times they "saw" in the Spirit. Read in Scripture about heavenly experiences (e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Revelation). Let the words of the Word soak into you. Pray as you slowly read, calling on the Holy Spirit to enlighten you about "how this works". Ask Him to teach you "how" to flow in this fresh anointing you sense is welling up within. The Holy Spirit loves it when we're spiritually active. He loves it when we seek and are hungering after spiritual insight and truth. He will respond to this because it's actually He who has stirred it within us in the first place.

These are some practical ways we can co-operate with the Holy Spirit to know our "season". I sincerely encourage you to "be wise" and learn to know your seasons by engaging with the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 6

Watching, seeing, hearing and doing

The role of the Wise Ones is to give meat in due season to those who are hungry. Those who have attained to a measure of wisdom are those who will see and appreciate the time and season that's before them. It's also their responsibility to declare this season in the due (set) time.

We are to be watchful, to be in that constant state of readiness and anticipation. Expectancy in spiritual things is vital if we're to grasp God's timing and His seasons. As we sense the Lord is allowing us to "see" what's coming, and to appreciate what season we're in, there's also a great responsibility to make sure that such insight isn't stolen by the unrighteous, dishonored by undiscerning brethren, or cast before swine. Times and seasons are precious pearls from the Lord and needed to be declared at the "appropriate time" to the "appropriate people".

The term "appropriate people" isn't meant to be elitist. It's meant to focus in on those whom the Lord knows need a prophetic voice at a specific time. Take for instance the people of

Nineveh. Their appropriate time had come to hear from God: it was heaven's time for them (Jonah 1:2). So Jonah was called forth at God's set time and season to bring them His word. The only thing was Jonah didn't consider either his call nor the timing (1:3 and 10) and he fled in a vain attempt to escape the divine task given him. God however would not be thwarted and called Jonah a second time to accomplish His will (3:1)

We also see that Jesus called the twelve disciples to Him and sent them forth at an appropriate time, but only to a certain people for that season, i.e. the House of Israel.

“Jesus sent these twelve out, charging them, saying: Do not go into the way of the nations, and do not go into a Samaritan city, but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Mtt 10:5-6

The twelve were to announce to Israel, and to them exclusively (at that time), the nearness of God's kingdom. It was a season ordained and set by God for them at a specific moment in the Messiah's earthly ministry. Israel's due season had come. The term “due season” is one word in Greek, *kairos* which means “a fixed and definite time, the time when things are brought to a crisis, the decisive epoch waited for”. It's and absolute and correct time - but with fixed limits.

Here we have an important clue in understanding times and seasons. Kairos time is different from *chronos* time. The latter is time measured by such things as days and nights, months, years, clocks, etc. Kairos on the other hand is a time set by God during which certain events or themes come forth. It's literally a time when things are brought to a crisis. “Crisis” means a cross road; it refers to a time in which to make a choice based on the understanding that a certain (spiritual) season is due.

One of the most beautiful insights about *kairos* time is found in the post-nativity story of Jesus being presented at the Temple shortly after His birth (Lk 2:21-38). Note the underlined sections of the following passages and keep in mind what was particularly said about *kairos* time:

Verse 21 And when eight days were fulfilled (*Note how there's a reference to *chronos* time here (8 days), according to Lev 12:2-3*) to circumcise the child His name was called Jesus, the name called by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

Verse 22 And when the days of her cleansing according to the Law of Moses were fulfilled (*Note another reference to *chronos* time here, (33 days) according to Lev 12:4*) they took Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord,

Verse 23 as it has been written in the Law of the Lord: “Every male opening a womb shall be called holy to the Lord;

Verse 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to that said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves, or two nestlings of doves.”

Verse 25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. And this man was righteous and devout, eagerly expecting the Consolation of Israel (*Now see how the focus shifts from *chronos* time to *kairos* time. There was “a decisive epoch waited for.”*) And the Holy Spirit was upon him.

Verse 26 And it happened to him, having been divinely instructed by the Holy Spirit, he was not to see death before he would see the Christ of the Lord. (*Note the ministry of the Spirit in this crisis. Revelatory insight and experiences are often associated with kairos timing.*)

Verse 27 So he came by the Spirit into the temple. (*The ministry of the Spirit is very deliberate in relation to kairos moments. It is precise and purposeful in its application.*) And as the parents were bringing in the child Jesus for them to do according to the custom of the Law concerning Him,

Verse 28 even Simeon received Him into his arms. And he blessed God and said,

Verse 29 “Now Lord, You will let Your slave go in peace according to Your Word;

Verse 30 because my eyes saw Your salvation,

Verse 31 which You prepared (*A kairos activity is never ad hoc, but always a prepared, and therefore eternal work. Here it refers to Jesus being the “made ready” Savior of all people. It has an allusion to a specially prepared feast (see Isaiah 25:6-9) before the face of all the peoples;*

Verse 32 a light for revelation to the nations, and the glory of Your people Israel.”

Verse 33 And Joseph was marveling, also His mother, at the things being said concerning Him.

Verse 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to His mother Mary, “Behold, this One is set for the fall and rising up of many in Israel, and for a sign spoken against;” (*“Is set” means Jesus was “stretched out and appointed” to be a stumbling block as part of His destiny. He came forth at a kairos moment in history to accomplish this.*)

Verse 35 yea, a sword also will pierce your own soul, so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Verse 36 And there was Anna, a prophetess, a daughter of Phanuel, (*Even the names are important in relation to this kairos event. “PHANUEL” means “vision of God”. Anna was a daughter of vision, and a prophetess!*) of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in many days, having lived seven years with a husband from her virginity;

Verse 37 and she was a widow of eighty four years, who did not depart from the temple, (*Anna knew how a daughter of vision should act, not following her own desires or ambitions, but staying where the Lord wanted her, in order to be part of this special kairos time*) serving night and day with fastings and prayers.

Verse 38 And coming in at the very hour, she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke concerning Him to all those in Jerusalem eagerly expecting redemption. (*The Holy Spirit will move people into position exactly “on time”. Hence there is a kairos moment within a kairos time! Note also the expectation (a “seeing”) that is part of any given kairos moment.*)

See how the underlined sections refer to our definition of kairos: how chronos time is initially a factor (vss 21-22); then how it's superseded by kairos time (vss 26-27), how things are brought to a crisis/crossroads point (vss 28-32), how a particular epoch, age or event is waited for (vss 25 and 34), and how only a remnant are aware of the moment having been

alerted by the Holy Spirit (vss 25-27 and 36-38). All these are common factors associated with kairos time.

However we cannot possibly know what's coming if we're not aware of what we're already in! It's important that we understand the times we're already in before we start to declare the times that are to come. This is a basic principle of the Word and we need to consider it well.

The principles players in the above scriptural account are Joseph and Mary who fulfill the chronos time by obeying the Levitical law; and then there's Simeon and Anna who fulfill kairos time by obeying the urgings of the Spirit. The latter were elderly and had been expectantly awaiting the Messiah for a considerable period, and when the kairos moment arrived, it all dovetailed perfectly - both the chronos moment and the kairos moment! We find here a clue to how both "times" work together when ordained by God, and how individuals, often unaware of one another's part in the kairos moment, are brought together to fulfill God's particular purpose.

On the same track, that's why it's vital to have some understanding of the Prophetic Feasts because they are in some sense God's chronos/kairos timetable. If we cannot appreciate the Feasts in the natural (now, the chronos bit) we won't be able to appreciate them in the spiritual (later, the kairos bit). It's really as simple as that. Even the Hebrew word "feasts" means an appointed or set time or season, a festival, place of meeting, a signal.

In all the Feasts, Jesus Christ is signaled (exalted) for He alone is the focus of the message of the Feasts, not the timing of the Feasts or the specific season they represent. Sure, each of the Feasts do represent Jesus somehow, but it's not about what they symbolize concerning Jesus' role, it's about Jesus Himself. Jesus is always the key in regard to understanding the Feasts. I say this because some people get so caught up in what the Feasts stand for and how intricate they are, they forget the One to whom the Feasts point - Jesus the Messiah.

This is why the Jews who celebrate those natural Feasts today cannot possibly understand what season they're in because they don't recognize the Messiah who is in the Feast, and they certainly don't recognize Jesus as that Messiah. To understand the Feasts is to recognize the Messiah and the grand scope of His Father's plan. The Feasts are wonderful ways "in" to understanding and knowing He who is signaled in those Feasts.

"And we know that the Son of God has come, and He has given to us an understanding that we may know the true One, and we are in the true One, in His Son Jesus Christ..." 1 Jhn 5:20

The Word commands us to watch and pray, and links this directly to a sense of urgency (in this case escaping the destruction of Jerusalem). **"Be watchful and pray. For you do not know when the time is."** Mk 13:33

"Watch and pray" - it's an urgent call, but it's more than that, for there's a truth resident here. When we do what the Word says we should do, then we begin to truly "see" what's going on. Watchfulness and prayerfulness will cause us to "see". This again is a basic principle in the Word. Do what the Word says we should do and then things open up for us. This "seeing" is a kind of outward and inward observance of certain things. What those precise "things" are is

hard to define, for they can only be spiritually discerned, and depend on the circumstances and the person/persons involved.

For example you might take note and observe what's going on in the Middle East from time to time. It's possible that from the tension there you can deduce that Armageddon is almost on the doorstep. But if you're simply "looking" without spiritual discernment you'll fall into a trap. There's always been tension in that part of the world and to simply look at the TV or newspapers and leap to some conclusion would be devastating. Anyway it's highly unlikely that to begin with the Lord's going to allow you to see and discern precise details of such complicated factors in regard to His seasons for Israel. Many have "watched" Israel to try and work out her "timing" but it's a veritable minefield of confusing dates, personalities and soulish conjecture.

I've watched Israel for more than 25 years, visited there three times, gone to the Feasts, supported Messianic ministries, prayed for Israel to repent, honored the Jewish people, and rejoiced in our Hebraic heritage - but there are still many "unknowns" out there to consider. I recall that one Bible commentator said that the vast majority of the OT Messianic prophecies about Jesus weren't fulfilled until the last 48 hours of His earthly life. If that's correct, or even partially so, then it should be a warning to us that End Time events involving Israel, and momentous "times and seasons", may not be accurately discerned until they're almost on top of us. It's worth reflecting on.

Being able to simply "look" at what's going on in the world isn't necessarily helpful in understanding times and seasons. It might be, but it's not necessarily a part of having spiritual insight into God's times and seasons. The natural can rob the spirit if you're not careful. Sadly too many "watchers" today take their cue from what's on the TV rather than taking their cue from heaven. This is especially so in regard to modern unrepentant Israel - as much as I love that nation. Yet the Word calls us to "watch", to be see-ers in the true sense of the word. Note how Jesus called on His disciples to look.

"Then when you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (the one reading, let him understand)..." Mtt 24:15

"So also you, when you see all these things, know that it is near at the doors." Mtt 24:33

Scripture also says that we should listen for certain things and take note of them.

"And at midnight, a cry occurred: Behold, the bridegroom comes! Go out to meet him." Mtt 25:6

"For when they say, Peace and safety! Then suddenly destruction comes upon them..." 1 Thess 5:3

Added to both the "seeing" and the "hearing" is the "doing".

"And when you see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that its destruction has come. And let those in Judea flee to the mountains. And those in its midst, let them go out." Lk 21:20-21

Watching, seeing, hearing and doing: these are four vital ingredients in our preparation to truly understand times and seasons. God's wise ones will primarily be good **"watchers"** in both the spiritual and the natural. They'll also **see** certain events occurring on the face of the earth, they'll **hear** certain "catch cries" broadcast in society, and as a result they'll **do** certain things.

A "watcher" is not one who keeps awake "on watch" as though it's some religious duty. Rather the Hebrew term for "watcher" simply means one who is ever watchful and alert. It generally refers to a holy angel (see Dan 4:13). However the word gives us a valuable insight to the character of a "watcher". In Hebrew it means *to be hot and ardent; then to be lively, or active, and to awake, to be awake, to be awake at night, to watch* (compare Song of Songs 5:2)

For us in this study, a "watcher" is a mature believer who is alert to whatever goes on in both the natural and spiritual realms. They are ardent and consequently are lively and active in what they do. The tribe of Issachar had this particular anointing: "**And of the sons of Issachar, having understanding of the times, to know what Israel should do...**" 1 Chron 12:32.

Ardent has three basic meanings: A person characterized by intense or strong emotion; something or someone glowing or shining like fire. Some synonyms for ardent are: burning, fervent, fiery, impassioned, torrid.

Issachar knew the timing. Another way of saying this is that the tribe knew what season was underway. So we find that those with an Issachar-anointing sense the season that's underway, but they also know what action's required for that particular season. It's one thing to be able to discern times and seasons, it's quite another to know what action is appropriate. The principle we find here is that when revelation is received there's a period of reflecting on it, but decisive action is required to see it through.

Some Jewish writers say that the tribe en masse was known for its achievements in the astronomical and physical sciences. However it's more likely that the tribe did NOT have this ability as a whole, but rather it was limited to its leadership. According to Scripture there were two hundred chiefs (1 Chron 12:32b) who were men of insightful knowledge and understanding. The Targum (see note below) suggests they were eminent in chronology, in the proper seasons for farming, for fixing the beginning of years and months and the intercalation of them, and for keeping the sacred festivals. Such men had prudence and bore wisdom corporately, and knew that this was the proper time for making David king.

So to say that "the sons of Issachar had understanding" simply states nothing more than that the tribe (in deciding to raise David to the throne) followed the judgment of its leaders ("..and all their brethren were at their command...") who rightly estimated the circumstances of the time. They watched, saw, listened and did! This was the character of Issachar, and it consisted of three aspects:

1. They knew about (spiritual) warfare;
2. They were submissive and disciplined;
3. Their vision wasn't divided but singular.

Consider however the text seems to suggest that discernment about times and seasons was mainly confined to the leadership of the tribe. If this was the case, then it's remarkable insight into how corporate discernment works.

(Note from above): The Targum is the Aramaic translation or paraphrase of the OT. After the exile, Aramaic gradually became the colloquial language over the slowly decaying Hebrew, until Hebrew was hardly more than the language of worship. As the majority of the population ceased to use Hebrew it became necessary to provide translations of the Bible read in Hebrew at services. To meet this need it became customary to add an explanatory oral translation to the portions of the Scriptures read on the Sabbath - hence, Targum (Aramaic for "translation, interpretation").

Chapter 7

How the Bible measures Time

Time. The basis of the Hebrew measurement of time was the day and the lunar month, as with the Semites generally. The division of the day into hours was late, probably not common until after the exile, although the sun-dial of Ahaz (2 Kgs 20:9; Isa 38:8) would seem to indicate some division of the day into periods of some sort, as we know the night was divided. The word used for "hour" is Aramaic *sha* (*shata*), and does not occur in the Old Testament until the Book of Daniel (4:33 and 5:5), and even there it stands for an indefinite period for which "time" would answer as well.

Day. The term "day" (*yom*) was in use from the earliest times, as is indicated in the story of the Creation (Gen chpt. 1). It there doubtless denotes an indefinite period, but is marked off by "evening and morning" in accordance with what we know was the method of reckoning the day of 24 hours, i.e. from sunset to sunset.

Night. The night was divided, during pre-exilic times, into three divisions called watches (*ashmurah*, *ashmoreth*), making periods of varying length, as the night was longer or shorter (Jdgs 7:19). This division is referred to in various passages of the Old Testament, but nowhere with indication of definite limits (see Psa 90:4; Psa 119:148; Jer 51:12; Hab 2:1)

In the New Testament we find the Roman division of the night into four watches (*phulake*) in use (Mtt 14:25; Mk 6:48), but it is possible that the former division still persisted. The use of the term "day" for the period from sunrise to sunset, or for day as distinguished from night, was common, as at present (Josh 10:13; Psa 19:2; Prov 4:18; Isa 27:3; Jhn 9:4). But the use of the word in the indefinite sense, as in the expressions: "day of the Lord," "in that day," "the day of judgment," etc., is far more frequent. Other more or less indefinite periods of the day and night are; dawn, dawning of the day, morning, evening, noonday, midnight, cock-crowing or crowing of the cock, break of day, etc.

Week. The weekly division of time, or the seven-day period, was in use very early and must have been known to the Hebrews before the Mosaic Law, since it was in use in Babylonia before the days of Abraham and is indicated in the story of the Creation. The Hebrew *shabhu* used in the Old Testament for "week," is derived from *shebha*, the word for "seven." As the seventh day was a day of rest, or Sabbath (Hebrew *shabbath*), this word came to be used for "week," as appears in the New Testament (*sabbaton*), indicating the period from Sabbath to Sabbath (Mtt 28:1). The same usage is implied in the Old Testament (Lev 23:15; Lev 25:8). The days of the week were indicated by the numerals, first, second, etc., save the

seventh, which was the Sabbath. In New Testament times Friday was called the day of preparation (*paraskeue*) for the Sabbath (Lk 23:54).

Month. The monthly division of time was determined, of course, by the phases of the moon, the appearance of the new moon being the beginning of the month, *hōdresh*. Another term for month was *yera* meaning “moon,” which was older and derived from the Phoenician usage, but which persisted to late times, since it is found in the Aramaic inscriptions of the 3rd century AD in Syria. The names of the months were Babylonian and of late origin among the Hebrews, probably coming into use during and after the Captivity. But they had other names, of earlier use, derived from the Phoenicians, four of which have survived in “*Abib*,” “*Ziv*,” “*Ethanim*” and “*Bul*.”

Year. The Hebrew year *shanah* was composed of 12 or 13 months, the latter being the year when an intercalary month was added to make the lunar correspond with the solar year. As the difference between the two was from ten to eleven days, this required the addition of a month once in about three years, or seven in nineteen years. This month was added at the vernal equinox and was called after the month next preceding, *adhar*, or the “second Adar.” We do not know when this arrangement was first adopted, but it was current after the Captivity.

There were two years in use, the civil and the ritual, or sacred year. The former began in the autumn, as would appear from Exo 23:16; Exo 34:22, where it is stated that the “feast of ingathering” should be at the end of the year, and the Sabbatic year began in the 7th month of the calendar or sacred year, which would correspond to September-October (Lev 25:9). Josephus says that Moses designated *Nican* (March-April) as the 1st month of the festivals, i.e. of the sacred year, but preserved the original order of the months for ordinary affairs, evidently referring to the civil year. This usage corresponds to that of the Turkish empire, where the sacred year is lunar and begins at different seasons, but the financial and political year begins in March. The beginning of the year was called *rosh ha-shanah*, and was determined by the priests, as was the beginning of the month. Originally this was done by observation of the moon, but, later, calculation was employed in connection with it, until finally a system based on accurate calculation was adopted, which was not until the 4th century AD. The New-Year was regarded as a festival.

Seasons. The return of the seasons was designated by summer and winter, or seed-time and harvest; for they were practically the same. There is, in Palestine, a wet season, extending from October to March or April, and a dry season comprising the remainder of the year. The first is the winter (*horeph*) and this is the seed-time (*zera*) especially the first part of it called *yoreh*, or the time of the early rain; the second is the summer (*kayic* “fruit-harvest” or “harvest”). Seed-time begins as soon as the early rains have fallen in sufficient quantity to moisten the earth for ploughing, and the harvest begins in some parts, as in the lower Jordan region, near the Dead Sea, about April, but on the high lands a month or two later. The fruit harvest comes in summer proper and continues until the rainy season. “The time when kings go out to war” (2 Sam 11:1; 1 Kgs 20:22) probably refers to the end of the rainy season in *Nican*.

The Jubilee. The Jubilee (Hebrew *Yovel*, every 50th year) and the Sabbatical year (every seventh year) are Biblical commandments concerning ownership of land. The laws concerning the Sabbatical year are still observed by many religious Jews in the state of

Israel, while the Yovel has not been observed for many centuries. According to the Hebrew Bible every seventh year farmers in the land of Israel are commanded to let their land lie fallow. The celebration of the Jubilee is the 50th year, that is, the year after seven Sabbatical cycles. Jubilee comes from the Hebrew term *yobel* refers to the blast of the shofar on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, announcing the jubilee year (*hashanah yobel*).

This law is ascribed to the legislation on Mount Sinai (Lev 25:1). It was to come into force after the Israelites should be in possession of Canaan, Israel. "When you come into the land which I give you". The law provides that one may cultivate his field and vineyard six years, but "in the seventh year shall be...a Sabbath for the Lord," during which one shall neither sow nor reap for one's private gain, but all members of the community — the owner, his servants, and strangers — as well as domestic and wild animals, shall share in consuming the natural or spontaneous yield of the soil.

The 50th year, i.e., that following the last year of seven Sabbatical cycles, is the jubilee; during it the land regulations of the Sabbatical year are to be observed, as is also the commandment "You shall return every man unto his possession" (vs. 10), indicating the compulsory restoration of hereditary properties (except houses of laymen located in walled cities) to the original owners or their legal heirs, and the emancipation of all Hebrew indentured servants whose term of six years is unexpired or who refuse to leave their masters when such term of service has expired (Gen 18:6). The regulations of the Sabbatical year include also the annulment of all monetary obligations between Israelites, the creditor being legally barred from making any attempt to collect his debt (Deut 15:1). The law for the jubilee year has not this provision.

Fifty, and forty-nine-year Jubilee cycles. There is a dispute in the Talmud as to whether the jubilee year was included in or excluded from the forty-nine years of the seven cycles. The majority of rabbis hold that the jubilee year was an intercalation, and followed the seventh Sabbatical year, making two fallow years in succession. After both had passed, the next cycle began. They adduce this theory from the plain words of the Law to "hallow the fiftieth year", and also from the assurance of God's promise of a yield in the sixth year sufficient for maintenance during the following three years, "until the ninth year, until her fruits come in" (Lev 25:22), which, they say, refers to the jubilee year.

Judah haNasi, however, contends that the jubilee year was identical with the seventh Sabbatical year (Talmud tractate Rosh Hashanah). The opinion of the Geonim and of later authorities generally prevails, that the jubilee, when in force during the period of the First Temple, was intercalated, but that in the time of the Second Temple, when the jubilee was observed only "nominally", it coincided with the seventh Sabbatical year.

In post-exilic times the jubilee was entirely ignored, though the strict observance of the shemittah was steadily insisted upon. This, however, is only according to a rabbinical enactment, as by the Mosaic law, according to Rabbi Judah, shemittah is dependent on the jubilee and ceases to exist when there is no jubilee.

No Era. We have no mention in the Old Testament of any era for time reckoning, and we do not find any such usage until the time of the Maccabees. There are occasional references to certain events which might have served for eras had they been generally adopted. Such was the Exodus in the account of the building of the temple (1 Kgs 6:1) and the Captivity (Ezek

33:21; Ezek 40:1) and the Earthquake (Amos 1:1). Dates were usually fixed by the regal years of the kings, and of the Persian kings after the Captivity. When Simon the Maccabee became independent of the Seleucid kings in 143-142 or 139-138 BC, he seems to have established an era of his own, if we may attribute to him a series of coins dated by the years "of the independence of Israel". The Jews doubtless were familiar with the Seleucid era, which began in 312 BC, and with some of the local eras of the Phoenician cities, but we have no evidence that they made use of them. The era of the Creation was not adopted by them until after the time of Christ. This was fixed at 3, 830 years before the destruction of the later temple, or 3760 BC.

(The above articles on "Time" are taken from The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)

Chapter 8

Scriptural references to Time

The duration of the world Job 22:16; Rev 10:6

The measure of the continuance of anything Jdgs. 18:31

An appointed season Neh 2:6; Eccel 3:1; 3:17

Biblical time is computed by:

Years Gen 15:13; 2 Sam 21:1; Dan 9:2

Months Nmbrs 10:10; 1 Chron 27:1; Job 3:6

Weeks Dan 10:2; Lk 18:12

Days Gen 8:3; Job 1:4; Lk 11:3

Hours after the captivity Dan 5:5; Jhn 11:9

Moments Exo 33:5; Lk 4:5; 1 Cor 15:52

The heavenly bodies were appointed by God as a means for computing Gen 1:14

The sun-dial early was invented for pointing out time 2 Kgs 20:9-11

Eras from which time was computed:

Nativity of the patriarchs during the patriarchal age Gen. 7:11; Gen. 8:13; Gen. 17:1

The exodus from Egypt Exo. 19:1; Exo. 40:17; Nmbrs. 9:1; Nmbrs. 33:38 1 Kgs. 6:1

The jubilee Lev. 25:15

Accession of kings 1 Kgs. 6:1; 1 Kgs. 15:1; Isa. 36:1; Jer. 1:2; Lk. 3:1

Building of the temple 1 Kgs. 9:10; 2 Chron. 8:1

The captivity Ezek. 1:1; Ezek. 33:21; Ezek. 40:1

Part of a period usually counted as the whole 1 Sam. 13:1; Est. 4:16; Est. 5:1

In prophetic language, means a prophetic year, or 360 natural days Dan. 12:7; Rev. 12:14

Shortness of man's portion Psa. 89:47

Time should be redeemed Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5

Should be spent in fear of God 1 Pet. 1:17

Particular periods of time mentioned;

The **ancient time** Isa. 45:21

The **accepted time** Isa. 49:8; 2 Cor. 6:2

The **time of visitation** Jer. 46:21; Jer. 50:27

The **time of refreshing** Acts 3:19

The **time of restitution** of all things Acts 3:21

The **time of reformation** Heb 9:10

The **time of healing** Jer. 14:19

The **time of need** Heb 4:16

The **time of temptation** Lk. 8:13

The **evil time** Psa. 37:19; Eccel. 9:12

The **time of trouble** Psa. 27:5; Jer. 14:8

All **events predetermined** by God Acts 17:26

All **God's purposes fulfilled** in due time Mk. 1:15; Gal. 4:4

The above references come from R. A. Torrey's New Topical textbook

Other aspects relating to Time

Beginning of Time - Gen. 1:1; Gen. 1:14

Time before the flood - Josh. 24:2

The exodus time - Exo. 19:1; Exo. 40:17; 1 Kgs. 6:1

Daniel's reckoning of time, and times, and dividing of half times - Dan. 7:25; Dan. 12:7

Time as indicated by a sundial - 2 Kgs. 20:9-11; Isa. 38:8

Division of time into watches - Exo. 14:24; 1 Sam. 11:11; Mtt. 14:25; Mk. 6:48

Time reckoned as one day as a thousand years - 2 Pet. 3:8

Fullness of Time - Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:10

End of Time - Job 26:10; Rev. 10:6

The above references come from Nave's Topical Bible

Chapter 9

Definitions of Discernment

DISCERN (from The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia). Five Hebrew words are translated as "discern":

1. bin, yadha, nakhar, raah and shama.
2. It may simply mean "observe" (bin), "I discerned among the youths" (Prov 7:7) Or it can mean discriminating knowledge, "A wise man's heart discerns time and judgment" (Eccel 8:5. yadha)
3. "He discerns him not, because his hands," etc. (Gen 27:23, nakhar)
4. "Then shall you return and discern between the righteous and the wicked" (Mal 3:18, raah)
5. "So is my lord the king to discern good". (2 Sam 14:17, shama).

In the New Testament the words *anacríno*, *diacríno* and *dokimázo* are translated as "discern", expressing the close and distinct acquaintance with or a critical knowledge of things. Used in KJV in 1 Cor 2:14 "the things of the spirit of God"; in 1 Cor 11:29 of "the (Lord's) body" in the sacrament; in Matt. 16:3 of "the face of the heaven"; in Heb 5:14 of a clear knowledge of good and evil as the prerogative of a full-grown man.

DISCERNING OF SPIRITS (from The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)

The Greek phrase *diakriseis pneumatón* means "judicial estimation," "through judgment or separation". It occurs in 1 Cor 12:10 as being one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The word also occurs in Heb 5:14 and Rms 14:1: "But him that is weak in faith you shall receive, yet not for decision of scruples." This translation scarcely expresses the meaning which Thayer has freely rendered, "not for the purpose of passing judgment on opinions".

Taking these three passages together it's evident that the Greek term which is rendered "discerning" means a distinguishing or discriminating between things that are under consideration; hence, the one who possessed the gift of "discernings of spirits" was able to make distinction between a person who spoke by the Spirit of God and one who was moved by a false spirit. This gift seems to have been exercised chiefly by those who had the role of

teachers, and it was especially important because of the abundance of many false teachers then current (see 2 Jhn 1:7; Acts 20:29-30).

DISCERNING OF SPIRITS (from Fausset's Bible Dictionary)

1 Cor 12:10. Discerning between the operation of God's Spirit and that of an evil spirit, or unaided human spirit claiming to utter the dictates of God's Spirit.

Acts 5:1-11; Acts 8:28; 1 Cor 14:23,37: "if any man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write to you are the commandments of the Lord." It is this which assures us of the inspiration of the NT. The books were accepted as inspired by churches having men who possessed "the discerning of spirits" (1 Jhn 4:1; 1 Tim 4:1).

DISCERNING OF SPIRITS (from Vincent's Word Studies)

1 Cor. 2:14 "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Concerning "the natural man", the contrast between the soul, life, and spirit is a man governed by the Holy Spirit and one in whom the Holy Spirit is absent. But natural, is not equivalent to fleshy. Paul is speaking of natural as contrasted with spiritual cognition applied to spiritual truth, and therefore of the soul, as the organ of human cognition, contrasted with the spirit, as the organ of spiritual cognition.

The man, therefore, whose cognition of truth depends solely upon his natural insight is natural, as contrasted with the spiritual man to whom divine insight is imparted. In other words, the organ employed in the apprehension of spiritual truth characterizes the man. Paul therefore "characterizes the man who is not yet capable of understanding divine wisdom as natural, i.e., as one who possesses in his soul the organ of purely human cognition, but who has not yet the organ of religious cognition in the spirit.

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