

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

VOTS #51-100

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17:11)

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A famine of hearing the words of the LORD

There was a time when everyone in Israel was so bitter, whether slave or free, was suffering; there was no one to help them. Looks like the LORD saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Jehoash. Being a ruler of the northern kingdom, he had rapidly conquered Syria, Moab and Ammon. The whole northern empire had a long period of peace and security marked by a revival of artistic and commercial development. Social corruption and the oppression of the poor and helpless were prevalent. However, Israel, the northern kingdom was booming, a time of prosperity both physically and economically.

But suddenly we see this man Amos who stands on street corners with a signboard and rails against the nation. The government was stable for a change and people were too busy enjoying the good life to listen to the rants of Amos. Who is this man? He came from the peasant class. A migrant to Israel from the south, he spoke with a rural accent and was probably the butt of many jokes by city sophisticates. But he speaks like a prophet. He says, prepare to meet your God, O Israel, seek good, not evil, that you may live.

Once when I was with Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, Amos said, “The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; the LORD will rise against the house of Jeroboam”. Then Amaziah sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel. How can someone talk about a king like that? Later Amaziah said to Amos, “Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom”. Is he really a prophet? Can a shepherd suddenly become a prophet?

Later I heard that he said, “*The days are coming when the LORD will send a famine through the land-- not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it. In that day the lovely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst*”.

Is he really a prophet? How can he be so confident to speak statements like that? What does it really mean to have a famine of hearing the words of the LORD? Will there be days like that? If God is speaking through him, as he warned, God's people cannot forever push God into a small corner of their lives to be brought out like a magic whenever they need him. God is a lion, not a pet. In the words of Amos, God roars. Seek the LORD and live.

When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it? Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. The lion has roared-- who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken-- who can but prophesy? (Amos 3:6-8)

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Being Sidelined?

We had an interesting discussion after hearing Paul going on another journey to visit how the believers are doing, where he preached the word. This time Paul chose Silas for his journey. Myself I have put as A and other two brothers B and C.

A : Why Barnabas is not going this time with Paul? What a great report they were sharing earlier, how God opened a door of faith to the Gentiles in their last journey together..

B : Paul was not happy about Barnabas because Barnabas wanted to take his cousin John Mark with them?

A : But I think Paul could have accepted Barnabas' request. Barnabas is known to be a very encouraging person. Does Paul know that he sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at apostle's feet? Paul was not baptized that time.

B : Just because someone has sacrificed and contributed, he should not think, his opinions need to be considered. Barnabas also should have listened to Paul because he had a reason for it. John Mark left them in their early journey.

C : Just because someone did a mistake once doesn't mean that he will do it again. May be Paul should have worked with faith than fear. It looks like he doesn't trust John Mark. Moreover, John Mark would have had some genuine family needs. We are aware that Paul, before getting baptized, used to kill people whoever followed Christ. Paul was not thinking about their family before killing. Paul thought he was zealous for God killing them.

B : I think Paul should have involved few other prominent men and elders who could have taken the call of including John Mark. Just because he is in a position, he should not also decide on his own and do this to Barnabas who is such an encouraging person.

A : But when I look at Barnabas, sometimes he can come across as people pleaser. He can give into the hypocrisy of the leaders too. But just recently both Paul and Barnabas showed great heart in confronting those who insist on promoting false doctrines in the church.

C : May be they were strained in the relationship earlier. We know that John Mark's mother Mary opened her house for us to have prayers. John Mark used to be very serving.

A : I feel Barnabas is being sidelined may be because of some relationship strain they had.

B : Being sidelined? We should not think a man of God will sideline others as he knows that everyone are chosen by God and Holy Spirit can work through anyone.

C : Yes, God can redeem good out of evil, yet we are all held accountable for the evil we do, even if God ends up bringing good out of the evil. Either Paul or Barnabas, probably both had to get this right with God and each other.

A : Yes, I remember these words from Christ, "for in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you".

The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:8)

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Third name to be remembered

It is such a joy to be in the church in Jerusalem. I love the way James uncle shares his conviction. I am 20 years old. I thank God for choosing me in such a young age. Once James uncle told me, “If you are in trouble? Pray. If you are happy? Sing songs of praise. Since then, I started loving the book of Psalms which is full of songs. Praying through Psalms connected me to God more and more. I came across this Psalm in which Israel’s history is written with lot of specific details. One of the line said, “But Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was checked”. Who was this Phinehas?

Suppose if we ask, give few names who entered the promised Land Canaan? Most of them will answer Caleb and Joshua. Well there are few other names listed in the book of Joshua who also have entered. But they were probably less than 20 years when the census was taken of those who were able to serve in the army of Israel during the time of Moses. Two names we can think of who were there in Moses time and entered promised land are :

1. Achan, son of Carmi – He coveted things of this world. Due to his sin, his family was in trouble and not only that 36 able army men were killed.
2. Phinehas, son of Eleazar – He served as a great priest during Joshua’s time and also during the time of Judges.

But, Phinehas while he was just less than 20 years old, during Moses’ time, he did something after which LORD said to Moses, “Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honor among them, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them”. Do we remember Phinehas?

What did he do? He killed another bold young Israelite, Zimri, the leader of a Simeonite family, who brought to his family a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting because of the plague which Lord brought that killed around 24,000 Israelites.

Being young, we have a choice to be like Achan, with love towards the world bringing trouble to the family and the community. Or to be like Zimri who was bold enough to sin even in front of leaders and priest in spite of knowing that the Lord was not happy about the community and the leaders. Or to be like Phinehas who was as zealous as God.

Phinehas was probably not the only one to make such a stand for righteousness. But his was the singular act that stopped the plague. We may think our particular stand for righteousness makes no difference in the awesome tide of sin around us; but God can honor just one righteous act and cause it to make the difference.

When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him. Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice. (Proverbs 16:7-8)

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A Con Man In God's Family?

Abraham uncle was known for his righteousness and his faith in God. I am a friend of Isaac his son and we admire their family. I got married at the same time as Isaac and God blessed with a boy and a girl child, but Isaac's wife Rebekah was barren. Moreover he was aware that his mother Sarah aunty also was barren for quite a long time and when Abraham uncle was 100 years old, Isaac was born to him. But God heard his prayers and blessed them with twin boys when Isaac was sixty years old. A longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

Isaac named the first Esau, he was red and his whole body was like a hairy garment since birth. He became a skillful hunter. The second one came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel, so he was named Jacob. Jacob was a quiet man staying among the tents. I called them Hairy and Scary. Rebekah dominated Isaac and at times manipulated him to get her way.

Hairy and Scary always had sibling fights and most of the times Scary will be pampered because he was Mama's boy, Rebekah loved him. But Isaac since he had a taste for wild game like most of the men like, he loved Hairy. This difference from the parents approach didn't work well in their family. But Scary was scary because he deceived Hairy on many instances. Once when Scary was cooking some stew, Hairy came in from the open country, famished. He said to Scary, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!". Scary replied, "First sell me your birthright". Hairy acted impulsively and he gave it.

Hairy was godless. He let his hunger overwhelm his concern for things of lasting value. The birthright has to do with both position and inheritance. By birthright, the firstborn son inherited the leadership of the family and the judicial authority of his father and also entitled to a double portion of the paternal inheritance. Hairy despised his birthright. And also he married two Hittite women. They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah.

Once I heard that Hairy wanted to kill Scary, very scary!. When I enquired I found out that Scary deceived Hairy again to get the blessings from his father. The blessing is regarded as a kind of magical power that conveyed prosperity from one generation to the next. One might ask why Isaac did that way? Well Isaac was old and he can't see properly. But the trick Scary did was covering his hands and the smooth part of his neck with the goatskins. Who was behind this trick? His mother Rebekah. Scary flatly lied to his father.

Now, Scary has gone to a long distance. Harry is holding a grudge to kill Scary. Isaac is really old and almost about to die. Not sure what God has in store for that family.

A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit. Though his speech is charming, do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart. His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly. (Proverbs 26:24-26)

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This Day is Holy

Last month was one of the best month so far in my life. We celebrated the Sukkot – the Feast of Tabernacles. Some called it as Festival of Shelters, Harvest Festival, Festival of Booths... Till last month I didn't understand many things that had happened earlier, but last month, I was able to understand deeply many things about God and His plans.

Just few weeks before my father was involved in rebuilding the great wall of Jerusalem and completed it. They used to talk about how through Nehemiah uncle God helped to complete this wall in just fifty-two days against many oppositions. My father told me that how all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.

On the first day of last month, the seventh month, we all assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. Ezra uncle stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion, read from the Book of Law of Moses aloud from daybreak till noon. All the people could see him and as he opened the book, we all stood up. Ezra uncle praised the LORD, the great God and we all lifted our hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!". Then we bowed down and worshiped the LORD with our faces to the ground.

Suddenly I noticed the people were weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. Then Ezra uncle, Nehemiah uncle and the Levites said to us, "This day is sacred to the LORD our God. This day is holy. Do not mourn or weep". Nehemiah uncle said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to the Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength".

Then we all went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy. The next day, my father attended another gathering along with the leaders to give more attention to the words of the Law. He came back and told us, "We need to live in booths. Let's go out and bring branches from olive, myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make booths. We saw everyone building booths and living in them. We celebrated the feast for seven days. Day after day, Ezra uncle read from the Book of the Law of God. Someone said from the days of Joshua the festival of booths had not been celebrated like that.

Then we all gathered together on the 24th day, fasting, wearing sackcloth and having dust on our heads. For quarter of a day we stood and read from the Book and spent another quarter in confession and worshipping the LORD. The Levites cried out with a loud voice and prayed. I understood about God's plan more deeply from Abraham uncles time through that prayer. This may be the longest prayer, if it is recorded. Our God is full of compassion.

For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love. (Psalm 33:4-5)

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3 months as king, 37 years in prison

I constantly hear many talking about Jesus. I used to hear names like Paul, Peter, Timothy and others spreading about Jesus. So I wanted to know about Jesus and started reading some materials about Jesus. I got a book where I found the genealogy of Jesus. It was interesting to know that it can be traced all the way back to Adam. I found interesting facts about many in that genealogy. One such person is Jeconiah or Jehoiachin.

So sad he was just 3 months as king when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon carried Jeconiah into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the year Evil-Merodach became king of Babylon, he released Jehoiachin from prison. Few other details about Jeconiah are :

- In one book it is mentioned that he was 8 years old when he became king, whereas another one mentioned as 18 years old. Can you believe at such a young age being in prison for the next 37 years. The best time of his life was in prison.
- The genealogy mentioned his fathers name as Josiah whereas his fathers name was Jehoiakim. Some connection mistake may be in the recordings.
- Josiah was his grandfather who instituted major reforms in Jerusalem. Josiah was 8 years old when he became king and did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.
- Neither Josiah's son Jehoiakin nor his grand son Jehoiachin got good name. Both did evil in the eyes of the LORD. Also Josiah's father Amon also was not humble and increased his guilt and Josiah's grandfather Manasseah became humble after doing a lot of damage to the nation.
- Evil-Merodach, king of Babylon showed lot of kindness to Jehoiachin and gave him a seat of honor higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon.
- Jehoiachin for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king's table. Day by day the king gave Jehoiachin a regular allowance as long as he lived. Jehoiachin had seven sons – Shealtiel, Malkiram, Pedaiah, Shenazzar, Jekamiah, Hoshama and Nedabiah.
- Jeremiah's words, "Is this man Jehoiachin a despised, broken pot, an object no one wants? Why will he and his children be hurled out, cast into a land they do not know? O land, land, land, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the LORD says: Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah."

When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices; when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy. Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed. A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his tongue. (Proverbs 11:10-12)

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A notorious double-crosser

I am a close relative of Laban and didn't like him since my childhood days. He always cheats people and deceives them for his own advantage. He is a lover of the worldly wealth and go to all extremes to get it. He often falls into trouble because of his deceitful tongue.

I remember he was even willing to send his sister Rebekah along with a stranger to a long distance just because he saw some nose ring and the bracelets the stranger presented to Rebekah and found out that the stranger was a servant of Abraham uncle who was a wealthy man. But that incident, even though was not acceptable, it looked like it was from the LORD. However we missed Rebekah who used to be such a loving and serving sister.

Later, it happened that Rebekah son Jacob came to see his uncles family. It was great to see him. He brought back all the memories of Rebekah with us. No sooner he fell in love with Laban's daughter Rachel. Any man would fall in love with Rachel as she was lovely in form and beautiful. But Laban took advantage of Jacob's love and made him to work for seven years. I remember attending the great feast. But just in few days there was great commotion. Then we figured out that Laban gave Leah to Jacob in stead of Rachel. How can a father do such a thing? How others in the family are able to support in this scheme?

Laban's heart was calloused. Eve though he deceived Jacob, he was confidently answering Jacob saying, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work". How can a man do such a thing to his own daughters? Can a selfish life go to this extent of even using their own children? What happened to Leah and Rachel? How did they allow their father doing these things? I didn't like them doing this. And obviously I saw so many problems in their family since then.

Laban's heart has not changed at all. He has always been a double crosser who says one thing and does another. Laban kept on changing Jacob's wages to get himself the benefit. Jacob's flocks increased due to his cunning, but in the process Laban's son grew hostile. Now we heard that three days back Jacob had fled along with Laban's daughters and the flocks. Laban has gone to pursue him and bring back his daughters. Laban never learned that, though cheating may get you what you want, it usually involves a heavy cost. Most people think happiness is about gaining something, but it's not. It's all about getting rid of the darkness you accumulate. People of double standards never experience happiness.

A scoundrel and villain, who goes about with a corrupt mouth, who winks with his eye, signals with his feet and motions with his fingers, who plots evil with deceit in his heart-- he always stirs up dissension. Therefore disaster will overtake him in an instant; he will suddenly be destroyed--without remedy. (Proverbs 6:12-15)

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God's Lion

I was part of the 24,000 men under Heldai the Netopathite. We had 12 divisions of 24,000 men each and each division served the king month by month throughout the year. Our team served on the 12th month. Our captain Heldai directed us well and we enjoyed our duty.

When I heard that Heldai was from the family of Othniel, I got curious to know about Othniel. The following are some details of Othniel who was referred to as "God's Lion".

- Some thirty years after the death of Joshua, the Israelites fell under the subjection of Chushan-rishathaim, the king of Mesopotamia. He oppressed them for full eight years, when they "cried" unto Jehovah, and Othniel was raised up to be their deliverer.
- Othniel accepted the challenge of being the savior wholeheartedly even if it came with risks. He made war to defeat the regime of Chushan-rishathaim, the King of Mesopotamia. The battle began and in the end, Othniel equipped with his bravery and faith in God, defeated the king.
- After the war, Othniel became a hero in the eyes of the Israelites. Furthermore, he succeeded in reforming them and restoring their fellowship with God. He was selected as Israel's new leader. He is likewise denoted as the first and best judge. Israel was at peace during the forty years of Othniel's reign until his death.
- He is the only Judge mentioned connected with the tribe of Judah.
- His wife Acsah was the daughter of Caleb. He gained her hand as a reward for his bravery in leading a successful expedition against Debir (formerly called Kiriath Sepher).
- Caleb said that he will give his daughter Acsah in marriage to the man who attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher. Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's brother took it; so Caleb gave his daughter Acsah to him in marriage.
- Othniel had two sons, Hathath and Meonothai.

Now I am part of a huge army but I wonder how the Spirit of God led them to have great victories. Praise be to the LORD my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge. O LORD, what is man that you care for him, the son of man that you think of him? Man is like a breath; his days are like a fleeting shadow.

There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the LORD. The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD. (Proverbs 21:30-31)

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The Officials of Zoan are Fools

I was part of the 6,00,000 men who journeyed from Rameses. That night was a night filled with mixed feelings. The Egyptians urged us to hurry and leave the country. We took our dough before the yeast was added and carried it on our shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. We went and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed towards us and they gave us what we asked for. But it was sad to think that there was not a house without someone dead. The LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt and there was loud wailing in Egypt. We stood in awe of God witnessing the work of His mighty hands.

As we were walking in the journey, I had a conversation with Aaron.

Myself : Aaron, are we walking in the wrong route? There is a shorter route than this.

Aaron : We are just listening to the LORD and following his instructions. His route is always the best. His understanding no one can fathom. Can you fathom His mysteries?

Myself : It's true, great is the LORD and most worthy of praise. But I am not sure why Pharaoh couldn't understand it, in spite of seeing so many signs in the region of Zoan.

Aaron : May be his heart is blinded with jealousy. Moses and Pharaoh almost grew together, so they might have had kind of sibling fights. Now he is showing that to Moses.

Myself : But what happened to Pharaoh's officials, they could have helped him.

Aaron : Initially they thought we are doing some magic and even made their magicians do the same by their secret arts. So Pharaoh's heart became hard. But later their magicians were not able to do. At least at that point he could have just let us go.

Myself : Looks like the officials of Zoan are nothing but fools; the wise counselors of Pharaoh gave senseless advice. Everyone are put to shame because of useless people, who bring neither help nor advantage, but only shame and disgrace.

Aaron : The wise men will know what the LORD of the hosts has purposed against Egypt. When the LORD waves his hand, the people will respond in terror. The LORD has poured into them a spirit of dizziness; they make Egypt stagger in all that she does, as a drunkard staggers around in his vomit. There is nothing Egypt can do. Let us fear the LORD.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones. (Proverbs 3:5-8)

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Is Jesus the Messiah?

When the great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, I came back to Cappadocia. I could never forget those days in Jerusalem. With great power the apostles testified to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. Now being in Cappadocia I am trying to do my best in preaching the word of God. Yesterday I had a gathering at my place and I was sharing about my life how I accepted Jesus.....

When I was in my early twenties I believed in Jesus when I saw the miraculous signs he was doing in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast. I was convinced in my heart that Jesus is the Messiah. After few weeks I informed my parents who were leaders in the synagogue. They were not happy about me. They said if we follow Jesus we will be put out of the synagogue and asked me to share this with the Pharisees and the teachers of the law.

I went to them and I was shocked to hear that they were planning to kill Jesus. The Jewish leaders were looking for a way to kill Jesus. Then I thought is Jesus the Messiah? I went to Jesus' family members, they said, "Jesus is out of his mind". Even his own brothers did not believe in him. Is Jesus not the Messiah? I am not able to see anything wrong with him then why his family members and the Jewish leaders didn't like him?

I was part of another gathering where Jesus was teaching during the Festival of Tabernacles. I was amazed to see his wisdom. But the people there told Jesus that he was demon-possessed. Can Messiah be called as demon-possessed? I got confused with all that I heard about Jesus. When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than Jesus?

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and in a loud voice, talking about rivers of living water flowing from within us. Some people said, "Surely Jesus is the prophet and few others, "He is the Messiah". Still others asked, "How can the Messiah come from Galilee?". So I got confused and didn't follow Jesus that time.

Now I am grateful, through the apostles, God made me to understand that Jesus is the Messiah. But I still do wonder how people can be deceived with their own understanding of the scriptures. Even though Jesus was from Bethlehem they continued to believe he was from Galilee. There are not many who really look into the facts but very strong in believing what they believe. They were even willing to stone the righteous one who is the Messiah.

Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand. Let us continue to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Jesus is the Messiah.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise. (Psalm 111:10)

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Political Survival mattered above all

I can never forget this day in my life. I am a close relative of Mary and Martha and went to their place to comfort them as they lost their dear brother Lazarus. I knew about Jesus but I was surprised to see Jesus weeping. Did he love Lazarus so much? I heard Jesus did many miracles earlier, why couldn't Jesus keep Lazarus from dying. All of a sudden, Jesus asked to take away the stone. Martha said, "But, Lord by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days". Jesus said, "you will see the glory of God". And in a loud voice called, "Lazarus come out". Lazarus came back alive! I completely put my faith in Jesus.

But some of them went to the religious leaders and told them what Jesus had done. Being close with the leaders, I knew that they don't like Jesus. Even after seeing such a great miracle can people turn against this great man? These "informers" were so near Jesus, but they were not able to see His power. How can God show grace to them? I heard that the Jewish council met and discussed what to do with Jesus. They were not seeking after what is right, they were seeking for ways to protect their own selfish interests.

Joseph Ben Caiaphas, known simply as Caiaphas, the high priest is a Sadducee, not a Pharisee, but the two factions could always get together to fight a common enemy. Unknown to himself and to the council, Caiaphas uttered a divine prophecy: Jesus would die for the nation so that the nation would not perish. Caiaphas thought logically but not morally. It was logical that one man should die for the people, but it was not moral to reject the righteous man and seek the death of an innocent Man. The official decision that day was that Jesus must die. It was a well planned political calculation.

Caiaphas and others of the Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence with which to frame Jesus, but were unable to find any. Jesus remained silent throughout the proceedings until Caiaphas demands that Jesus say whether he is the Christ. Jesus replied "I am: and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven". They charged him with blasphemy and sentenced him to corporal punishment.

Caiaphas is the son-in-law of Annas who was the high priest earlier. The Sadducees are known to be rude even among one another. Sadducees bent over backward to cooperate with whatever group held political power and as a result they prospered. I remember a saying goes like this, "wholesome sugar may be found in a poisoned cane, a precious stone in a toad's head, a flaming torch in a blind man's hand". For some, political survival mattered above all. Jesus's miracles, teachings and character make no difference.

Blessed is the man who always fears the LORD, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble. Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked man ruling over a helpless people. A tyrannical ruler lacks judgment, but he who hates ill-gotten gain will enjoy a long life. (Proverbs 28:14-16)

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An angel spoke?

When I was travelling back towards Egypt, I met this interesting couple from Bethlehem with a little child. I always looked up to Bethlehem as it was the ancestral home of David, the great king of Israel and founder of the royal dynasty. But it was quite a little town six miles to the south of Jerusalem. As they were sharing, Mary was sharing how few Magi came from a distant land, they saw the child, bowed down and worshiped him. Not only that, they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. Looks like they were wise and wealthy. What amazed me was when I heard that they found an interesting star which almost led them to this place. Were they astrologers?

The things that I heard, I can see that they were probably priests of Zoroastrianism. As part of their religion, the priests followed the patterns of the stars religiously. These men were Gentiles. They also mentioned the child as the king of the Jews. I remembered the words of prophet Micah, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times”. Is this child the “king of the Jews”?

But I was asking them, then why they have to go to Egypt. They said an angel spoke to them in a dream saying, "Get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.". I was shocked, “What! an angel spoke to you”. I heard of angels speaking to people in ancient times but I never heard of it during that time. Then they shared how angels appeared different times in their life before marriage and how they were able to see God working in their life. They were also sharing about how angel spoke to another couple Zechariah and Elizabeth with regards to their child. Another child? Is that what prophet Malachi was prophesying?

It is no surprise that Herod tried to kill this child. Being a cruel and crafty man, he alone wanted to bear the title “King of the Jews”. I remembered the words of Isaiah, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel”. I carried the child and kissed him. I became so emotional holding that divine child in my hand. I couldn’t control my tears. What did I do for God to make me hear and see His mighty power?

God gave me an opportunity to serve this wonderful family in Egypt. After some time we heard Herod died. Joseph said that the angel spoke to them to go to the land of Israel. Just last week I arranged their travel back to Israel. I miss Immanuel and the family. Joseph and Mary are such a wonderful couple. God is good to those who are pure in heart.

God has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

(Ecclesiastes 3:11)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Womb To Wilderness

Many people around me were talking about John remembering the words of prophet Isaiah, “The **voice** of one crying in the **wilderness**: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, Make his paths straight”. I heard that people went out to him from Jerusalem and Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. With curiosity I went to see John. I was shocked to see him and hear about him. His clothes were made of camel’s hair and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. Everything looked so crazy for me.

Elizabeth aunty, the mother of John is my far relative. That time she must be around 60 years of age and well past years when she was conceived with John. It was a pleasant surprise for my family to hear that she’s conceived. We as a family visited her house. Zechariah uncle was not able to speak. Aunty told us that the Lord had shown His favor and taken away her disgrace among people. At the same time one of her close relative Mary aunty visited her. She was also carrying and both were praising God.

Now, looking at John, I wonder if any mother would be happy and praising God seeing her son being in the wilderness, eating locusts and wild honey. Not only that, that time when I was with John, he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to him. He said to them, “You brood of vipers!...”. I was feeling very unforgettable the way he was talking. If he is from God, would God allow him to talk in such language about the Jewish leaders? What if he is from God, are all leaders who we believe in are brood of vipers? It doesn’t look good for me the way it is going. Looks like John will earn more enemies by being straight forward. That too he is too bold to talk to people in leadership and I heard that he even challenged the Roman officials. His lifestyle, his food, his talk doesn’t look normal at all. Would God use such abnormal people with crazy lifestyle to show His ways?

John also said, "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire". He was mentioning about Jesus. I don’t much understand what he said about this winnowing fork is in his hand and so and so but I remembered Mary aunty, the mother of Jesus. Is Jesus going to be another crazy man like John in the wilderness? Would the family give glory to God as they glorified Him when the child was in the womb?

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Romans 8:19-21)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Good Tidings Of Great Joy

Imagine seeing a group of people coming with great joy from your neighborhood. As many, I was so curious to know what really happened. I know that there was no wedding or any other function planned in our neighbors place. Otherwise I would have got invited to that function. This group I saw looked like shepherds. Shepherds were outcasts in Israel.

I took my courage to ask them what had happened. I was pleasantly surprised about what I heard. They are shepherds. They take care of the temple flock. They protect and give care for the lambs used in temple sacrifice. As they were watching over their flocks one night, they suddenly saw somebody like an angel of the Lord. They said they were totally afraid. Then they said the angel spoke to them saying, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger”.

Not only that, after this they suddenly saw a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests”. Then they immediately planned together and came to Bethlehem to see whether what they heard about. They said they saw exactly what was informed to them. They said they worshipped the child and marveled at God’s grace and goodness. I couldn’t believe myself. A child is being worshipped?

But shepherds are not easily fooled. They are practical men of the world who have little to do with fantasy. If they said that they saw angels then it must be true. Moreover, I remember my neighbor telling me that as there was no room in the inn, he gave his manger to an young couple who was about to deliver. Is that the child? Born in a manger? Immediately I went and saw the child and his parents. Strange but true!

Then I saw this family in Jerusalem. They came to present the child to the Lord. They offered their sacrifices. Simeon uncle took the child in his arms, praised God, saying, “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel”. God’s salvation?

Then Simeon uncle blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too”. This divine child had no room in the inn but found room in the hearts of many.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Why Jesus Wept?

I am a relative of Lazarus. Most of our relatives got baptized in Jerusalem. It was a great day. Around 3000 got baptized. A day we can never forget ever. Last week couple of relatives met and remembered the day when Jesus raised up Lazarus from the dead. I am writing down the discussion we had. (Myself as R1)

R1 : Jesus wept. So much he loved Lazarus. I was also moved when I saw that.

R2 : Our Lord's weeping reveals the humanity of the Savior. He has entered into all of our experiences and knows how we feel.

R3: His tears also assure us of His sympathy; He is indeed "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief".

R2 : But why did He weep at all? After all, He knew that He would raise Lazarus from the dead. Will someone weep before doing such a great miracle?

R3 : May be he wept because he was calling his friend from heaven back into this wicked world. Jesus, coming down from heaven, knew what Lazarus was leaving behind.

R1 : I was thinking that day, if Jesus loved Lazarus so much, why did He not prevent his death? He could have healed him while he was sick.

R2 : I thought, Jesus was weeping because He was unable to do anything. They were tears of deep regret. May be he thought he could have come earlier and healed him.

R1 : No one expected that after 4 days that he could do such a miracle.

R3 : But Thomas told me that Jesus knew that Lazarus was dead and Jesus was glad that he was not there that time. Also Thomas was not that happy to come along with Jesus.

R1 : I remember as they took away the stone Jesus said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me".

R2 : Yes, he also told Martha that she would see the glory of God.

R3 : This makes me to think that Jesus wept because he knew that even after seeing this some were not able to put their faith in him.

R2 : Yes, I heard some went to Pharisees and told them. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin and they plotted to take Jesus' life.

R1 : I remember these words of Moses, "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain". Did Jesus went through a similar pain in his heart?

R2 : Does that mean, if we are hardened in our hearts then God is grieving?

R3 : Yes, he loves us so much. We need to take a firm decision that we don't grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom we were sealed for the day of redemption.

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. (James 4:7-8)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Looking for an honest man!

I met an interesting person in my life. His name is Diogenes. He declared himself a cosmopolitan and a citizen of the world rather than claiming allegiance to just one place. He begged for a living and often slept in a large ceramic jar in the marketplace. Many stories of Diogenes refer to his dog-like behavior, and his praise of a dog's virtues. According to him, Dogs live in the present without anxiety and unlike human beings who either dupe others or are duped, dogs will give an honest bark at the truth. He believed human beings live artificially and hypocritically and would do well to study the dog.

One day I saw him carrying a lamp during the day. I heard that he was looking for an honest man. I was surprised to hear that and talked to my father. My father told me about a passage from prophet Jeremiah. God commanded Jeremiah to conduct a search of all the city of Jerusalem. If even one righteous person were discovered, the Lord would forgive the wicked city and call off the invasion. Jeremiah appealed to God who saw and cared about truth among men. Jeremiah mourned over the lack of repentance and brokenness over sin among the people of Jerusalem. They were stricken yet not grieved; consumed yet not corrected. Despite all they had and would endure, they have refused to return.

Jeremiah found nobody among the poor who qualified, but he concluded that their lack of religious education would excuse them. The prophet then went to the nobles and the leaders, who he discovered knew God's commandments but threw off the yoke and turned away from the law. When the survey was concluded, not one person was found who was honest and truthful. The search ended in disappointment.

God fed them to the full. He supplied all their needs, yet they used His gifts in order to commit sin. The goodness of God should have brought them to repentance, but they were ungrateful for His blessings. Instead of acting like men and women made in the image of God, they became like animals in heat; well-fed, lusty stallions. God asked two questions: "Why should I forgive?" and "Shall I not punish them for these things?"

One thing was left for God to do: He would allow the invaders to enter the land like marauding animals and destroy the people. The animal had gotten loose from the yoke and run away from the master, only to be met by a lion, a wolf, and a leopard! God sent the rains and gave the harvests, but His people refused to thank Him. My father told me that we should encourage one another to fear God and be grateful. When a nation becomes that corrupt, there is no hope but looks like one righteous person can make a difference.

LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy. (Habakkuk 3:2)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The Seventy 'Sevens'!

I am from Berea, relative to Timothy's father who is Greek. Timothy's mother is a Jewess. Once Timothy took me to a gathering where Paul was talking about Jesus. I was so eager to listen from Paul and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. More and more Jews and Greeks believed the message. But some Jews from Thessalonica came and agitated the crowds. So the brothers immediately sent Paul. It was a great time of understanding the plan of salvation of God.

While examining the scriptures I was going through the book of Daniel where he had written that when he was speaking and praying, confessing his sin and the sin of his people Israel, Gabriel, the man he had seen in the earlier vision, came to him in swift flight. And instructed him the following ...

- *"Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.*
- *"Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.*
- *After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.*

After reading this, I found out, it was during Nehemiah's time, Artaxerxes made a decree giving Nehemiah permission, to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the walls. Then I calculated the seven 'sevens' and the sixty-two 'sevens'. Sevens is basically seven times. This means $7 * 7$ years plus $62 * 7$ years which equals to 483 years. I couldn't believe that the Anointed One was crucified exactly after 483 years of Artaxerxes decree.

Then I got alarmed because if this is true then Jerusalem will be destroyed after this according to Daniel. Will the Romans destroy Jerusalem? I heard Jesus once said, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"*

Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil. May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:19-24)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The god of this age!

It is discouraging to see so many things within the Corinth church, I am part of. Christians' hearts are divided because of their lack of spiritual understanding and growth. There are divisions and factions within the church. Nearly every Christian in the church is involved in the strife. Christians are taking doctrinal and non doctrinal stances in opposition to one another and are striving against one another. The Christian's hearts are divided because of misplaced loyalties to their leaders and a general lack of appreciation for the cross of Christ that had crept in. The Christians give more importance on cultural values than spiritual values. They are concerned of who is leading them and showed favoritism.

Time and again Paul wrote letters to the church helping us to understand that we are the church of God. Those are tough issues, but his letters are very clear of dealing those so that the church can be pure. If Paul is such a faithful teacher of the Word, then why did not more people believe his message? Why are the false teachers so successful in misleading many? What I understand is, it is because the mind of the lost sinner is blinded by Satan, and fallen man finds it easier to believe lies than to believe truth. We should not let anyone walk through our mind with their dirty feet. It's all in the mind!

I felt encouraged from these words of Paul, *“Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”*.

As the god of this age and the prince of this world, Satan keeps lost sinners in the dark. It is the minds of the unbelieving that are blinded. Of course, Satan also works on the heart and the emotions of the lost, but his main battleground is the mind. Satan works hard to make people think less and learn less and use their minds less. There is a significant and real sense in which Satan “rules” this world. Not in an ultimate sense, because, the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. Yet, Jesus did not contest Satan's claim to rule over this present age, because there is a sense in which Satan is the “popularly elected” ruler of this age. The sad thing is that Satan uses teachers to deceive people. Unspiritual mind puffs us up with idle notions.

For the fool speaks folly, his mind is busy with evil: He practices ungodliness and spreads error concerning the LORD; the hungry he leaves empty and from the thirsty he withholds water. The scoundrel's methods are wicked, he makes up evil schemes to destroy the poor with lies, even when the plea of the needy is just. (Isaiah 32:6-8)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Do you want to please God?

I visited Paul many times to listen from him when he was in Rome waiting for his case to be heard before Caesar. Paul kept “open house” and received anybody who wanted to discuss the things of the kingdom of God. He was chained to a guard who was relieved every six hours, but the guards were forced to listen as Paul preached and taught and prayed. No wonder some of them were saved. During those time Paul always shares to me of him writing different letters to the brothers in Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians....

I also got to know about great brothers like Timothy, Tychicus, John Mark, Luke, Onesimus, Epaphroditus and others. In one such visit, I was asking Paul, “What should I do to please God?”. He appreciated me for asking that question and told me that many are looking to please themselves or others rather than pleasing God. He told me that without faith it is impossible to please God. We must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. He asked me a question whether I earnestly seek God? I took time to answer but it made me to understand how far I was in my faith. He told me that no one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs – he wants to please his commanding officer. As a believer God should be our commanding officer.

He told me that according to David, singing songs and glorifying God pleases God more than an ox or any other sacrifices or deeds. Do we take time to glorify God? He also told me that doing good and sharing with others pleases God. Sometimes we forget to do good and share with others. God is pleased with such sacrifices.

He told me that according to Solomon, the Lord detests the thoughts of the wicked, but those of the pure are pleasing to Him. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. We got to watch out what is controlling us – the Spirit or sinful nature. The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace, the sinful mind is hostile to God.

He told me that God is pleased when we care for our own family and repay our parents and grandparents. It is sad to see many families neglect their parents when their parents are old and needy. If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. I told Paul, thank you so much for opening my eyes. Sometimes we work hard thinking that we are building the Kingdom of God but may not be pleasing God by having faith, being pure and caring for others especially our immediate family. Let us make it our goal to please God.

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. (Romans 14:17-19)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Cutting and burning God's Word

I am a relative of Micaiah, who I see a great godly man and showed lot of interest in God's word. His grandfather Shaphan Grandpa was the one who then read the newly found book of the law to King Josiah. Lot of reforms were made in our nation because of that. But just recently Pharaoh Necho defeated king Josiah and made Judah a vassal to Egypt. King Josiah's son Jehoiakim had gotten his throne only because Egypt had deposed his brother Jehohaz. Thanks to Jeremiah uncle who constantly informed us about God's word. However he went through persecutions and was not allowed to enter the temple.

But one day when we were at the temple, Baruch, Jeremiah uncle's secretary, stood up and read from a scroll. On that day many people were there, as a time of fasting before the LORD was proclaimed for all the people in Jerusalem and those who had come from the towns of Judah. We didn't see much of a response from people. So my friend Micaiah immediately went and informed the officials and the princes and asked them to hear it. Then Baruch was called for and he again read from the scroll. Then we understood that it was Jeremiah uncle who dictated these words to Baruch and Baruch wrote them.

The officials and the princes looked in fear from one to another. They knew Jeremiah uncle's message from God would bring trouble. They thought they need to tell the king Jehoiakim directly and told Baruch that he and Jeremiah uncle to go and hide. Then we heard Jehudi read it to the king and all the officials standing beside him. Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns of the scroll, the king cut them off with a scribe's knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire. The king and all his attendants who heard all these words showed no fear, nor did they tear their clothes.

Any king or anyone who thinks he can silence God with a knife and a fire has a very high opinion of himself and a very low opinion of God. The same God who gives the Word has the power to protect and preserve the Word. If the king and his flattering, servile officers had only feared the Word and obeyed it, they would have saved the nation suffering and ruin, but they preferred to go their own way and ignore God's voice. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon attacked him and bound him with bronze shackles to take him to Babylon.

When word of God was read to King Josiah his response was fearing God but his son Jehoiakim responded differently. King Jehoiakim would have thought, these aren't the words of God; but of Jeremiah uncle. But he was wrong. Sin may so deaden spiritual and moral faculties, that men will without fear cast the messages of God to the fire, and commit His messengers to death. But such action never destroys the Word of God.

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.

(Isaiah 40:8)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The tale of two women

The influence of women upon society is great. There are some women whose cruelty oppresses and depresses society, but there are those whose compassion and sympathy lift the hearts of the oppressed. There are women whose lives and actions corrupt others, but there are godly women whose pure lives and godly conduct have preserved the hope of many. If one wicked woman can do much harm, one pure-minded woman can do a vast amount of good. Women occupy a critical place in society – devils or ministering angels.

I was shocked to hear from my relative who took care of Joash son of King Ahaziah for six years, hidden in the temple. All this could happen because of a good, clever and a brave woman Jehosheba. She is the aunt for Joash, sister of King Ahaziah and daughter of King Jehoram. She is also the wife of priest Jehoiada. So far I have not seen any priest marrying from the royal family. Jehosheba actually stole Joash away from among the royal princes who were about to be murdered and put him and his nurse, my relative, in a bedroom. She was willing to do what was right regardless of the potential consequences to herself.

Princes getting murdered? Well, this is because of another wicked woman Athaliah. She is none other than Joash's grandmother and Ahaziah's mother. Athaliah reigned eight years as queen to King Jehoram and a year as Queen Mother with their son Ahaziah. But when Ahaziah died a violent death, Athaliah decided to take charge for herself. She had all potential rivals – including her own children and grandchildren – put to death. She reigned alone for six years, secure in the throne since she had eliminated all opposition.

No wonder Athaliah was like that because she was the daughter of evil king Ahab and the wild and wicked Jezebel. Not only that, her husband Jehoram, once he became a king, put all his six brothers to the sword along with some of the officials of Israel. Jehosheba being the daughter of such wicked family, I believe, she chose to fear God. She married a priest Jehoiada. She took the risk of protecting Joash, her brother Ahaziah's son from this wicked Athaliah. Imagine Jehosheba seeing soldiers storming the royal palace, rushing from room to room, killing Ahaziah's sons. It takes courage to hide Joash in such situation.

Just few weeks back, we admired the brave act of Jehoiada and Jehosheba purging the evil among the city. Jehoiada and his sons brought out Joash, 7 years old and put the crown on him; they presented him with a copy of the covenant and proclaimed him king. As per the instruction of Jehoiada, the commanders seized Athaliah and put her to death. All the people of the land rejoiced. Even in darkest of times, God is still working and moving.

The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD... (Psalm 33:10-12)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Cyrus, the messiah!

I came back home after listening to Jesus when he shared about he being the good Shepherd. My family believed in Jesus being the Messiah in spite of all the opposition they faced in the synagogue. I told my uncle about Jesus, the good shepherd. My uncle asked me, "Do you know there was another God's shepherd in the past". I was thinking of David and told my uncle. He said, "I am going to tell you about another one. His name is Cyrus."

He showed me the following different passages about Cyrus. It is interesting to see what the prophets - Isaiah and Jeremiah, have to say about Cyrus,

- *...who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."'*
- *....This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut...*
- *.....I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty.*
- *In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing:*
- *This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you--may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up...*

My uncle told me that God is amazing to even mention Cyrus' name through the prophets 150 years before these events took place. God anointed Cyrus for this task, even referring to him as a messiah ('anointed one') and he is the only non-Jewish person to be called so. God made him a great king. He became the first Persian Empire. His regal titles in full were The Great King, King of Persia, King of Anshan, King of Media, King of Babylon, King of Sumer and Akkad, and King of the Four Corners of the World. He was also known as the king of the world. Greeks called him, "Cyrus the Elder".

God has complete control over human history. He can use anybody to accomplish his work, even a great emperor who does not acknowledge him. All people of the earth belong to God, whether or not they know it. The LORD reigns, let the earth be glad.

Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. (Psalm 96:9-10)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Good intentions don't excuse bad actions

I am working for King David. We were so delighted to receive rains after around three years. Yes, there was a famine for three successive years. What I heard was, the famine was because of King Saul and his blood-stained house. But King Saul had been dead for over 30 years. During his reign he killed several Gibeonites but intended to wipe them all out. In his zeal for Israel and Judah, King Saul had tried to annihilate them.

What I heard is, in the days of Patriarch Joshua – more than 400 years before King David's time – Israel swore not to harm the Gibeonites, a neighboring tribe. God expected Israel to keep its promise, even though the Gibeonites tricked Israel into making the agreement. Saul's crime was not only in killing the Gibeonites but also in breaking this ancient and important oath. God expects all individuals and nations to keep their promises. Time does not diminish our obligation to promises.

I also heard that King Saul's great-grandfather was from Gibeon. Gibeon once was a Levitical city and the tabernacle was there at one time. The city was located in the tribe of Benjamin – King Saul's tribe. So King Saul would have thought that pagan Gibeonites should not live in Benjamin. So in a way, it may be also King Saul slaughtered his own relatives. Whatever his motive and method, King Saul in his grave brought judgment on the people of Israel as the drought and famine was there for three years.

Well, King David summoned the Gibeonites and asked them, "What shall I do for you? How shall I make amends so that you will bless the Lord's inheritance?" The Gibeonites answered him, "We have no right to demand silver or gold from Saul or his family, nor do we have the right to put anyone in Israel to death. As for the man who destroyed us and plotted against us so that we have been decimated and have no place anywhere in Israel, let seven of his male descendants be given to us to be killed and exposed before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul--the Lord's chosen one." King David handed seven of them over to the Gibeonites, who killed and exposed them on a hill before the LORD. Later king David buried their bones along with bones of King Saul and Jonathan. After that, God answered prayer in behalf of the land. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

One man's sins can bring sorrow and death to his family, even after he is dead and buried. King David has to deal drastically with sin for the sake of the nation. He also showed kindness to the house of Saul. God examines both our intentions and our actions. Good intentions don't excuse bad actions. If God has such a high expectation that men keep their covenants, we can have great confidence that He will keep His covenant with us.

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:13)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Do things in the prescribed way

It was a great time hanging out with Obed-Edom. God has blessed Obed-Edom. He has eight sons. All of them are great capable men with the strength to do the work for the temple of God. He is in charge of all the gold and silver and all the articles in the temple of God. He is a great example of one who fears the LORD. Blessings will follow when the holiness of the LORD is respected and His instructions are obeyed. I remember visiting his house for the first time in the middle of celebration and confusion.

I was one among the 30,000 chosen men, when King David wanted to bring the ark of God from the house of Abinadab. 400 years before God commanded Moses to make this ark. It was a wood box completely covered with gold and with an ornate gold lid on top known as the mercy seat. It is 3 feet 9 inches long, 2 feet 3 inches wide and 2 feet 3 inches high. The tablets of the law that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai, a jar of manna, and Aaron's rod that miraculously budded as a confirmation of his leadership were inside the ark. We set the ark of God on a new cart. The sons of Abinadab were guiding the cart. We celebrated like anything, with all our might before the LORD, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals.

When we came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. Suddenly he fell down and he died beside the ark of God. King David was confused and he was frustrated. So the King commanded us to take it to the house of Obed-Edom. It was there in the house of Obed-Edom for three months. What we saw was God blessing the house of Obed-Edom and all that belonged to him. When the King heard about it, he wanted to bring it to the City of David.

The King summoned the Levites said to them, "You are the heads of the Levitical families; you and your fellow Levites are to consecrate yourselves and bring up the ark of the LORD, the God of Israel, to the place I have prepared for it. It was because you, the Levites, did not bring it up the first time that the LORD our God broke out in anger against us. We did not inquire of him about how to do it in the prescribed way". What I understood was transporting the ark on a cart was against God's specific command. The ark is designed to be carried and also only by Levites of the family of Koath. After that we had a great time bringing the ark with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet. Lots of sacrifices were made during that journey. Great to see the way King honoring God.

We need to inquire the Lord and do things in the prescribed way. God always wants His presence and glory to come on the shoulders of consecrated, obedient, praising people.

*A wise man has great power, and a man of knowledge increases strength;
(Proverbs 24:5)*

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Tabor and Hermon

I will sing of the Lord's great love forever
 I will make your faithfulness known through all generations
 I will declare that your love stands firm forever

.....

The heavens are yours and yours also the earth
 You founded the world and all that is in it
 You created the north and the south
 Tabor and Hermon sing for joy at your name.

I love this song which Ethan the Ezrahite wrote. I asked my father the explanation for Tabor and Hermon in this song. He took me to Mount Tabor. By this time, it became a pilgrimage site. People believe that on this high mountain, Jesus became radiant when he was along with Peter, James and John. These disciples saw Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah and one of them told Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here...". While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

As I can see Tabor was on the west, I asked my father, "Can Tabor and Hermon be West and East?". This is because then the lines of the song would be, "North, South, West and East" – all directions. My father said, "Yes, it could be highly possible as Hermon is on the east. Then he gave me some details of these mountains.

- Mount Tabor is mentioned as border of three tribes : Zebulun, Issachar and Naphtali.
- During the time of Deborah, descending from mount Tabor, the Israelites attacked and vanquished Sisera and the Canaanites.
- Mount Tabor was one of the mountain peaks on which it was the custom to light beacons in order to inform the northern villages of Jewish holy days and of the beginning of new months.
- Alexander of Judaea and his army of 30,000 Judeans was defeated in battle at mount Tabor. 10,000 Jewish fighters were killed.
- David spoke of the sacred hill of Hermon and compared brotherly love to the dew of it.
- Mount Hermon could be the place where the fallen angels descended to Earth. They swear upon the mountain that they would take wives among the daughters of men and take mutual imprecation for their sin.
- In Chronicles , we can see some of the brave warriors, famous men from half-tribe of Manasseh settled in Mount Hermon.

O LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you. (Psalm 89:8)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

'Freedom' to fall by the sword, plague and famine

Imagine after getting freedom from slavery, you are forced to be under slavery again. That happened in my life couple of months back. After many years of being a slave, we all got some time to go where we wished but that didn't last long.

Earlier Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army had come against Jerusalem and circled the city in a siege. King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to proclaim freedom for the slaves. Everyone was to free his Hebrew slaves, both male and female; no one was to hold a fellow Jew in bondage. So all the officials and people who entered into this covenant agreed that they would free their male and female slaves and no longer hold them in bondage. They agreed, and set us free. But afterward they changed their minds and took us back and enslaved us again.

Even though according to the law of Moses, a Jewish master had to free his Jewish slaves at the end of seven years of service, the Jews hadn't done this for years. I think the reason why they freed us, may be because God would honor their obedience and defeat the enemy in some miraculous way. They might have tried to bargain with the Lord and bribe Him into helping their cause. The solemn covenant made in the temple meant nothing. They forced us back into servitude. Does people of God make promises to the Lord when they are in tough times, only to reject them when things get better?

Later I heard Jeremiah saying, **“This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I made a covenant with your forefathers when I brought them out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I said, 'Every seventh year each of you must free any fellow Hebrew who has sold himself to you. After he has served you six years, you must let him go free.' Your fathers, however, did not listen to me or pay attention to me. Recently you repented and did what is right in my sight: Each of you proclaimed freedom to his countrymen. You even made a covenant before me in the house that bears my Name. But now you have turned around and profaned my name; each of you has taken back the male and female slaves you had set free to go where they wished. You have forced them to become your slaves again. “Therefore, this is what the LORD says: You have not obeyed me; you have not proclaimed freedom for your fellow countrymen. So I now proclaim 'freedom' for you, declares the LORD--' freedom' to fall by the sword, plague and famine. I will make you abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth.....”.**

Not sure when this will take place. I think it is better that we submit to Babylon. God is able to save us. We pray that God doesn't give us freedom from His protection.

Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise. (Psalm 106:47)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

When God intervenes, the earth trembles!

In our worship today in Jerusalem, we read this prayer from the book of Habakkuk. I went home and meditated on this book much deeper. The first part of the book presented the prophet's question and answer time with God. Now that God had answered Habakkuk, the prophet brought a prayer to close the book. Habakkuk prayed because he was overwhelmed by God's splendor. All he could do was cry out to God.

I used to think that it's an enjoyable experience getting to know God in a deeper way, but that's not what I could see from people who were chosen by God. Moses trembled at Mount Sinai when God gave the law. Joshua fell on his face before the Lord, as did David many times. Daniel became exhausted and ill after seeing the visions God gave him. The vision of Christ's glory on the Mount of Transfiguration left Peter, James, and John facedown on the ground and filled with terror. It might be a terrific experience for those chosen by God, in the way God showed his judgments.

Imagine Moses carrying those message of plagues to Pharaoh and seeing all that could happen in front of his eyes for the people who he grew up with. Can we say, is it because of the outcry of the people for God to intervene? When God intervenes, the earth trembles.

Even in this passage Habakkuk mentioned, *“Plague went before him; pestilence followed his steps. He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed. His ways are eternal ... In wrath you strode through the earth and in anger you threshed the nations. You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot.”*

The other passage which was much more alarming was from Zechariah, *“This is the plague with which the LORD will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. On that day men will be stricken by the LORD with great panic. Each man will seize the hand of another, and they will attack each other”*. We know that the LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made.

I like the way Habakkuk prayed in those challenging times, *“LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy”*. Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights. (Habakkuk 3:19)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Everything Is Meaningless

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Everything is meaningless!", these words of Solomon were my principles. I used to say this when my brother used to talk about Jesus when we were in Jerusalem. He was always talking about Jesus, the Kingdom of God, the works of the Spirit and many other things.

For me I would quote to him "be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth, follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see". My brother would quote, "remember your creator and know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment". I thought I worship the Lord every Sabbath as was expected, why should I listen to someone like Jesus who had an horrible death.

My brother would always pray for me to accept Jesus during those days in Jerusalem. The time came when a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem. I heard a man called Saul began to destroy the church, also going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison. I was not happy with my brother as I thought he would be in prison one day. We had to move back to Phrygia. I used to tell him why Jesus couldn't save all his followers from this trouble.

But in Phrygia, my brother kept telling about Jesus to all the people. Many started putting their faith in Jesus. Even then I thought those are meaningless, I just have to enjoy my life. But more and more I could see God working powerfully through my brother in Phrygia. Slowly I became curious about what was really happening. He took me to Paul. Paul was just visiting Phrygia in his journey. The conversation with Paul really made me to think about my life. I could not believe he was the same Saul who put the followers of Jesus in prison. Now he is talking about Jesus and convincing many. He also told me the persecutions he went through at different times of his life. Why would Saul or Paul do this in his life, why can't he just enjoy his life what God has given to him?

I started thinking deeply and examined the scriptures more thoroughly. My brother and his friends really helped me to understand the scriptures well. It was great to know that the scriptures which was written many centuries ago talk about Jesus. I didn't understand so far. Later I accepted Jesus as my Lord. It's been couple of years now. The joy I have is totally different from the joy I used to have before. Nobody can experience this joy unless they accept Jesus. Yes, without Jesus everything is meaningless. For me now everything else is meaningless in front of spreading the good news of Jesus. His love compels me, I will continue to live for Christ. Everything else is meaningless.

Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God.

(Ecclesiastes 5:7)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

This Too Shall Pass

It is great to work as a soldier under King Solomon. The king is considered as the wisest man and many would come to hear from him. My captain also has many amazing skills, faithfully serving the king. Once while we were talking my captain said, “No task is too difficult for someone like me. I can accomplish anything”. Looks like some how the King heard of it. The king called my captain and few of us went along with him.

King : I have a job for you, my friend.

Captain : Whatever you ask, Your wish is my command.

King : I want to own a magical ring.

Captain : As you wish. Describe the ring for me so that I may find it.

King : All I can tell is : If a person is happy and puts this ring on his finger, he will become instantly sad. But a sad man who places this ring upon his finger will become happy.

Captain : I shall find it for you.

Then the captain took us to the marketplace and visited many jewelers of Jerusalem and then visited many traders and captains from other foreign land. He told them what he was looking for. Each one told us that they never heard of such a ring. Over time, my captain became frustrated. With all his might he wanted to fulfill his master's wish, but no matter how hard he tried, he could not find the mysterious ring. He was depressed and almost gave up, until one day before the Feast of Tabernacles, he arrived at the small workshop of a poor jeweler in a small village. Hesitantly my captain asked whether he could get that ring, describing what he really want. The silversmith thought for a second, took out a small copper ring from one of the drawers, scratched it and handed it to the servant. The captain gave one glance at the inscription on the ring, and his eyes lit up. He thanked the silversmith, paid him and hurried to the king's palace.

King Solomon took the ring. The moment he read the inscription, his smile vanished. All the courtiers were curious to see what was written on the magical ring, and finally, when they looked at it, they saw the following simple sentence in Hebrew:

“Gam zeh ya'avov”, which means, “This, too, shall pass”.

This simple sentence contains a truth that we must cherish in our hearts - even if it feels like everything is going great and were on top of the world, we must remember that all this might disappear one day. On the other hand, and this is the happy side of the rule, all the suffering, all the frustration, all the difficult times we sometimes experience, these too will pass and be forgotten. Gam zeh ya'avov! This, too, shall pass!

When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future.

(Ecclesiastes 7:14)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The reward of grace

As I was meditating on the scriptures it was hard for me to understand the parable of the workers in the vineyard. I asked my father, “Don’t you think the people who came in the morning deserve more than those who worked for less time”. My father made me to understand that, this is part of the answer Jesus gave to Peter’s question, “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have? Those who follow Jesus are sure to get the promise of reward. God’s manner of distributing reward is not necessarily the manner of men”.

I asked my father, “then given a choice, few would like to work less and get the same reward”. My father told me, “It is easy to sympathize with these who had worked all day. They worked while the others were idle. They worked in the heat of the day while others shaded themselves. Yet they were paid exactly the same. But, the landowner reminded them that he had been completely fair to them. He did them no wrong, and had broken no promise. The reward is not of works, lest any man should boast; but it is all of grace”.

Then I asked my father, “then don’t you think those who worked hard be comforted”. My father told me, “The landowner rebuked them for their jealousy and resentment of the landowner’s generosity towards others. He also strongly claimed his right to do what he wanted with what was his”.

My father asked me, “What made them to have that evil eye?”. I told him, “They didn’t see that they got what was promised to them but compared with others and their rewards. Moreover, they complained against the landowner and got offended”.

My father told me, “The system of law is easy to figure out: you get what you deserve. The system of grace is foreign to us: God deals with us according to who He is, not according to who we are. He who grudges the reward to another, forgets that he himself is saved by grace alone. The parable rebukes all jealousy and suspicion. Living under grace is sort of a two-edged sword. Under grace, we can’t come to God complaining, ‘Don’t I deserve better than this’; because God will reply, ‘Does this mean that you really want Me to give you what you deserve?’”.

God rewards on the principle of grace, and we should therefore expect surprises. He will never be less than fair, but reserves the right to be more than fair as pleases Him. God’s grace always operates righteously. The grace of God does not give us more blessing than we deserve – it gives blessing to us completely apart from the principle of deserving.

Then I called on the name of the LORD: “LORD, save me!”. The Lord is gracious and righteous; Our God is full of compassion. (Psalm 116:4-5)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Faithful, even to the point of death

It is great to be in Smyrna one of the principle cities of Roman Asia. It is great to follow Christ but we constantly face many challenging situations and persecutions because of that. It was painful, that's when I was talking to my uncle Polycarp. He read to me a letter written to the saints in Smyrna.

“I know your afflictions and your poverty--yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life”.

With more words Polycarp uncle encouraged me to be faithful, even to the point of death. Uncle shared with me all the challenges he faced and not just him but all the Apostles faced in different parts of the world. Uncle was very close to John, the Apostle and trained by him. He shared with me how most of those Apostles and the followers died as martyrs.

Polycarp uncle was respected by many in Smyrna. He went on trips to help people find Christ and also was involved in helping churches to follow the word of God in a right way as there were differences in practices in churches of Asia and Rome. Once he showed me the letter he wrote to church in Philippi. In the middle of all those constant persecution uncle called me higher to live by faith.

I miss my uncle now. Few months back uncle was burned at the stake and pierced with a spear for refusing to burn incense to the Roman Emperor. On his farewell, he said: "I bless you, Father, for judging me worthy of this hour, so that in the company of the martyrs I may share the cup of Christ”.

In the martyrdom, he said, “Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior? You threaten me with a fire that burns for a season, and after a little while is quenched; but you are ignorant of the fire of everlasting punishment that is prepared for the wicked”.

As I read in another letter I have decided to be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute and not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

*But those who suffer he delivers in their suffering; he speaks to them in their affliction.
(Job 36:15)*

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Feeding of a Hundred

I am one among the prophets from Jericho. I remember the time when Elijah was taken up by the Lord. Elijah and Elisha together crossed over Jordan on dry ground. God has been doing amazing wonders through Elijah. Then we saw Elisha alone coming back. Again like Elijah he made the water divided to the right and to the left. We were discussing that the spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha. Elisha is a miracle-working prophet who ministered to all sorts of people who brought him all kinds of needs.

In the northern kingdom of Israel, there was no official temple dedicated to Jehovah, and many of the faithful priests and Levites had left apostate Israel and moved to Judah. Since there was no sanctuary to which the people could bring their tithes and offerings, they brought them to the nearest school of the prophets where they would be shared by people true to the Mosaic law.

The first fruit offerings of grain could be roasted heads of grain, fine flour baked into cakes, or even loaves of bread. All of this would be most welcome to the sons of the prophets, and certainly the Lord honored the people who refused to bow down to the golden calves at Dan and Bethel.

There were one hundred hungry men in the group, and though the gifts the man brought were honored by the Lord, they couldn't feed all of the men adequately.

A man came from Baal Shalishah, bringing to Elisha twenty loaves of barley bread baked from the first ripe grain, along with some heads of new grain. "Give it to the people to eat," Elisha said. "How can I set this before a hundred men?" his servant asked. But Elisha answered, "Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the LORD says: 'They will eat and have some left over.'" Then he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the LORD.

Out of the riches of His grace, the Lord meets our every need. God promised not only to provide, but to provide beyond the immediate need. Elisha trusted the promise of God, acted upon it, and saw the promise miraculously fulfilled. What can these few cakes do towards feeding a hundred men? Sometimes we forget that God can multiply them. We can limit the Holy One of Israel. God is not dependent upon human strength. Our weakness is a better weapon for God than our strength.

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The Mountains Skipped Like Rams

Since the time I heard about Mount Sinai from Moses Uncle, I was longing to see the mountain. “Though the bush was on fire it did not burn up”, when I heard that I was so thrilled. How can it be possible? But in our journey we saw many wonders. Truly God is powerful. It took exactly three months for us to reach Wilderness of Sinai from Egypt. We saw God’s deliverance from Egypt, received His guidance on the way to go, saw His glorious victory at the Red Sea, received God’s miraculous gifts of food and water, and we saw a prayerful victory won over the Amalekites.

Uncle showed us the mountain and he said this was the same mountain where God spoke to him. Uncle said that God spoke, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain”. God indeed kept His promise and we are witnesses.

Moses uncle went up the mountain to meet with God. Uncle came back and in front of the elders laid before us the words which the LORD commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do”. Then after talking to God again, uncle came back and told us to be ready for the third day. He wanted us to be sanctified before meeting with the Lord. He also set bounds for the people all around, saying, “Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast, he shall not live.’ When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain”.

One side we were excited to meet with God but other side we were in fear of God. The much awaited third day came. In the morning, there were thundering and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that we trembled. And Moses uncle brought us all out of the camp to meet with God. Mount Sinai was completely in smoke. The whole mountain quaked greatly. The mountains skipped like rams, the little hills like lambs! Sheep and lambs move lightly in the meadows; but the hills, were as readily made to move as the most active creatures.

At times we fear the mountains, but the mountains tremble before the Lord. The whole environment spoke of God’s presence in a terrifying sense. These signs of power and glory signaled God’s presence. And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses uncle spoke, and God answered him. A day I can never forget.

Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. (Psalm 96:9-10)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

God calmed the storm to a whisper

Life was so great in Jerusalem. Many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. More and more men and women believed in the Lord. But when Stephen died a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem. I was not able to stay in Jerusalem and was travelling to my native place by ship. That journey, I can never forget in my life. The whole ship trembled under the force of the storm. Everyone were trembling with fear. I was also in fear. I remembered Noah. Till that time I was thinking that the journey of Noah would have been smoother with all those living creatures. But just thinking even at the time when the waters lifted up the ark and the ark started floating, it could have tossed on the waters. Great anxiety could have seized all the living creatures that were in the ark. Moreover, they didn't have facilities like what we had.

Imagine living creatures being terrified, the lions roared, and the oxen lowed, and the wolves howled, and every living creature in the ark spoke and lamented in its own language, and their voices reached to a great distance. I can think of Noah praying to God for His guidance and rescue. Imagine God calming the storm but asking Noah to wait for one full year inside the ship. It could have been like being in a prison.

I took one of the book I had and started reading. There I read how God rescued people. It gave a lot of faith to me. The chapter started with this verse, "Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so". It talked about how God delivered the lost, the guilty, the sick and the storm-tossed.

With regards to the storm-tossed, it said, "Those who go down to the sea in ships, Who do business on great waters, They see the works of the LORD, And His wonders in the deep. For He commands and raises the stormy wind, Which lifts up the waves of the sea. They mount up to the heavens, They go down again to the depths; Their soul melts because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, And are at their wits' end. Then they cry out to the LORD in their trouble, And He brings them out of their distresses. He calms the storm, So that its waves are still. Then they are glad because they are quiet; So He guides them to their desired haven. Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men! Let them exalt Him also in the assembly of the people, And praise Him in the company of the elders".

Then I prayed, "O Lord help us, for we have no strength to bear this, answer us, O Lord, answer us, be gracious to us, redeem us and deliver us". I am grateful to God the way he delivered us. The Lord is good and His mercy endures forever.

Whoever is wise will observe these things, and they will understand the lovingkindness of the LORD. (Psalm 107:43)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

From the wicked goes forth wickedness

I live in Shinar, the city that was built by King Nimrod. People in our time believed that the garments of skin which God made for Adam and his wife passed down through generations and it was given to Nimrod. And during his twenties Nimrod used to wear those garments. Nimrod became strong when he put on the garments, and God gave him might and strength, and he was a mighty hunter in the earth. He hunted the animals and he built altars, and he offered on them the animals before the Lord.

Nimrod strengthened himself, and he rose up from among his brothers, and he fought the battles of his brothers against all their enemies round about. The Lord delivered all the enemies of his brothers in his hands, and God prospered him from time to time in his battles, and he reigned on earth.

Therefore it became current in those days, when a man ushered forth those that he had trained up for battle, he would say to them, like God did to Nimrod; who was a mighty hunter in the earth; and who succeeded in the battles that prevailed against his brothers, that he delivered them from the hands of their enemies, so may God strengthen us and deliver us this day.

Nimrod lived in Shinar, and he reigned securely, and he fought with his enemies and he subdued them, he prospered in all his battles, and his kingdom became very great. All nations and tongues heard of his fame, and they gathered themselves to him, and they bowed down to the earth, they brought him offerings, and he became their lord and king, and they all lived with him in the city at Shinar. Nimrod reigned in the earth over all the sons of Noah, and they were all under his power and counsel.

And all the earth was of one tongue and words of union, but Nimrod did not go in the ways of the Lord, he was more wicked than all the men that were before him, from the days of the flood until those days. He made gods of wood and stone, and he bowed down to them, he rebelled against the Lord, and taught all his subjects and the people of the earth his wicked ways. Mardon his son was more wicked than his father.

And every one that heard of the acts of Mardon the son of Nimrod would say, concerning him, From the wicked goes forth wickedness. Therefore it became a proverb in the whole earth, saying, From the wicked goes forth wickedness, and it was current in the words of men from that time to this.

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The Oak of Mamre

When I grew up, every year I read about a very famous festival held during summer at a place called Mamre. This is held mostly by people of the neighborhood as well as by the inhabitants of more distant parts of Palestine and by Phoenicians and Arabians. Very many go there for the sake of business, some to sell and some to buy. The feast is celebrated by a very big congregation of Jews, since they boast of Abraham as their forefather, of heathens since angels came there, of Christians since he who should be born from the Virgin for the salvation of humankind appeared there to that pious man.

Everyone venerates this place according to his religion: some praying God the ruler of all, some calling upon the angels and offering libations of wine, burning incense or sacrificing an ox, a goat, a sheep or a cock... Emperor Constantine's mother in law, Euthropia, having gone there to fulfill a vow, gave notice of all this to the Emperor. So he wrote to the bishops of Palestine reproaching them for having forgot their mission and permitted such a most holy place to be defiled by those libations and sacrifices.

Emperor Constantine wrote to Macarius, bishop of Jerusalem and all the other bishops of Palestine and admonished them, letting them know that he had ordered the comes Acacius to destroy all pagan idols and punish those holding on to pagan practices. The enclosure was then consecrated, Constantine had a basilica built, dedicated to Saint George and the enclosure of the Terebinth of Mamre roofed over, the foundations of which are still visible.

Our family went on a tour to this place, which is located on a hill on the route between Hebron and Jerusalem. Encircling the site is an impressive Herodian-style wall of well-fitted stone blocks built during the time of Herod the Great. We were thrilled to see the Oak trees which I heard that it is there from the beginning of the world. This site is also called the 'Oak of Mamre' or 'Oak of Abraham' or 'Terebinths of Mamre'.

My father told me that this is the place where Abraham pitched the tents for his camp, built an altar and was brought divine tidings, in the guise of three angels, of Sarah's pregnancy. Mamre might be the name of the Amorite, a tribal chieftain after whom grove of trees was named. Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre. Abraham, Issac, Rebecca, Leah were also buried in the same cave. Jacob when he was in Egypt, he gave instructions to his sons to bury him in the same cave after his death. So it is also called as the 'Cave of the Patriarchs'. We had a great memorable time there.

Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you. All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your name." (Psalm 66:3-4)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The First Pharaoh

I am living in Egypt. Few years ago I met a man, Rikayon, who had a beautiful appearance but was poor and needy. He was from the land of Shinar and came to meet King Oswiris, to show the king his wisdom; thinking he might find grace in his sight, to raise him up and give him maintenance. That time the king would meet the people only one day in a year. After hearing this, Rikayon grieved greatly and was very sorrowful.

The next time I met him selling vegetables; the crowd ridiculed him, took his vegetables from him and left him nothing. After few days, along with me, 30 strong men carrying their war instruments were hired by him. He commanded all of us saying, “Thus says the king, strengthen yourselves and be valiant men, and let no man be buried here until two hundred pieces of silver be given”. The Egyptians glorified the dead both as the gods of the underworld and with the hope of resurrection. They mummified the dead.

In eight months time we gathered great riches of silver and gold, and Rikayon took a great quantity of horses and other animals, and he hired more men and we remained with him. When the year came round, at the time the king went forth into the town, all the inhabitants of Egypt assembled together and said to the king, “What is this thing you do in the town to your servants, not to allow a dead body buried until so much silver and gold be given?” They told him all the works of Rikayon and us, and the king's anger was aroused, and he ordered Rikayon and all of us to be brought before him.

Rikayon took about a thousand children, sons and daughters, and clothed them in silk and embroidery, and he set them on horses and we took them to the king. We also took a great quantity of silver and gold and precious stones, and a strong and beautiful horse, as a present for the king, with which he came before the king and bowed down to the earth before him; the king, his servants and all the inhabitants of Egypt wondered at the work of Rikayon; they saw his riches and the presents that he had brought to the king. It greatly pleased the king and he wondered at it; and when Rikayon sat before him the king asked him concerning all his works, and Rikayon spoke all his words wisely before the king, his servants and all the inhabitants of Egypt.

After listening to the words of Rikayon and his wisdom, the king said to Rikayon, “Thy name shall no more be called Rikayon but Pharaoh shall be your name, since you did exact a tax from the dead”. And all the inhabitants of Egypt greatly loved Rikayon Pharaoh, and they made a decree to call every king that should reign over them and their descendants in Egypt, Pharaoh. After the death of king Osiris, Rikayon became the Ruler of Egypt. The word Pharaoh means ‘a great house’ may be referring to the great ‘Pyramids of Egypt’.

A bribe is a charm to the one who gives it; wherever he turns, he succeeds. (Proverbs 17:8)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The vine of Sodom

I was so glad to see Eliezer my friend back from Sodom. Couple of months back, when I heard Eliezer went to Sodom, I was deeply troubled in my heart. Sodom is known for arrogant people, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. When a poor man goes to their land they would give him silver and gold, and cause a proclamation in the whole city not to give him a morsel of bread to eat. If the stranger should remain there some days and die from hunger, not having been able to obtain a morsel of bread, then at his death all the people of the city would come and take their silver and gold which they had given to him. Not only that, people give themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. Hearing all these things about Sodom, people refrained from going there.

Eliezer is Abraham's servant and he was sent by Sarah to Sodom to see Lot and inquire of his welfare. The experience he shared was amazing. Eliezer went to Sodom, and he met a man of Sodom fighting with a stranger, and the man of Sodom stripped the poor man of all his clothes and went away. And this poor man cried to Eliezer and begged his favor on account of what the man of Sodom had done to him. He said to him, "why do you act thus to the poor man who came to your land?". The man of Sodom answered Eliezer, saying, "is this man your brother, or have the people of Sodom made you a judge this day, that you speak about this man?". Eliezer strove with the man of Sodom on account of the poor man, and when Eliezer approached to recover the poor man's clothes from the man of Sodom, he hurried and with a stone struck Eliezer in the forehead.

The blood flowed copiously from Eliezer's forehead, and when the man saw the blood he caught hold of Eliezer, saying, "give me my wage for having rid you of this bad blood that was in your forehead, for such is the custom and the law in our land". And Eliezer said to him, "you have wounded me and require me to pay you your wage?". Eliezer would not listen to the words of the man of Sodom. And the man laid hold of Eliezer and took him to Shakra the judge of Sodom for judgment.

The man spoke to the judge, saying, "I beseech you my lord, thus has this man done, for I struck him with a stone that the blood flowed from his forehead, and he is unwilling to give me my wage". And the judge said to Eliezer, "this man speaks truth to you, give him his for this is the custom in our land". Eliezer heard the words of the judge, and he lifted up a stone and struck the judge; the stone struck on his forehead, and the blood flowed copiously, and Eliezer said, "if this then is the custom in your land give to this man what I should have given him, for this has been your decision you did decree it".

Their vine comes from the vine of Sodom and from the fields of Gomorrah. Their grapes are filled with poison, and their clusters with bitterness. Their wine is the venom of serpents, the deadly poison of cobras. (Deuteronomy 32:32-33)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Kedar : The “Dark Skinned”

Every year as a family we go to Jerusalem to worship. We learn a lot about God and His mighty deeds. Last year we were singing a new song and few lines of the song are...

Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech, that I live among the tents of Kedar!

Too long have I lived among those who hate peace.

I am a man of peace; but when I speak, they are for war.

Then I asked one of the priest to explain to me about the places Meshech and Kedar. Given below are some explanation he gave for Kedar.

- Kedar was the “dark skinned” grandson of Abraham and the second son of Ishmael.
- The city he found was named after him.
- From the Scriptures in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Kedar might be very important person; He was glorious, a mighty man and an archer; He lived in the mountains, as a mountain-lord and he was a pastoralist, but most importantly he was a Prince.
- It is because of Kedar’s success, the Arabs Tribes (Ishmaelites) came to be collectively known as Kedar, also known as Qedarites.
- They lived in black tents. They were archers like Ishmael. They were ruled by princes.
- God kept his promise to Abraham. *“I will bless him (Ishmael). I will make him fruitful, I will multiply him exceedingly, he will bear Twelve Princes and I will make of him a great nation”*.
- God also said, *“You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers.”*
- In the book of Jeremiah we can read of God’s wrath and disappointment towards Kedar (Ishmael), a judgement followed, and just like the Jews (Isaac’s descendants); Kedar was also judged and scattered under Nebuchadnezzar. Also, Ishmael and subsequently Kedar, are not very well liked, they seem to be destined to a life of conflict and war.
- This man who wrote this song his sharing about his distress. In his distress he cried to the Lord to deliver him, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue.
- He sought to speak words of peace and goodness, to represent and promote those values in his community. Yet every time he did, the response was hostile, characteristic of those who are for war.
- The very society of such is tedious and unsavory to a good soul.

*I call on the LORD in my distress, and he answers me. Save me, O LORD, from lying lips and from deceitful tongues. What will he do to you, and what more besides, O deceitful tongue?
(Psalm 120:1-3)*

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The Zing In Zelica

Being a close friend of Zelica, wife of Potiphar, I went to see her when she was in grave sickness along with few of the other friends. We said to her, “Why are you in this declining state? You lack nothing; certainly your husband is a great and esteemed prince in the sight of the king, should you lack anything of what your heart desires?”

Zelica answered us, saying, “This day it shall be made known to you from where this disorder comes which you see in me, and she commanded her maid servants to prepare food for all us who visited her; she made a banquet for us, and all of us ate in the house of Zelica. And she gave us knives to peel the citrons to eat them, and she commanded that they should dress Joseph in costly garments, that he should appear before us, and Joseph came before our eyes and all of us looked on Joseph and could not take our eyes from off him; we all cut our hands with the knives that we had in our hands, and all the citrons that were in our hands were filled with blood.

And we knew not what we had done but we continued to look at the beauty of Joseph, and did not turn our eyelids from him. Zelica saw what we had done, and she said to us, “What is this work that you have done? Look, I gave you citrons to eat and you have all cut your hands”. And all of us saw our hands, and truly they were full of blood, and blood flowed down on our garments. We said to her, “This slave in your house has overcome us, and we could not turn our eyelids from him on account of his beauty”.

She said to us, “Certainly this happened to you in the moment that you looked at him, and you could not contain yourselves from him; how then can I refrain when he is constantly in my house, and I see him day after day going in and out of my house? How then can I keep from declining or even from perishing on account of this?” And we said to her, “The words are true, for who can see this beautiful form in the house and refrain from him, and is he not your slave and attendant in your house, and why do you not tell him that which is in your heart, but allow your soul to perish through this matter?”

And she said to us, “I am daily endeavoring to persuade him, and he will not consent to my wishes; I promised him everything that is good, and yet I could meet with no return from him; I am therefore in a declining state as you see.” Zelica became very ill on account of her desire toward Joseph, and she was desperately lovesick on account of him; but all the people of the house of Zelica and her husband knew nothing of this matter. I remember reading the story of Job, he made a covenant with his eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman. Can this slave of Zelica also be like that?

For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. (1 John 2:16)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The Dead (Living!) Sea

Every year we go to Jerusalem as a family to celebrate the Passover. Last time when we went my father took us to visit Dead Sea. Due to high salt content of the water no living creature can live in the sea. So we understood may be because of this, it got the name “Dead”. Some believe that the Dead Sea region was once vibrant, filled with life, and watered. It was only after God rained down fire and brimstone on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah did the area become a wasteland, and the sea became a hyper-saline salt lake. Some believe that Sodom and Gomorrah lie underneath the Dead Sea, also called Salt Sea.

My father also told me about the prophecy of Ezekiel in which it is written that the Dead Sea would be transformed from saline waters that cannot host life into fresh waters teeming with sea life. He prophesized that “Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh. Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail”. The prophet Zechariah also echoed this same prophecy centuries later. He predicted that “living” water would soon flow where today the water is salty”.

However I heard amazing things about the Dead Sea, a large body of salt water on the southern end of the Jordan River.

- The Dead Sea is the lowest point on earth, around 1400 feet below sea level.
- It is the world’s deepest hypersaline lake, around 10 times as salty as the ocean.
- It is the most mineral-rich body of water in the world.
- The Dead Sea is famous for the water’s mysteriously buoyant qualities which allow people to float across the top of the water, without needing to swim. It is around 1000 feet deep. Imagine floating.
- The unique concentration of the Dead Sea waters is known to have medicinal value.
- As far back as Cleopatra, man has been making use of the Dead Sea’s minerals for beauty treatments and health remedies.
- The ancient Egyptians used the Dead Sea for beauty products and they used asphalt from the Dead Sea for the mummification process.
- Even Aristotle, King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba were aware of the sea’s value.
- The Dead Sea air is also high in oxygen which is great for overall well being.
- King Herod the Great built or rebuilt several fortresses and palaces on the western bank of the Dead Sea. John the Baptist was imprisoned by Herod Antipas and died in one of the fortress.

On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea, in summer and in winter. (Zechariah 14:8)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The Grand Funeral

After few years of the death of Herod the Great, King of Judaea, we as a family visited his tomb in Herodium. I remember an enormous funeral procession carried his body on a golden brier from the throne room in Jericho to Herodium. As we were discussing about the funeral, my father told us about a grand funeral which he read from a book.

When Jacob died in Egypt, the people of Egypt and people who came from the land of Canaan wept for him in Egypt for seventy days. Joseph commanded his servants the doctors to embalm his father with myrrh and frankincense and all manner of incense and perfume. After seventy days, Joseph said to Pharaoh, "I will go up and bury my father in the land of Canaan as he made me swear, and then I will return". And Pharaoh commanded that it should be announced throughout Egypt, saying, whoever goes not up with Joseph and his brothers to the land of Canaan to bury Jacob, shall die.

And all Egypt heard of Pharaoh's proclamation, and they all rose up together, and all the servants of Pharaoh, and the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt went up with Joseph, and all the officers and nobles of Pharaoh went up as the servants of Joseph; they went to bury Jacob in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Jacob carried the bier, according to all that their father commanded them. The bier was of pure gold, and it was inlaid round about with onyx stones and bdellium; and the covering of the bier was gold woven work, joined with threads, and over them were hooks of onyx stones and bdellium. And Joseph placed on the head of his father Jacob a large golden crown, and he put a golden rod in his hand, and they surrounded the bier as was the custom of kings during their lives.

And all the troops of Egypt went before him, they were all girded with swords and equipped with coats of mail, and the trappings of war were on them. All the weepers and mourners went at a distance opposite to the bier, going and weeping and lamenting, and the rest of the people went after the bier. Joseph and his household went together near the bier barefooted and weeping, and the rest of Joseph's servants went around him; each man had his ornaments on him and they were all armed with their weapons of war. Fifty of Jacob's servants went in front of the bier and they scattered along the road myrrh and aloes, and all manner of perfume. Thirty-one kings of Canaan came with their men to mourn and weep over Jacob. All these kings observed Jacob's bier, and there Joseph's crown was on it; they also put their crowns on the bier and encircled it with crowns.

How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. (Psalm 116:12-15)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The Baalah of Judah

I love this hymn which is called Messianic hymn. The song starts with remembering David, the great king of Israel and all the afflictions he endured and ends with horn, lamp and crown which refers to the Messiah.

This song is mainly sung at feast times when pilgrim travelers visited Jerusalem. This song has words of Moses in the wilderness. Solomon, Stephen and Peter also mentioned few lines of this song. I remember doing a search on this line, “We found it in the fields of Jaar”. The following gives some details.

- It is also called as “fields of the woods”, “fields of the forest”.
- Before the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites it was known as “Kiriath Baal”, “Baalah Judah” or “Baal Judah”
- It was a Hivite settlement mostly associated with the people of Gibeon and center of Baal worship.
- May be during Joshua’s period it was named as Kiriath Jearim.
- After the conquest of Canaan, Kiriath Jearim became a landmark identifying the border between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.
- It gained prominence as the resting place of the Ark of the Covenant for around 20 years after the Ark was returned from Ekron by the Philistines.
- The writer of Chronicles teaches that Shobal, a descendant of Caleb, was "the father of Kiriath-Jearim", possibly in the sense of being the founder of this town.
- Descendants of Kiriath-Jearim were among the Jewish exiles who returned to Judea with Zerubbabel.
- Kiriath Jearim was also the home of the prophet Uriah, who joined Jeremiah in protesting about the injustices of king Jehoiakim’s rule.
- Ephrathah (Bethlehem) is close to Kiriath Jearim.

I will clothe her priests with salvation, and her faithful people will ever sing for joy. Here I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for my anointed one. I will clothe his enemies with shame, but his head will be adorned with a radiant crown. (Psalm 132:16-18)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

From food to future

I respect my master Boaz, a lot. He is a man of standing. He is a wealthy man. He always greets us saying, “The Lord be with you”. Recently he married Ruth which I was not much convinced of. This is because we read from the law that Israelite men not to marry a foreign woman. My owner told me that he is fulfilling the duties of a guardian redeemer.

I told him, it also says that, “No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, not even in the tenth generation”. He replied that the prohibition in the Scripture applied only to the men of Moab — and not to the women. Also He told me that he had heard from the prophets that she was destined to become the ancestress of kings and prophets.

I know Ruth from the day one she visited our fields. She asked me, “please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters”. She was working very hard from morning till evening except for a short rest. Boaz told her, “my daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled”.

Also Boaz told her, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge”.

Later Boaz gave orders to us saying, “Let her gather among the sheaves and don’t reprimand her. Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don’t rebuke her”.

All the people of our town know Ruth as a woman of noble character. I also heard that she is the daughter of Eglon, the king of Moab. She is a woman of great character. I am still amazed how she was able to leave her family and friends and came to Bethlehem with Naomi. She came to our field in search for food, to glean and gather but God gave her a great future. God works in mysterious way.

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” (Romans 11:33-34)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The glory of His faithful people

Last week in our fellowship we had an interesting conversation. One brother said that how most have become lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. They love what is evil and hate what is good.

Another brother said it is true what Jesus said, “because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved”. Seeing all that is happening we can see love of most have grown cold, which means increase of wickedness. We need to make sure we stand firm to the end. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. Who we can say that he is faithful and standing firm?

Another brother said, I can think of Gaius. Being around him is such a joy. The elder is so excited about him. He once said that he rejoices to see Gaius walking in the truth. I am sure everyone can agree with this. His soul prospers. Whatever he does, he does so faithfully not just for the believers but also for strangers. His hospitality stands out. It is love in action. He used his resources in a godly way, being a blessing to others. Another brother said, I totally agree. It is a blessing to have Gaius among us. We all need to become like Gaius one day. What a great man he is, even though some around him loves to have preeminence and want to be superior, he was so hospitable.

Another brother said, it is true, some loves to be leaders but does not acknowledge any authority. They don't want to see what they are doing but spread malicious nonsense about others. They don't get satisfied with that and even refuses to welcome other believers. They also stop those who want to do and sideline them. A question came, “Then what is the glory of his faithful people?” One brother remembered the following song. We concluded our discussion singing this song.

For the Lord takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with victory.

Let his faithful people rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds.

May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands,

To inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples,

To bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron,

To carry out the sentence written against them

This is the glory of all his faithful people. Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of his faithful people. Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King. (Psalm 149:1-2)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Sold out to do evil

Once when I was in my uncles place, he received a letter from king Ahab. My uncle is an elder in Jezreel. In that letter it was written, “Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people; and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, You have blasphemed God and the king. Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die”. I was not happy about this letter but my uncle with other elders and nobles, planned to do what was written in that letter. I thought how come the elders and nobles of Jezreel also can do such a thing and obey others unquestionably. Surely the hand of queen Jezebel was in that letter. Both Ahab and Jezebel sold themselves to do evil.

The procedure in the letter was in agreement with the law, but the accusation was false, the witnesses were liars, and the judges had been bought off by royal intimidation. In every town there were “men of Belial—worthless fellows” who would do anything for money or just to become important. The letter even threw in some religion and told the local authorities to proclaim a fast. If you can sugarcoat your scheme with something religious, the people will quickly accept it. But no matter how legal and spiritual that royal edict may have looked, in the sight of God it was only a lie—and God judges liars.

The weak rulers in Naboth’s city followed the orders, conducted their illegal trial, took Naboth and his sons outside the city, and stoned them. Nobody in the family was alive who could inherit the vineyard which Naboth owned. Later only we understood that that king wanted Naboth’s vineyard because he coveted a garden convenient to the palace. “Thou shalt not covet” is the last of the Ten Commandments, but perhaps it’s the most difficult one to obey. Even more, a covetous heart often leads us to disobey all the other commandments of God. The first nine commandments focus on forbidden outward conduct—making and worshipping idols, stealing, murdering, and so on—but this commandment deals primarily with the hidden desires of the heart.

Powerful people acquire one thing after another, but in all their acquiring, there’s never any real satisfaction. People in position most of the times think that they alone are important, like to get what they want and use authority to take care of themselves. It is better for the people in position not to follow the philosophy of governing but to serve the people in love. A true leader uses his authority to build the people, while a dictator uses the people to build his authority, and people are expendable. When you turn away from truth, it’s evidence that you’re believing lies, then you start loving lies, and before long, you’re controlled by lies. justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance.

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight (Isaiah 5:20-21)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Elder's Note and signs of wickedness

Last month looking at my church, I was pretty confused that it is filled with many kind of teachings. Many false teachers are still around and say things to suit their own desires. It looked as if the spirit of antichrist, which we have heard is already in the middle of us. Such people are from the world and speak from the viewpoint of the world and the world listens to them. I am pretty much clear that everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

I discussed the same with my grandfather couple of days back, who lived during the days when the apostles lived. He was very close to Elder John uncle, who was the only one who died a natural death among the apostles. When I discussed with him, he brought out a letter which was written by John uncle. In that letter the elder had some recommendations of how a disciple need to be, few of which my grandfather explained are given below :

- If we know and love the truth, we will love those who also know and love the truth – the truth which abides in us also lives in others who know the truth
- The truth does not change. The truth will be true forever and we will have the truth forever in eternity. Many people today think that the truth changes from age to age and from generation to generation.
- Apart from God's truth and love, we can never really have grace, mercy and peace.
- While truth is not the only concern of a shepherd, it is a great concern and it is a great comfort for a shepherd to see those he loves and cares for walking in the truth.
- The integrity of our life can be measured by our love for one another.
- If we love God, we will obey His commandments: the guides and gifts to us from God.
- To depart from the true Jesus means we put ourself in jeopardy to lose the things the apostles and other faithful saints worked for.
- If anyone comes to you and does not bring the apostles teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.

Then I asked my grandfather, how can we get convinced if someone is wicked. He quoted the wisdom from Solomon which could help us to find those signs of wickedness..

- Those whose words are perverse
- Those who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways
- Those who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil
- Those whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways.

Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. (2 John 1:8-9)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The long-suffering of the Most High

As me and my friend were discussing about the current status of the world, he asked me whether I heard about Baruch's prayer. The long-suffering of the Most High, who has been long-suffering towards all who are born, like those who sin and those who are righteous. The prayer :

- O You that made the earth, hear me; you that have fixed the firmament by the word, and have made firm the height of the heaven by the spirit, that have called from the beginning of the world that which did not yet exist, and they obey You. You that have commanded the air by Your nod, and have seen those things which are to be as those things which You are doing. You that rule with great thought the hosts that stand before You; also the countless holy beings which You made from the beginning from the flame and fire, which stand around Your throne where You rule with indignation.
- To You only does this belong that You should do whatsoever You wish. Who causes the drops of rain to rain by number upon the earth, and alone know the conclusion of the times before they come; have respect to my prayer. For You alone are able to sustain all who are, and those who have passed away, and those who are to be, those who sin, and those who are righteous as living and being past finding out. For You alone live immortal and past finding out, and know the number of mankind. And if in time many have sinned, yet others not a few have been righteous. You know where You preserve the end of those who have sinned, or the conclusion of those who have been righteous.
- For if there were this life only, which belongs to all men, nothing could be more bitter than this. For of what profit is strength that turns to sickness, or fullness of food that turns to famine, or beauty that turns to ugliness? For the nature of man is always changeable. For what we were formerly now we no longer are, and what we now are we will not afterwards continue to be. For if a conclusion had not been prepared for all, then their beginning would have been in vain. Everything that comes from You, You informed me, and regarding everything about which I ask You, You enlighten me?
- How long will that which is corruptible remain, and how long will the time of mortals succeed, and until what time will those who transgress in the world be polluted with much wickedness? Command in mercy and accomplish all that You said You would bring, that Your might may be made known to those who think that Your long-suffering is weakness. Show to those who do not recognize it, that everything that has befallen us and our city until now has been according to the long-suffering of Your power, because on account of Your name You have called us a beloved people.
- Bring mortality to an end. Reprimand the angel of death, and let Your glory appear, and let the might of Your beauty be known, and let Sheol be sealed so that from this time forward it may not receive the dead, and let the treasuries of souls restore those which are enclosed in them. For there have been many years like those that are desolate from the days of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and of all those who are like them, who sleep in the earth, on whose account You did say that You had created the world. And now quickly show Your glory, and do not put off what has been promised by You.

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. (Hebrews 2:10)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Nero, the Pharaoh

We are well aware of Pharaoh during Moses' time, who gave tough time to people who worshipped the LORD, the God Of Israel. Pharaoh made many threats to people. The Israelite foremen realized they were in trouble when they were told, "You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day. When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, and they said, "May the LORD look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us".

Moses returned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all". Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country."

I remember this when I think about Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, the fifth emperor of Rome. His first five years were considered exemplary, probably because of good advisors, such as the renowned Seneca. During this early period he reversed some of the cruelty that former emperors had exercised. He curtailed corruption, forbade blood shed in circus, banned capital punishment, reduced taxes and allowed slaves to bring complains to him against their unjust masters. Nero also encouraged competition in poetry and theatre over gladiator competitions. He had a reputation of political generosity.

After Nero's initial five years as emperor, one of his trusted advisors died and another retired to private life. Thereafter, the emperor sank into immorality and crime, to the point of being implicated in the murders of his own mother and cousin. He began pursuing a hedonistic lifestyle marked by lavish self-indulgence and tyranny.

Couple of years back fire destroyed much of Rome. Many attributed the blame to Nero himself, for it quickly became known that he intended to build his new palace on the site of the burned quarters, seizing a good deal of private property for the state. To avoid charges, Nero shifted blame to people who followed Jesus Christ – Christians. We heard Nero burning Christians alive, using them as human torches during his circus races. Nero was brutal in his persecutions.

However, unlike Moses time, the people didn't blame the leader for the difficult situation. The people and the leaders offered their bodies as living sacrifices to God. Many in Rome followed Christ, "the Way", including numerous individuals employed in the imperial palace. I had several good times with Paul, when Paul came to Rome and spent around two years as a prisoner during Nero's reign. I met few of Nero's household along with Paul, following "the Way". Nero's persecution led to Peter and Paul's death. Nero is remembered most for instigating the Roman persecution of Christians. Nero committed suicide, becoming the first Roman emperor to do so.

Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character". Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God.... (1 Corinthians 15:33-34)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Another great star from the East

Few days ago, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him". When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea", they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel".

At home, I was sharing this to my grandfather. My grandfather told me that it might be true. He also told me about another similar star which he read in one of the books. Terah the son of Nahor, prince of Nimrod's host, was in those days very great in the sight of the king and his subjects, and the king and princes loved him, and they elevated him very high. When Terah was seventy years old, his wife gave birth to a son. Terah called the name of his son Abram, because the king had raised him in those days, and dignified him above all his princes that were with him.

It was in the night that Abram was born, that all the servants of Terah, and all the wise men of Nimrod; and his conjurors came and ate and drank in the house of Terah, and they rejoiced with him on that night. When all the wise men and conjurors went out from the house of Terah, they lifted up their eyes toward heaven that night to look at the stars, they saw and behold one very large star came from the east and in the heavens he swallowed up the four stars from the four sides of the heavens. And all the wise men of the king and his conjurors were astonished at the sight, and the sages understood this matter, and they knew its import. They said to each other, This only betokens the child that has been born to Terah this night, who will grow up and be prolific, and reproduce, and possess all the earth, he and his children for ever, and he and his descendants will kill great kings, and inherit their lands.

They went and informed the king. The king called for Terah and said to him, "I have been told that a son was last night born to you, and after this manner was observed in the heavens at his birth. And now therefore give me the child, that we may kill him before his evil springs up against us, and I will give you for his value, your house full of silver and gold. Terah took a child from one of his servants, which his handmaid had born to him that day, and Terah brought the child to the king and received value for him. And Terah took Abram his son secretly, together with his mother and nurse, and he concealed them in a cave, and he brought them their provisions monthly.

After some time Abram came out from the cave, he went to Noah and his son Shem, and he remained with them to learn the instruction of the Lord and his ways; no man knew where Abram was. The Lord was with Abram and he became great in the house of Noah. The grandfather told me that this child may be the Seed of Abraham.

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. (Galatians 3:16)