

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

VOTS #1-50

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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The Story of the Seventieth Saint

I grew up in Cana, in Galilee. I worked in the vineyard. I attended this wedding where Jesus was part of. I never tasted such wine ever before in my life. I really wanted to join this team to make such delicious wine. Then I understood that it was a miracle. Everyone was talking about it. Couldn't believe, but started following Jesus and his disciples from a distance.

As I followed, including me many were amazed at Jesus's teachings. Not only that, I saw mute speaking, crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. I started following much closer. Those 12, Jesus had, were like heroes of my life. I became close to Peter. I was appointed along with 72 and I enjoyed doing all sort of healing, teaching. ... Those days were the joyful period of my life, even the demons submitted to us in Jesus' name.

Peter used to share about his personal times with Jesus. Once he shared about how he saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. I struggled to believe this. It's impractical, illogical. But I kept all these things and pondered them in my heart. Then I heard that Jesus was arrested. I went to the courtyard. I heard Peter saying that he didn't know Jesus. Also I heard that Judas for love of money he schemed all this. I saw Jesus being treated like a criminal. My faith shattered. Just a week back everyone was singing Hosanna when Jesus entered Jerusalem, but I heard most of them shouting "Crucify him!". I struggled in my faith, went back to my vineyard. Jesus died.

After few days, I heard Jesus was risen. I felt its impractical, illogical. I came back, there were around 120 listening to Peter. I heard Judas died. Then the day of Pentecost came. My faith got renewed seeing the power of the Spirit. I loved those days. But due to persecution we were scattered but preached the word wherever we went. I eagerly waited to read those news and letters sent by Peter, John, Paul and others. It inspired my faith.

My loved ones faced jeers and flogging, chained, put in prison, stoned, sawed in two, put to death by the sword, wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground... The world was not worthy of them. Now I am ready to face death. Always be led by the Spirit.

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-21)

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Noah's Nephew

I love Noah Periyappa, my father's eldest brother. I have never seen a person who is so righteous and blameless among the people. I grew up in a house on a hill. I saw lots of wickedness around me starting from my own family. Many times Noah Periyappa visited our family and persuaded my father to be righteous. My father ignored Periyappa's advice.

In the meanwhile I enjoyed playing with my cousins Shem, Ham and Japheth. Ham was very close to me and we did mischievous things together. Our favorite game was each one making a wooden structure and make it float on the river and have a race. We run miles alongside the river to see whose structure travels far, safely and swiftly.

Years passed by and I noticed my cousins were totally busy with their fathers business. Then I found out that God had asked Periyappa, a man of the soil, to build a wooden structure. They called it "Ark". My cousins told me something called "Flood" and it will destroy everything. I mocked them for these crazy thoughts. However, to hang out with them, I joined them in bringing Cyprus woods to make that structure.

When I told my father about it, he told me that his great grand father Enoch was like this, always talking about God and suddenly he was absconding. He also told me that my grandfather Lamech named him Noah thinking he would bring comfort but actually he's only bringing trouble to all of us, not allowing us to enjoy this life. My father also told me that God gave children to Noah Periyappa only after 500 years old and convinced me to do my own business and enjoy this life. I continued to live in luxury and self-indulgence.

However, at times, I joined my cousins and had fun. I remember watching pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all creatures entering that ark. They also arranged every kind of food. I didn't enter as I was convinced that they will be absconding!

One day when I was at my place, I saw the door of the ark was shut and oh my God water continuously pouring from the sky. The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, lifting that huge structure high above the earth. Unbelievable! I saw everything else getting destroyed and dead bodies floating on the water. The waters started rising up to my house on that hill. It is true what my cousins told me. A feeling of panic grew in me.

With fear of death and lots of tears, I screamed on top of my voice, "Periyappa, Periyappa, please take me". What does pleasure accomplish? I hope that this small structure of mine will travel miles calling many to be busy with the heavenly father's business.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)

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Ziklag Zoomed

I was one among the many who didn't like prophet Samuel's children as leaders, as they were dishonest and also greedy for money. So we insisted prophet Samuel to appoint a king to lead us, even after his many warnings. We got Saul uncle as king in Israel.

After being with King Saul for sometime, I didn't feel that good about his leadership. Once I noticed even prophet Samuel was not happy about the King. Also noticed relationship strains between King Saul and David. David married King's daughter Michal. David had great success in everything he did. It looked like King Saul kept a jealous eye on David.

King Saul even told all the attendants to kill David. Who can stand before jealousy? Michal warned David to flee. So David made his escape. I joined David in the cave of Adullam. Around 400 who were in distress accepted David as our leader. But we noticed King Saul, along with around 3000 of his men, making attempts to kill David.

At times David got an opportunity to kill King Saul, He didn't do it. Some of us felt how long we will be running away from the King like this. David decided to escape to the land of the Philistines. So we all, around 600 families, went to Gath. Achish was king of Gath. David talked to Achish and we got Ziklag as a place to settle. We had many victories there.

Achish made David his bodyguard for life and made us to join him in one of the battle. At Apehek suddenly David told us that we are going back to Ziklag. After three days of journey, we came back to Ziklag only to see the whole place was destroyed by fire and our families were taken captive. We wept aloud. Lost all our strength. Very bitter in spirit, I along with few were talking of stoning David. But David found strength in the Lord. We all went to pursue the raiding party. I was too exhausted and had no hope. Like me, 200 men were exhausted and stayed back before Besor Ravine. 400 continued the pursuit.

After few days, it was to our pleasant surprise they brought back all our family members. Some among the 400 men were not willing to share the plunder with 200 who stayed back. But David said, "all will share alike and we must share what the Lord has given us". After arriving in Ziklag, David shared the plunder to elders, friends and many in various places.

At Ziklag, that day I decided to find strength in the Lord. I felt bad about not trusting in the Lord but leaning on my own understanding. The experience in Ziklag made me get more closer to God. I admired David's leadership of taking help from God to turn the bitter situation to a victorious one. Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ears too dull to hear. God is powerful to change any bitter situation to a better situation.

Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe. (Proverbs 29:25)

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Korah's Corner

If we hear the name Korah, what do we remember? Till today many of us remember the group which rebelled against the authority set by God Himself. It is indeed a painful event that happened during the journey of Israelites from Egypt to Canaan. 250 Israelite men, well known community leaders, members of the council died because of Korah. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their household and all their possessions.

Not only that, the following day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron saying "You have killed the Lord's people". Lord's wrath came out and 14,700 people died from the plague. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Ever since that incident the name Korah seems to be in the bad books of Israelites. However, God was compassionate and gracious. Probably, their children who were too young were spared. The line of Korah did not die out. The children might have grown fearing God a lot, knowing all that happened to their family and passed the same reverence to their generations. God's faithfulness continues through all generations.

Do you know after seven successive generations, prophet Samuel came from the line of Korah? The Korahites became doorkeepers and custodians for the tabernacle. Today, Korahites are serving in King David's army. It's a privilege for me, a Korahite, to be part of the singers and many of my cousins are singers and musicians. Heman, the grandson of prophet Samuel is a musician in our group. We enjoy writing songs and praising God.

The Israelites enjoy singing those songs. One of the song we enjoy singing is, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God". In God we make our boast all day long and we will praise His name forever. God has always kept us in His compassionate books. Would it be better if we keep everyone in love and compassionate books as God keeps? Let us be sympathetic. Let us be compassionate and humble.

This is my conviction. Better is one day in God's courts than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a door keeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. By day the LORD directs his love, at night His song is with me.

Keeping that incident of Korah in mind we wrote these lines... God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. The Lord Almighty is with us.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. (Colossians 3:12)

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The Jerusalem Dream

By the rivers of Babylon, my family sat and wept when they remembered Zion (Jerusalem). First time I heard this place called “Jerusalem”. When I asked them about Jerusalem, my uncle shared the following with tears in his eyes.

“Jerusalem, my highest joy, how can I forget Jerusalem, the city of the living God. I heard King Manasseh led the people of Jerusalem astray. He built high places, erected altars to Baals, made Asherah poles and did things which are detestable to God. I was young when King Manasseh’s grandson Josiah became the King. King Josiah restored the joy of Jerusalem by removing all that had provoked the Lord to anger. We, as singers, enjoyed those services. We celebrated the Passover at that time and observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days. What I heard was, the Passover had not been observed like that in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel and none of the kings of Israel had ever celebrated such a Passover.

King Josiah was followed by kings who did evil in the eyes of the Lord. All the leaders of the priests and many of us became more and more unfaithful. The Lord sent word through His messengers again and again because he had pity on His people. But we mocked God’s messengers. God handed all of us over to Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon. He brought around 3,023 of us in this strange land. The tormentors demanded us to sing songs of joy, songs of Zion. We couldn’t sing. O daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction...”

After hearing this, Jerusalem became my dream destination. We were sincerely praying for that. One of my relative, Daniel uncle, a wise man, was working for King Nebuchadnezzar. Initially, my family didn’t like it. Once the King gave orders to put all wise men to death, we thought Daniel uncle also will die. But we heard God doing powerful things through Daniel uncle and his friends. Daniel uncle was known to be a man of prayer. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, having his windows opened towards Jerusalem.

Years later Babylon was captured by Cyrus, the great. Suddenly we heard this proclamation, “Anyone of God’s people among you – may his God be with him and let him go up to Jerusalem and build the temple of the LORD”. Jumping with joy, we gathered all our people to join. We were so amazed to see around 42,360 signed up. We missed Daniel uncle in this trip for he couldn’t make it. 200 men and women singers were in our group.

People remembered prophet Jeremiah’s letter which was sent by the prophet from Jerusalem to us earlier. The singers inspired all, singing “We are marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful Zion”. There is no wisdom, no plan that can succeed against the Lord.

**Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.
(Psalm 27:14)**

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An Ephesian's Epistle

To the elders who direct the affairs of Ephesus church,

My father, a craftsman, was a partner to Demetrius uncle, who made silver shrines of Artemis. We received a good income from this business until the visit of Paul uncle to Ephesus. As you are aware God did extraordinary miracles through Paul uncle. The name of Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Paul uncle visited house to house and convinced many saying that man-made gods are no gods at all. One day, all the craftsman became furious and shouted for 2 hours, "Great is Artemis of Ephesians". However the city clerk quieted the crowd and dismissed the assembly, protecting from any charges of rioting.

After few months, my family got an opportunity to hear the word of the Lord and accepted Jesus as Lord. We totally understood we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. My father lost his business. Even though we were poor in the eyes of the world, God made us rich in faith. It is totally God's grace that we have been saved.

As you are well aware, God's word spread widely and grew in power. The church grew into many thousands and became one of the largest churches in Asia Minor. The faith in Lord Jesus and love for all the saints were commendable. The church made every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. We were consistently taught to put off our old self and put on the new self, put off falsehood and speak truthfully to one another. We were called to be imitators of God, live a life of love and be children of light.

I got the privilege of being around Timothy uncle, Tychicus uncle, Onesiphorus uncle, Aquila uncle and Priscilla aunty. God's word through them, enlightened the eyes of my heart and strengthened my inner being. We, as Gentiles understood, we are heirs together with Israel. The church is commended for the deeds, the hard work and perseverance, endured hardships and not grown weary. The concern I have now is, whether we are becoming legalistic in our love for God, love for the saints and forsaking our first love.

Some have turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. To suit their own desires, some have gathered teachers to say what the itching ears want to hear. Some are indulging in godless chatter and becoming ungodly and even think godliness is a means to financial gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain. I pray that some who are rich, not be arrogant but to put their hope in God. For love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

Can you please look into this and kindly direct us to understand what the Lord's will is. I am willing to do anything, go anywhere and give up everything. To God be the glory.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions.... With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. (Ephesians 6:18)

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God Intervenes...

We belong to the land of Uz, the place probably named after the great grandson of the legend Noah. When I was young, like most of the girls, I look forward to the bed time stories from my grandma. My grandma loves to share from her life and teach lessons. One of the story which I can never forget is her childhood days in Shinar (Babylonia).

She shared how the whole world had one language and a common speech. Her parents along with others were building a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, thinking to make a name for themselves. But later God intervened and confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth. The tower is known to be the “Tower of Babel”. Two lessons she taught me ...

1. Don't keep building anything against the will of God. It may look progressing but we never know when God will intervene.
2. Don't stop loving. Love everyone irrespective of the language, background... We are God's children and whatever we do to others, we are doing to God Himself.

It is so true, as we always get tempted to do something to make a name for ourselves and tempted to show more affection towards those who are of our language, background.....

One family I really love in this land is Job uncle's family. My father is taking care of Job uncle' flocks. Uncle is a great righteous man. He fears God and has such a love towards the poor and the needy. He cares for the handicapped, he is the eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. Having influence in the court, he fought the case for the underprivileged. Jemimah, Keziah and Keren-Happuch, his three daughters are so beautiful. An adorable family!

But what my father once shared about uncle's life gave me a big shock. One day when my father was on his duty, the Sabeans attacked. He managed to escape and he was the only one left. Then my father saw three other people coming one after another informing uncle that everything he owned got destroyed. Not only the flocks and the servants but also the tragic demise of his ten children, all on the same day. My father also was surprised to see after all these, uncle was praising God. And later uncle was afflicted with painful sores. His friends came to sympathize with him and comfort him. Later God intervened and blessed uncle's family. As my father was sharing this, he taught me two lessons....

1. At the end, God will do what He has intended to do. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.
2. Till the end, you need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

**Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.
(Psalm 127:1)**

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Jesse's Cousin

We live in Bethlehem. When I was young, I was advised not to play with Jesse. This is because his grandfather Boaz was son of a prostitute named Rahab. Not only that, dadda Boaz married a foreign women daadee ma Ruth, who is from Moab. I also heard daadee ma Ruth came as a young widow along with her mother-in-law Naomi. People wondered daadeema Ruth's faithfulness to her mother-in-law. It also impressed Jesse's grandfather Boaz and he got married to her. Even a foreigner with little revelation of the true God is capable of faithfulness beyond all logic or expectation.

Paradaadee (great grand mother) Naomi had a bitter life. Her family went from Bethlehem to Moab when there was famine. There she lost her husband and her two sons. One of her son was the husband of daadee ma Ruth. After some time pradaadee and daadee ma came back to Bethlehem. Due to this and other reasons of the past, Jesse's family was looked down. However, amid all these, Jesse and me became close friends. In the meantime the nation had a transition from the period of the judges, when the leadership was so painfully lacking, to the period of kingship. I think the LORD looked with favor on Jesse.

Jesse had 8 sons and 2 daughters. Once when prophet Samuel came to Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. He said he came to sacrifice to the LORD. He also consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. Later Jesse told me that prophet Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed his youngest son David in the presence of his brothers. Isn't it true, that a good man obtains favor from the LORD?

David knows how to play the harp. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine looking man. King Saul was going through some challenging times. So David was asked to help King Saul and his talent of harp playing gave much relief to the king. The king liked David very much and David became one of his armor-bearers. Isn't it true, a man skilled in his work serve before kings? Such man will not serve before obscure men.

In the meanwhile, Jesse lost one of his sons. But good to see most of his children work for the king. God brought many great victories through David. I heard once prophet Samuel told king Saul, that the LORD has sought out a man after His own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because Saul has not kept the Lord's command. God is just. He will pay back trouble to those who trouble God's chosen and give relief to those who are troubled. Is God unjust? Not at all! The earth is full of God's unfailing love.

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

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Massah And Meribah

I love singing. King David always inspired us to sing joyfully, loudly, with instruments and even shout with joy to God. Singing pleases the LORD more than any sacrifice. As we sing, we meditate on those words. One song had these words, “Massah and Meribah”.

*Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah,
As you did that day at Massah in the desert,
Where your fathers tested and tried me,
Though they had seen what I did.*

So I deeply looked into the books for Massah and Meribah. I found out that during Exodus, Israelites travelling from Egypt to Canaan, at some point, there was no water for people to drink. So they quarreled with Moses. They grumbled against him saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?” and were almost ready to stone him. Then Moses cried out to the LORD and the LORD asked Moses to speak to the rock and bring water out of the rock. It is further written that Moses called them rebels, raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out and the community and their livestock drank.

But when I continued reading the Lord said to Moses and Aaron at different points,

- “you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites”
- “both of you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah”
- “both of you disobeyed my command to honor me as holy before their eyes”
- “both of you broke faith with me in the presence of the Israelites
- “you will not bring this community into the land I give them”.

I was deeply moved in my heart thinking....

1. Consistent grumbling, complaining, quarrelling... can push God to stop people entering His promised land. For forty years, God was grieved with that generation.
2. Consistent grumbling, complaining, quarrelling.... can push a most humble leader on the face of the earth, Moses, to lose entry into the promised land.
3. In spite of seeing all the great wonders and miracles of God with their own eyes, if the hearts of Israelites could be hardened how much more vulnerable mine will be.

I am not sure how Moses, Aaron and people felt after all the hardships in the journey, they were told that they will not enter the promised land. I must do my best to be joyful always, pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances for the LORD our God is holy.

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe (Philippians 2:14-15)

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The redemption of Jerusalem

When I grew up, Alexander Jannaeus ruled Judea. My family and relatives didn't like him because of his cruel nature. He also served as High Priest at the temple in Jerusalem. The Jewish people started opposing him, as he was against the Pharisees and persecuted them a lot. In one incident he had 800 Jewish rebels, primarily Pharisees, crucified. Before their deaths Alexander had their wives and children executed before their eyes.

Later Pompey, the Roman general, captured Jerusalem. The provinces in the Holy Land became subject to Rome. After several years, the Roman senate appointed Herod "King of the Jews" and provided him with an army. We grew up waiting for the consolation of Israel. We are eagerly looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. We all were well taught of the prophecies of Messiah to come. We are waiting for that wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, who will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. The government will be on his shoulders. His name would be Immanuel, meaning "God with us".

My friend Simeon is a righteous and devout man. The Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. We have a prophet, Anna. She is a widow. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. One couple, I am impressed with is Zechariah and Elizabeth. Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. But they had no children. Zechariah serves as priest before God. One day all the assembled worshipers were praying outside as Zechariah was about to burn the incense. The people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

Here and there, we hear that angels spoke to Zechariah, Joseph, Mary.... After some time Elizabeth became pregnant. It came as a surprise as she was barren. Mary too became pregnant. The events that are happening around makes us wonder what is next, all the time. Remembering all the prophecies, we are eagerly looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. All we wanted from God is to rescue us from the hand of our enemies and enable us to serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. (Joel 2:13)

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The king of the Jews

What a horrific time I had in Bethlehem? Imagine being a mother and losing one year old boy. I can never forget that day, when my child was grabbed from my hand to be killed. King Herod, known as the king of Jews, gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem. What was the reason? The king heard through some wise men that the king of the Jews was born in Bethlehem. It was a massacre of innocents. There was weeping and great mourning in Bethlehem. Many refused to be comforted. Since then the term “king of the Jews” triggered me to great pain and depression.

Herod was such a brutal king. Some said he killed his wife, his sons, his brother-in-law, many military leaders and many others. Most of it, he did in order to keep his throne secure for himself. A leader who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor. Not wanting to live in Bethlehem, we moved to Nazareth. Later we heard that Herod died because of painful illness. The LORD hates hands that shed innocent blood.

However in Nazareth, I found more comfort through Mary, my neighbor and her son Jesus. Oh what a smart and obedient child he was. I was emotionally attached seeing him, it always reminds me of my son, as Jesus’ age was same as that of my son. After listening to my story, Mary told me that she also was in Bethlehem that time and by the grace of God, they moved to Egypt when the massacre of the innocents happened. Then after Herod’s death they moved to Nazareth. Years passed by, things were going much better.

One day I visited Mary’s house and what I heard gave me a big shock. The family told me that Jesus was out of his mind. Lots of complaints came to the family by prominent people that Jesus was disturbing the Jews. After few months I also heard from few others that he was possessed with demons. The Pharisees plotted how they might kill Jesus. The day came when Jesus was crucified. It was horrible. It was hard for Mary to see her son going through such pain. Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS. I got triggered and went into depression.

Few weeks later, when I visited Mary, she told me that Jesus, the king of Jews resurrected and she remembered what the angels told her before Jesus’ birth - that Jesus will sit on the throne of David and his kingdom will never end. Also she showed me prophecies about Jesus being the king of Jews, the Messiah, the Son of God. Now the term “king of the Jews” gives me great strength. No wonder his presence comforted me when I was in trouble after losing my son. I started loving Jesus more than before. Jesus is Lord.

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. (1 Peter 5:10)

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The Beauty of Bethlehem

My grandpa always shares his visit to Bethlehem worshipping Jesus when Jesus was a young child. It is interesting to see how God used the star to guide them. I got more and more curious about Bethlehem and did a search on this small town which is close to Jerusalem. Found some interesting facts and some of them are listed below.

- The place where the Matriarch Rachel died and was buried. Rachel's tomb has been considered holy to the Jews. God remembered Rachel in pain, listened to her and opened her womb. Rachel gave birth to Joseph.
- Elimelech and Naomi's family were from Bethlehem. Naomi displayed good reverence to God in the middle of all the pain she went through.
- Ruth, a Moabite, displayed good loyalty, came to Bethlehem along with Naomi, married Boaz, a man of standing from Bethlehem. From Boaz to Obed his son, to Jesse his son, to David his son and so on, many generations lived in Bethlehem mostly fearing God and living with great convictions.
- Rahab the prostitute, who God used to give shelter to the spies of Israel, who told the spies "the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below" also made to stay in Bethlehem. She is the mother of Boaz, the man of standing.
- Bethlehem was well known as the hometown of David, Israel's greatest king; It is the site of David's anointment by the prophet Samuel. David loved God so much. Most of his songs are used in worshipping the Lord. It was from the well of Bethlehem that three of his warriors brought him water when he was hiding in the cave of Adullam. Also first two out of the thirty mighty men of David were from Bethlehem.
- According to Micah, Bethlehem was small among the clans of Judah and he prophesied Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah, the ruler over Israel.

I remember a song which goes "since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come".

Maybe in Bethlehem, people declared God's power to their generations and God blessed them. Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands. His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.

Sing to the LORD, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. (1 Chronicles 16:23-24)

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The Year of the Lord's favor

Couple of years back, it was an unforgettable Sabbath for me in Nazareth. I used to see this young man Jesus in the synagogue more active. That particular Sabbath he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"*.

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, *"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"*. All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

After some discussion, all the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard something more he told them. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. I was wondering how things can change so quickly by speaking well of Jesus and then thinking of killing Jesus.

But I was focused more on his statement, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing". Yes, what Jesus said is true. Being with Jesus for these few years, I can see what Isaiah prophesied is fulfilled. Jesus is the anointed one. I see him preaching the good news to the poor. I am amazed to see the mute speaking, the lame walking and the blind seeing.

Jesus is the answer to all our prayers. Jesus has been sent to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. But why people thought of killing him. Looks like they were angry to be told that there was something wrong with them, that their request for a miracle was denied, and that Jesus implied that God also loved the Gentiles.

Moreover, it is easy for people of Nazareth to doubt the power and work of God through Jesus as he is familiar. People that we often consider undeserving and perhaps strange are many times recipients of God's miraculous power. The choice is ours, we can speak well of Jesus or we can get hurt by his words, may be because our motives are questionable. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. (Psalm 84:11)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Broken in Bokim

In Bokim, we all wept aloud because we disobeyed God. We didn't follow His instructions. We made covenant with the people who God instructed not to make a covenant with such people. When the angel spoke that these people will be thorns in our sides and their gods will be a snare to us, we all wept aloud.

I remember a similar situation my father sharing to me about how God led them from Egypt through Moses thaatha (grandfather). In spite of all great wonders God did, the people did not trust in the LORD their God. One day Moses thaatha told them, "Not a man of this evil generation shall see the good land". They also heard that only Caleb uncle and Joshua uncle will enter. The people said that they sinned against God but in arrogance they rebelled against the Lord's command again. The Amorites chased them like a swarm of bees. They came back and wept before the LORD.

After the death of Moses thaatha, God led through Joshua uncle. We had great victories. When he was old and well advanced in years, Joshua convened the elders and chiefs of the Israelites and exhorted them to have no fellowship with the native population, because it could lead them to be unfaithful to God. Soon afterward he died.

After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the LORD, "Who will be the first to go up and fight for us against the Canaanites?" The LORD answered, "Judah is to go; I have given the land into their hands." I was with the men of Judah. We attacked Jerusalem also and took it. We put the city to the sword and set it on fire. The Benjamites, however, failed to dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem. Ignoring Joshua Uncle's orders to clear the land, the Israelites instead settled in among its pagan occupants and soon started acting like them. He who scorns instruction will pay for it.

Now we stand at Bokim and we feel bad about all that we did against God's instructions. For 80 years the Israelites followed two outstanding leaders – Moses thaatha and Joshua uncle – who now proved impossible to replace. Now the leaders were hampered by the absence of a central authority. Everyone did as he saw fit. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

God continued his program of revelation by showing that he's as faithful to the covenant curses and penalties as he's to the covenant benefits and blessings. His grace did not negate his justice. God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day.

God will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice. The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. (Psalm 9:8-9)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Numb To God's Spirit

Imagine living in the largest city in the world, not only that under the largest empire of the world. Probably the best empire in history in my days. Yes, I am living in Nineveh, the capital of Neo-Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians are the first to be armed with iron weapons.

When I was young, Sennacherib uncle was the king of Assyria. The king was known for his military campaigns against Babylon and Judah. He was also a notable builder. He made Nineveh a truly magnificent city. The palace he built in Nineveh is amazing. It had around 80 rooms. An elaborate system of eighteen canals brought water from the hills to Nineveh, one of them is 50km long. He also built great hanging gardens. The population is around a lakh and fifty thousand, one among the largest settlements worldwide in an enclosed area.

I love reading books and found that Nineveh was built by Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord. Who is this Lord – I asked to myself. We worship god Nisroch. So I was curious about this Lord. As I was reading certain books. I found many great wonders done by that Lord. I was stunned to read this statement from the book of prophet Isaiah about our king. *“Then the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning--there were all the dead bodies! So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there. One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer cut him down with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king”.*

Then I got the book of prophet Jonah which was written much earlier than Isaiah and the message to Nineveh *“Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned”* and how the Ninevites believed God and God showed compassion for the city to survive. Is it because of this reason, down the line, God gave Israelites to the hands of Assyrian kings?

Now, the Ninevites have forgotten that God and continued in their wickedness. When people continue to rebel, they can become numb to God's Spirit. Just recently prophet Nahum has written *“The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into darkness”*. Also prophet Zephaniah, *“He will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria, leaving Nineveh utterly desolate and dry as the desert”*. Not sure what will happen to Nineveh, God is gracious but he cannot be mocked.

The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. (Matthew 12:41)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Lukewarm Laodiceans

Growing up I was so tuned with the Jewish culture. My father was a Pharisee, fasted twice a week, gave a tenth of all he got and taught us all great rituals. He was a hero in my life until I became a young man. Then I started smelling lies and hypocrisy in his life. Not only in him, I could see the same in many of my father's friends who visited us.

Then I heard about Jesus and started following him. My father was so furious with me and shared how they were plotting to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill Jesus. He was convincing me that Jesus was against the Jewish practices. Many even among the leaders believed in Jesus and wanted to follow Jesus. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue.

I stopped following Jesus. Later I heard Jesus was crucified. After some time, when the day of Pentecost came, we were all together and heard Peter, who was with Jesus, gave a big firm talk and concluded that "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ". I was cut to my heart, got baptized and decided not to be part of that corrupt generation. Life was great, devoted to prayer, apostles' teaching, fellowship, praising God and enjoying everyday the favor of all the people, proclaiming the good news.

Later, we spread everywhere. I got good friends in many places and some of them in Laodicea. We heard how God was powerfully working through Epaphras. Several years later, I heard from my friends that many in Laodicea church, became rich and started relying on their wealth. They stopped focusing on making disciples but spent their time in acquiring wealth. I also heard from another friend from Colosse, the letter written by Paul mentioning that how much he was struggling for those at Laodicea.

I was encouraging my friends, saying "just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him and no one should take you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. No one should deceive us by fine-sounding arguments".

How great if our deeds as a disciple are hot in which we are involved sincerely in teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. There may be some who are cold, in our fellowship, who are weak in their faith, who need to be accepted and helped, without passing judgments on disputable matters. God doesn't want us to be lukewarm. The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth. (Rev. 3:15-16)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Less is more than enough

I can't forget the days when we were oppressed by the Midianites. Fearing them, along with us, many families prepared shelters in mountain clefts and caves. Imagine living in a nice place in a nice location and then living in caves. Not only that all the hard work we put in planting the crops, the Midianites would come and camp on the land and ruined the crops. They did not spare any living thing, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys.

We were so impoverished and we cried a lot to God. Then a prophet came and told us how we disobeyed God by worshipping the gods of Amorites. I remember these words taught to me earlier, "if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you....". Life is all about choices and the choices we make determine our destiny.

Suddenly one day, in the morning, when we got up, there was Baal's altar, demolished, with the Asherah pole beside it cut down and a bull sacrificed on the newly built altar! After careful investigation we found out that Gideon son of Joash did it. Looks like the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon. He blew a trumpet summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. And he sent messengers throughout to join him to fight against the Midianites.

But Gideon was not a warrior. His clan was the weakest in Manasseh and he was the least in his family. How can we believe in such a man and follow his directions? But still I noticed more than thirty thousand men joining him and I joined him too. Suddenly he announced "anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave". Twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained. And after some time, he just took three hundred men and sent all of us back to our tents. I was wondering about this, 300 men fighting against a group which is more than hundred thousand men.

But later we could see how God, through Gideon, delivered us from the Midianites. The key leaders in Israelites said to Gideon, "Rule over us". But Gideon told them, "I will not rule over you, the LORD will rule over you". During Gideon's lifetime, the land had peace forty years. With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. Nobody is born a warrior, in exactly the same way that nobody is born an average man. We make ourselves into one or the other. Less is more than enough, just trust in the Lord at all times.

God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Relationship Versus Righteousness

Micaiah, my friend, is one of the prophet during king Ahab's time. He had a conviction that he will speak only what the LORD says to him. However, king Ahab, the king of Israel hated him because couple of times he wanted to do something but after enquiring the LORD through Micaiah, he was advised not to do. So king Ahab most of the time picked up prophets who tells him what he wanted to hear.

The kings too sometimes choose prophets who would tell them what they wanted to hear. And those prophets also are happy to please their kings and tell them what they wanted to hear. The king should actually delight in a wise servant. A tyrannical ruler lacks judgment.

Once I visited Micaiah in a prison. And he was telling this incident that happened with king Ahab. He was called by the king. When he went there he saw both the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, dressed in their royal robes, sitting on their thrones. Not only that he also saw around 400 prophets, prophesying before them. Micaiah was wondering why the king called him as he was well aware that the king didn't like him and had a feeling that Micaiah never prophesies anything good about him.

Micaiah heard all the prophets prophesying as one man, "Attack Ramoth Gilead and be victorious, for the LORD will give it into the king's hand". The messenger who took Micaiah said to him, "Let your word agree with theirs, and speak favorably". What Micaiah told them was not favorable to them. He also told them how a lying spirit is put in the mouths of all these prophets of the king. Then one of the prophets slapped Micaiah in the face. I told Micaiah, "What! a prophet slapped you. How did the king allow this?". Then I understood that for some it is the relationship that matters and not righteousness. Is it not true that if a ruler listens to lies, all his officials become wicked?

It is sad that prophets like Micaiah are put in prison. The messengers of God are hated because of the message. It is sad the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire – they all conspire together. It is also sad to see that many prophets are not faithful prophets of the LORD, they are happy to please others and tell them what they wanted to hear. Can I speak something favorable because others wanted it even it is not part of God's plan and standards? Let us speak the truth in love.

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The destiny of every man

It was a sobering time when I attended my friend's funeral. No one wants to die. Even people who want to go to heaven don't want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share, for dust we are and to dust we shall return. No one has power over the day of his death. It was hard for me to accept my friend dying at this very young age.

In the funeral they read through the prayer of Moses, the man of God, from the book of Psalms. One of the line goes, **"You turn men back to dust"**. When I read the events that occurred during Moses' time, I realized Moses could be the one who has seen enough deaths. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints, but during Moses time, it was the judgment of God turning man to destruction with wicked Egypt and disobedient Israel. Moses had to pray, **"We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. Relent, O LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants"**.

There were about 600,000 Israelite men on foot, besides women and children when they started their journey from Rameses. In just around 40 years, imagine Moses seeing almost all of them die except for their children, Joshua and Caleb. There were many instances in Moses' life that he could have seen mass deaths because of God's discipline....

- 24,000 died from the plague when Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor.
- 14,700 died from the plague in addition to those who had died because of Korah.
- 3,000 died when Israelites bowed down to an idol in the shape of a calf.
- Many Israelites died because of venomous snakes, the LORD sent when Israelites spoke against the LORD and Moses and probably many more similar mass deaths.

Moses also saw individuals die like his sister Miriam, brother Aaron and others. He saw young men die like Aaron's children. All that LORD did would have made people to fear God more. Moses continued in his prayer **"Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you. Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom"**. Let us fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For His anger lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime.

Death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart. Moses' ended his prayer with these lines... **"Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.... May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children. May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us-- yes, establish the work of our hands"**.

This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead. (Ecclesiastes 9:3)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

A Pleasing Proposal

I was one among the 3000 who got baptized during the day of Pentecost. Since that day we continued to meet together every day in the temple courts. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the leadership (apostles). And the Lord added daily those who were being saved. All the believers were one in heart and mind.

Here and there the leaders were persecuted but God delivered them in a powerful way. Few believers were little corrupt in their minds but God dealt with them. Great fear seized the whole church when we heard about the death of Ananias and Sapphira. I remember the words of Peter at the time of baptism, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation”. Bad company corrupts good character. A friend of the world is an enemy to God.

One day the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and gave us a proposal. In that proposal they wanted the church to choose seven men from among us who are known to be full of Spirit and wisdom. This is because some of the believers from a Hellenistic background believed that the widows among the Hebrew Christians received better care.

This proposal pleased the whole group. The leaders were far more concerned with the internal quality of the men than their outward appearance or image. What a way to solve a problem! They didn't throw the complainers out. They didn't shun the unhappy people. They didn't form a committee and discuss the problem to death. They themselves could have done this but it was great to see their commitment towards prayer and the ministry of the word. We also wanted them not to get distracted with these kind of tasks.

Choosing seven men was not that easy. There were many who fits into this category who are known to be full of Spirit and wisdom. Most of them also were powerful in doing ministry of the word. Many wanted to help the church and the leaders in this way. The church shortlisted the seven men and presented them to the leaders. The leaders prayed and laid their hands on them. The leaders addressed, church nominated and leaders appointed.

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples increased rapidly and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. Meeting unmet needs is a great way to bring more people into ministry. Practical service is spiritual service. We also noticed those seven men performing great wonders and signs among the people. It is great to have leaders responding to the need without distracting themselves from their main tasks.

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:2-3)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

From Prison to Prime Minister

He was just thirty years old when he became the prime minister. He became second in command and Pharaoh put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt. I know him as Joseph but Pharaoh named him Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Asenath daughter of priest Potiphara to be his wife. After around 10 years, I met Joseph, so closely. I came to buy grain. He is still the same, his God has been giving him success in everything he did. He gave me a big hug and showed his love to me. My eyes were filled with tears.

I was not a good person. I was one of the workers in the prison where Joseph was there ten years back. Joseph was well-built and handsome. I misused my power and mistreated him. I heard that he was put in prison because he misbehaved with his master's wife. I thought his physical features blinded him to even misbehave with his masters wife. But Joseph's behavior in prison was so different. No one can accept that such a person could do such a thing of misbehaving with a woman. Joseph talked a lot about his God.

After some time, the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison and he was made responsible for all that was done there. I didn't like that plan but I could see his God giving him success in whatever he did. One day suddenly he was released from the dungeon as Pharaoh wanted him. An no sooner he became the prime minister of Egypt.

I was talking to one of Pharaoh's officials and he told me how Joseph helped Pharaoh in interpreting his dream. I heard Joseph also told Pharaoh, "I cannot do it but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires". I heard Pharaoh asked the officials, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in who is the spirit of God?". Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace and all my people are to submit to your orders".

Then we could see Joseph travelling throughout Egypt, collecting all the food produced in those seven years of abundance. Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure. Now, not just me, not just people of Egypt, all the world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe everywhere. When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice. A righteous man may have many troubles, but God delivers him from them all; God watches over the way of the righteous and surround them with his favor as with a shield. God will never let the righteous fall. Whatever he does prospers.

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. (James 3:13-15)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Warning Against Falling Away

The church I am part of, has been going through a lot of challenging situation. More and more believers have fallen away. Some have become more lazy and not being diligent in Godly affairs. But thanks to God who sent a warning letter. Given below are few lines in that letter. Let us be concerned about the Lord's affairs.

- We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!
- Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.
- It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.
- Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case--things that accompany salvation.
- God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.
- We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.
- We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

Let us continue to pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. (Hebrews 10:37-39)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Zerub, the Zealot

“Is it time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while LORD’s house remains a ruin?”. This was the call of the prophet Haggai. This shook everyone including my friend Zerub (Zerubbabel) and Joshua, the High priest. Zerub led the first group of Jews, numbering more than 40,000, who returned from the Babylonian captivity in the first year of Cyrus, King of Persia. We were prepared in Babylon to go up and build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem. But our enthusiasm didn’t last long as we faced opposition.

The work on the temple ground to a halt. We also thought that the time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD’s house. This went on about 20 years when God spoke through Haggai to confront the growing apathy and confusion. “Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored. You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why? Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house”.

Then Zerub, Joshua and the whole remnant obeyed the voice of the LORD and feared the LORD. The work on the house of the LORD began. Then after a month the LORD spoke through Haggai, “Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? But now be strong, all you people of the land and work. For I am with you. The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house. And in this place I will grant peace”.

After two months the LORD spoke through Haggai, “Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I will shake the heavens and the earth. I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. On that day, I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you”.

Then I remembered the words of the prophet Jeremiah, “As surely as I live, even if you, Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, were a signet ring on my right hand, I would still pull you off”. God rejected Zerub’s grandfather, king Jehoiachin, penultimate king of Judah. But now Zerub is chosen as the Lord’s “signet ring”. The zeal for God’s household can melt God’s sternness. God is eager to respond with mercy when we obey him. Through Zechariah the LORD told Zerubbabel, “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit”

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. (Romans 12:9-12)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

From delivery to deliverance, Hazzelelponi

Hazzelelponi is the name of Etam's daughter mentioned in one of the genealogies. My father is a teacher of the law and I admire his wisdom. He taught me the commands, decrees and laws. I understood there is a special significance if a woman's name is mentioned in the genealogy and searched about Hazzelelponi and found out the following :

- According to the ancient Rabbinic tradition, Hazzelelponi was married to Manoah (father of the famous judge Samson). She also had a daughter called Nishyan.
- She was one of the very few woman, the angel of the LORD had a direct message. The message being the delivery of a child to the deliverance of Israel.
- Being sterile and childless, the message of the angel could have been difficult for her to believe but the way she shared this to her husband Manoah, showed great faith in her and she could recognize the message came from a man of God, who looked like an angel of God, very awesome. Will I be able to recognize God's voice like this?
- She was able to grasp the word 'Nazirite' (a vow of separation to the LORD). So she must be well acquainted with Law of Moses. Looking at the culture in her time, many did evil in the eyes of the LORD and no history of any Nazirites.
- Her husband Manoah after hearing prayed begging for the man of God to come again and the reason being to teach them how to bring up the boy who is to be born.
- God heard Manoah. The angel appeared to Hazzelelponi again while she was out in the field, but Manoah was not there. But the angel waited till she could bring her husband.
- The angel of the LORD was very specific to Manoahs requests and told him strongly, "Your wife must do all that I have told her", "She must do everything I have commanded her". When God gives directions, he wanted us to obey.
- As Manoah and his wife watched, the angel of the LORD ascended. The book also recorded this as "God did an amazing thing". What a couple they could be?
- We can also see, they were successful in raising up the child to those standards where the people around were in different extreme standards. They could have faced many challenging situation in bringing this child up as there were many compromising things floating around. The child also was able to honor their parents and their directions.

What amazes me also is the plan God had from delivery to deliverance. Does God want Israelites to wait around 20 years for the child to grow and deliver them? So, for some of our prayers, has God's plan already started somewhere? Our God is an awesome God.

"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of separation to the LORD as a Nazirite, he must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or from other fermented drink. He must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. (Numbers 6:2-3)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Samaritan Saga

One fine morning when I heard that Peter and John was visiting my village, I was so happy to see them. It was quite some time since I had been with them. Those were the best days of my life. It all happened when one of my aunty came back from Jacob's well and said to us, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?". Messiah, the word we constantly heard in our family.

Many of us didn't like the aunty because of her lifestyle but we were all expecting this Messiah to come and deliver us. A little faith towards this hope of coming of Messiah made us to forget even who brought this good news. So most of us went to see this Messiah. Many of us believed in him because of the aunt's testimony.

Then we urged Jesus to stay with us for two days and because of his words more became believers. We told our aunty, "We no longer believe just because of what you said, now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world". Those two days were the best days of my life.

Earlier to this incident, the Jews did not associate with Samaritans. They did not use dishes Samaritans had used. The rift between Jews and Samaritans started way back when the remnant returned after captivity to rebuild Jerusalem. Walls of bitterness were erected on both sides due to various reasons and did nothing but to harden for more than 500 years. Truly, it is not the person from radically different culture on the other side of the world that is hardest to love, but the nearby neighbor whose skin color, language, rituals, values, ancestry, history and customs are different from one's own.

What shocked me was that the Jews who had so much of convictions and had a rift towards us because of certain things, couldn't recognize this Messiah. They allowed his body to be tortured and crucified him. Can people with great convictions raise up to torture the body of Christ because of certain differences in the way they think?

I praise God for Peter and John. We constantly hear the good news of the Messiah spreading throughout Judea and Samaria. God used Philip in a powerful way in Samaria. Peter and John placed their hands on us and we received the Holy Spirit, which Jesus promised earlier. The church in Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirt, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. (James 2:8-10)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Fools Day Out

I thank God for King Hezekiah in Judah. I could see him doing what is right in the eyes of the Lord. I am privileged to be chosen by the king to compile the proverbs of King Solomon. Only few were chosen. And we really searched all the works of King Solomon, even though it was more than around 270 years. King Solomon's proverbs are too good. God has indeed given him amazing wisdom. Thank God for King Hezekiah who formed a team to compile on this God chosen wise man. Wisdom is more precious than rubies.

As we were compiling, I learnt many things. The benefits of being righteous and the consequences of the wicked. How to be wise and what the fools do. I got convicted on certain proverbs about fools and saw how much I need to change in the way I talk and live. Who is a fool and what they will do? I have listed few of them below.

- Whoever spreads slander is a fool.
- A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct.
- A fool shows his annoyance at once.
- A fool is hotheaded and reckless.
- A fool spurns his father's discipline.
- A fool has no desire to get wisdom.
- A fool brings grief to his parents.
- A fool finds no pleasure in understanding.
- A fool delights in airing his own opinions.
- Lips of a fool are perverse.
- A fool is quick to quarrel.
- Wisdom is too high for a fool.
- In the assembly at the gate a fool has nothing to say.
- A fool is wise in his own eyes.
- As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly.
- He who trusts in himself is a fool.
- A fool gives full vent to his anger.
- The fool folds his hands and ruins himself.
- Extortion turns a wise man into a fool.
- The fool lacks sense and show everyone how stupid he is.

I pray God to give me a discerning heart, to distinguish between right and wrong. The ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.

Like a lame man's legs that hang limp is a proverb in the mouth of a fool. Like tying a stone in a sling is the giving of honor to a fool. Like a thornbush in a drunkard's hand is a proverb in the mouth of a fool. (Proverbs 26:7-9)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Hosanna! Hosanna!

When I heard the chief priests were planning to kill Lazarus, I went to see him. It was so sad to see the chief priests, Pharisees and teachers of the law constantly trying to kill Jesus. Many Jews believed in Jesus because of Lazarus and now they are planning to kill Lazarus too. How many Lazarus' they can kill? Great are the works of the LORD. I was there when Lazarus was buried and after few days Jesus bringing him back to life from the tomb.

What did Jesus do for those people to go after him? Is it because Jesus called them hypocrites? Is it because of their own guilt that they teach something but their life is not according to their teachings? Is it because being a teacher Jesus ate with tax collectors and 'sinners'? Or is it because many started following Jesus and that has given them the fear? And what about Lazarus? Can't they see how God raised him up from the dead?

However, we heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. We took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Hosanna!", a Hebrew expression meaning "Save!". Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it. Many people, because they had heard that he had raised up Lazarus, came to meet him. I overheard Pharisees saying to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!". Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs, they still would not believe in him.

Suddenly we heard a voice from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again". Many believed angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself". Jesus didn't come to judge the world, but to save it. He has come into the world as a light.

We know from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever and so we asked Jesus about that. Jesus replied, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left.

One side I hear the words of Jesus, about his death, the voice from heaven, and on the other side I see the Pharisees and others planning to kill Jesus. Not sure how the next few days going to be. Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. Hosanna!

Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God. (John 12:42-43)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Is Christ a criminal?

Every year I look forward for Passover. Passover is the seven-day holiday of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, with the first and last days celebrated as legal holidays and as holy days involving holiday meals, special prayer services, and abstention from work; Our families gather together and have a great time of fun, food, fellowship... The uncles narrate the story of the first Passover during the time of Moses and how God saved Israelites. We end up singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in our hearts to God.

Now I am in the middle of Passover holiday but this time, it is not that good. Our families are divided due to this man Jesus, who is called Christ. Some of my uncles are too busy proving Jesus to be a criminal. They were sharing with excitement how they were able to arrest Jesus near the garden of Gethsemane. They even wanted to arrest the followers of Jesus. Early in the morning they were out, taking Jesus to Pilate, the governor and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. Pilate came out to meet them and said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But we have no right to execute anyone," the Jews objected.

Some of my family members really don't want this to happen. They wanted God to take care of this. They like Jesus. They were not able to bear the tears of Mary aunty, the mother of Jesus and other uncles and aunties who were there around seeing Jesus being tortured. They were not happy seeing the crowds shouting to release Barabbas who is a notorious prisoner, who had taken part in rebellion and committed murder. It was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. In spite of the governor giving a choice of releasing Jesus, they wanted Barabbas to be released. They were even talking that the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas.

Is Jesus a criminal? Last few years whenever we came for Passover, I heard more good news about him. His family every year attended the Feast of the Passover. Once I remember during the Feast time, many people saw the miraculous signs Jesus was doing and believed in his name. I have heard his teachings and not found anything against God. Why Jesus has to suffer this way, that too at this young age? He is in his early thirties! I can observe the people who wanted to arrest Jesus and his followers doing more crime than him. The chief priests, the elders and many other leaders are involved in this.

I pray God to pass over again and save the Israelites as He did during the time of Moses.

Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. (Isa 53:10)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The Cheap (chief) Priests

I am Joseph of Arimathea, was once a secret disciple of Jesus. Those times I feared the Jewish leaders. I was not agreeing to their decision and action with regards to killing Jesus. I was surprised to see the acts of the chief priests in just that crucial week of Passover.

- They got indignant when the children shouted, ‘Hosanna’.
- They looked for a sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him.
- They gave 30 silver coins to Judas, to guide them in this.
- They sent a large crowd armed with swords and clubs to arrest Jesus near Gethsemane.
- They looked for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death.
- They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, early in the morning.
- They persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.
- They asked Pilate to guard the tomb where Jesus was buried.
- Even though the soldiers who guarded the tomb told the truth of Jesus’ resurrection, the chief priest gave a large sum of money and asked the soldiers to tell lies.

Elders also were no different from the chief priests, they also were involved with all that the chief priests did. They were angry with me because I begged for the body of Jesus and put him in my new tomb. Even though I was a prominent member of the Jewish council, they put me in prison immediately, for doing this. Thanks to Nicodemus, who was also member of the Jewish ruling council, accompanied me in giving proper burial to Jesus in accordance with Jewish burial customs. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. We wrapped Jesus’ body with spices and strips of linen. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

Nicodemus and me, were discussing on other two criminals –

1. Gestas : He put travelers to death, murdering them with the sword.
2. Demas : He made attacks upon the rich, but was good to the poor.

When I was in prison, Jesus delivered me. I saw the resurrected Jesus. He told me to stay in my house in Arimathea for 40 days. After that elders sent an apology letter to me through my friends. I went to Jerusalem to meet with the elders and the chief priests and testified that Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven. And also told them that tombs broke open and bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. However, the chief priests didn’t believe and continued in their ignorance and vengeance. God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors”. (Isaiah 53:12)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Those Two Months

After so many years, few of our friends were able to meet again. During our reunion we shared our experiences what we went through in our lives. I missed them, as my family was taken as captives and we all were scattered. The Assyrians were treating us bad. Later the Persians came into rule. Now, I am glad, I am back in Jerusalem.

As we were discussing about many things, my friends were asking me about the most challenging experience I had. I remembered those horrible two months. As I was sharing, tears flowed from my eyes. We were in Citadel of Susa. King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa. He ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush. King Xerxes was a dangerously impulsive king. Once I remember when a bridge he had ordered built was destroyed in a storm, he had the bridge builders beheaded.

After few years of his reign, King Xerxes honored Haman, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. Haman was considered to be an archetype of evil and persecutor of the Jews. With the help of the king, a decree was issued by him to destroy all the Jews. Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews--young and old, women and little children--on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.

My friends also remembered that decree as it had reached them and they had their share of that event. Moreover, it was announced just when the Passover was over in the first month. There was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes. During this crisis, Mordecai stood tall, showing extraordinary courage. Based on Mordecai's direction, we Jews in Susa fasted for three days. Esther, a Jew, was the queen at that time. She took many risks in her life to change things around.

After two months, we heard Haman was hanged on the gallows and the king issued another decree in favor of the Jews. God turned the tables and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them. Those two months I had the most challenging experience in my life. God can accomplish his purposes just as easily through coincidences as he can through grand miracles of deliverance. Though he works behind the curtain to deliver his people, he is in control. Events that others see as chance or fate are seen as signs of God's sovereignty to believers. God is still in the business of protecting his people.

The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing. The way of the LORD is a refuge for the righteous, but it is the ruin of those who do evil. The righteous will never be uprooted..... (Proverbs 10:28-30)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Magor-Missabib [Terror On Every Side]

I am one among the exiles in Babylon. Jeremiah's letter was read to us. I understood that I will not get a chance to go back to Jerusalem, as the letter mentioned that we will be here in Babylon for around 70 years. I may not live that longer. Moreover, in the letter Jeremiah mentioned that we should build houses, plant gardens, marry, have children and also to seek the welfare of the city and pray to the Lord on its behalf.

Now I feel sober, but when I was in Jerusalem, I was against Jeremiah. I remember once Jeremiah took some of the elders and priests to the valley of Ben Hinnom and informed them that LORD would bring a disaster on this place and it would be called as the valley of Slaughter. He also added that the LORD would smash this nation as the potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired. When our priest Pashhur heard this, he had Jeremiah beaten and put in the stocks at the Lord's temple. We were not happy as we thought that the LORD would not do this and strongly believed that Jeremiah was wrong.

The next day, when Pashhur released him from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, "The Lord's name for you is not Pashhur, but Magor-Missabib. For this is what the LORD says: I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; with your own eyes you will see them fall by the sword of their enemies. I will hand all Judah over to the king of Babylon, who will carry them away to Babylon or put them to the sword".

We all mocked Jeremiah. We took Jeremiah's rebuke of Pashhur and used it against him calling him Magor-Missabib and were discussing "Terror on every side! Report him! Let's report him!" We were waiting for Jeremiah to slip, saying, "Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him". Now I am totally convinced Jeremiah is from God. Jeremiah was compelled to preach a message faithful to God. This is the burden of the Word of Jehovah. Perhaps only those who have experienced it can understand it. To publish that word at times brings suffering; but to refrain brings far more terrible suffering. Are we Magor-Missabibs, if we hurt God's chosen ones?

Back in Jerusalem we were thinking Jeremiah was neither a priest nor an elder. How can he say that God is speaking through him? We didn't see God doing extraordinary things through him. But the LORD is with him like a mighty warrior. God's word is living in his heart, burning in his heart like fire. If God wanted to speak, the chosen person doesn't need any position or platform and it can be for any audience. Blessed are all who fear the LORD.

For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? (2 Corinthians 2:15-16)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Beauty And Brainy

I am one of the cousins of Daniel Kileab, the second son of David uncle. Daniel's mother Abigail aunty looks so beautiful. In my family we always discuss about David Uncles family. Once, as we were talking about them, I was telling my father how Abigail aunty is so beautiful. My father told me that she is not only beautiful, she is also brainy. My father told me that he is alive because of Abigail aunty. I never knew that she was a widow and David uncle married her. The following is what my father told me and taught me if the LORD delights in a man's way, he makes his step firm. The LORD upholds the righteous.

“Nabal, my relative, was a wealthy man. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep. We look up to Nabal a lot. But he was wicked, surly and too mean in his dealings. May be because of his wealth, Abigails parents could have made her to get married to Nabal. Once we had a great banquet, like that of a king, hosted by Nabal. We enjoyed that banquet and the next day we heard the news that Nabal got a kind of stroke. I went to visit the family and could see Nabal's heart failed him and he was like a stone. I was asking Abigail what happened and she told me how God rescued us.

Sometime back David sent ten young man to Nabal asking for some food for his group. That time David was known to be an outlaw, who went away from King Saul. And King Saul made many attempts to kill him. David had around 600 men. Early to this David and his men were very good to us. Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them. The young men also talked about this to Nabal, but Nabal sent those young men back with insults for David.

This news reached Abigail through one of the servants. The servant told Abigail, “Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him”. David had a plan to kill all the male belonging to Nabal. I was one among them to be killed.

But Abigail lost no time. She, without the knowledge of Nabal, took lot of food and visited David and requested David to forgive Nabal's offence. David was impressed by the way Abigail talked and blessed her for her good judgement. When Abigail came back, we were in that banquet and Nabal was in high spirits and very drunk. When she told him the next day, Nabal became like a stone. Ten days later he died and later David sent word to Abigail to become his wife. The LORD loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones”.

The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD; he is their stronghold in time of trouble. The LORD helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him. (Psalm 37:39-40)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Satan's so-called deep secrets in Thyatira

Now, I am a member of Thyatira church. I accepted Jesus as my Lord at Philippi few years back. The Lord opened Lydia aunt's heart to respond to Paul uncle's message at Philippi. Through her faith and perseverance, many of us started following Jesus. Lydia aunty is rich but a great worshipper of God. It is hard for rich people to enter the kingdom of heaven.

She is also rich in good deeds, generous and willing to share. She persuaded the visiting leaders to stay in her house at that time. It was great to see the way God delivered Paul uncle and Silas uncle from the prison. They came from prison to the gathering at aunt's house and encouraged the brothers there. I enjoyed my Christian life.

Then I was back to my native place Thyatira and become part of the church here. What a great church? The fellowship was electrifying. This was like a model church. The love, faith, service, perseverance, deeds was in increasing measure. We were so excited and greatly involved with many people encouraging them to follow Christ.

But after some time, the church was almost divided with different kinds of teaching. The church tolerated the teachings of Jezebel who called herself a prophetess. She mislead the saints into sexual immorality and eating of food sacrificed to idols. She also didn't live a life worthy of the calling. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

For few of us it was hard to digest such things happening inside our church. Even though few talked with convictions to her, she was not willing to repent. More and more she disturbed many. Many who loved such things started following her teachings and got hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Sinful heart turns them away from the living God.

But there were some who did not hold to her teaching and not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets. We didn't give up our faith or zeal. We continued to do what is right. When we fix our eyes on Jesus and listen to His teachings, should we get carried away by all such false teachings and attractions? We should not believe our conscience and our feelings more than the word of God. Let us watch our life and doctrine closely.

It was sad to see that Jezebel lost her children. Also we saw those who committed adultery suffered intensely. Our God is a God who searches hearts and minds and will repay each according to their deeds. Let's worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.

At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (Matthew 24:10-13)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Lot, a righteous man

After reading the letter of Peter uncle, I heard about Lot and read the book to find out more about Lot and his family. I can't imagine being in the place of Lot when God was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Will I hesitate in following the Lord's directions?

- The angels were urging Lot to immediately leave.
- The people of the city wanted to do wicked things with angels.
- Lot was trying to convince his to-be sons-in-law. But they thought Lot was joking.
- His wife became a pillar of salt.

At one shot, Lot lost everything except for his two daughters - house, friends, neighbors, possessions, clothes.... Later I read that Lot and his two daughters lived in a cave. The later part of that story was much more alarming. The descendants of Lot became Moabites and Ammonites. Now I couldn't see or hear any of those descendants. Then I read in the book of Zephaniah, *"Therefore, as surely as I live," declares the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, "surely Moab will become like Sodom, the Ammonites like Gomorrah-- a place of weeds and salt pits, a wasteland forever. The remnant of my people will plunder them; the survivors of my nation will inherit their land"*.

But when I looked deeply, God was really merciful to Lot's family and his descendants. I read from the book of Moses how God had plans for Lot's descendants.

- *Then the LORD said to me, "Do not harass the Moabites or provoke them to war, for I will not give you any part of their land. I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot as a possession."*
- *When you come to the Ammonites, do not harass them or provoke them to war, for I will not give you possession of any land belonging to the Ammonites. I have given it as a possession to the descendants of Lot."*

Initially I thought Lot was attracted to the world around him but from Peter's letter I understood that Lot living among those unrighteous, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard. Lot was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men. Taking Lot's example the letter from Peter uncle taught us *"the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority"*. Peter uncle also warned us that there will be false teachers among us and scoffers will be there following their own evil desires. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with us, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives. (2 Peter 3:11)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN

I can never forget this phrase “MENE, MENE, TEKEL PARSIN”. This phrase changed the whole atmosphere on that day. Being close to the king Belshazzar, I was invited to this great banquet king Belshazzar gave. Thousands were there and drank wine with them. What was special was to drink from the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem. May be the God of Jerusalem was not that happy about this.

Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way. The king called out for the enchanters, astrologers and diviners to be brought and said to them that he will reward them if they can tell the meaning of this phrase which was written.

All the king’s wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. We were baffled. Then based on the queen’s suggestion, Daniel was brought in. I know Daniel. Once King Nebuchadnezzar appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners. We know Daniel has one who has the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. He must be having the spirit of the holy gods in him.

It was surprising to see that Daniel was not willing to get the rewards to explain that phrase and also to hear about king Nebuchadnezzar. We know king Nebuchadnezzar is someone who everyone feared, he put to death those he wanted to put to death, those he wanted to spare, he spared, those he wanted to promote, he promoted and those he wanted to humble he humbled. But came to know king Nebuchadnezzar heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal. Is that true the Lord detests all the proud of heart and they will not go unpunished?

Daniel then explained the meaning of the phrase :

Mene – God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end

Tekel – You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting

Peres – Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians

What Daniel said was fulfilled that very night. We never understood that Medo-Persian armies surrounded Babylon when we were partying. Belshazzar was slain. Darius (known as Gubaru) the Mede took over the kingdom. Let us honor the God who holds in his hand our life and all our ways. The arrogant one will stumble and fall and no one will help.

Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the LORD is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed. (1 Samuel 2:3)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

From Slave to Saint

I am from Colossae. Recently I heard that Onesimus was imprisoned in Rome and was stoned to death, under Trajan the emperor. After Timothy he was ordained as a pastor of Ephesus. Also heard that in Ephesus, Onesimus helped in compiling the letters of Paul.

Philemon is my close friend and he lead the church in Colossae. Once when I visited his house, I was surprised to see Onesimus back again in his place, but this time not as a slave but as a brother. Earlier Onesimus was a slave to Philemon. Then he ran away from Philemon suddenly probably stealing some of his master's money. So I asked Philemon about Onesimus being back and Philemon showed me Paul's letter.

Then I understood that God made Onesimus to meet Paul in Rome. Paul led Onesimus to Christ. Looks like Onesimus was very helpful to Paul when he was in prison. The relationship between Paul and Onesimus was so close that Paul mentioned Onesimus in that letter as "my son", "who is my very heart". Not only that Paul also mentioned, "so if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me".

I can't imagine someone sending me a runaway slave from my house and asking me to respect him like an elder. I appreciate Philemon even though he had all the rights to punish him when he ran away and to prove Paul how bad Onesimus was, he was willing to listen to Paul and given him that respect which can make him to be a great pastor. Philemon is known to be a leader who refresh the hearts of the saints. His faith in Christ and his love for the saints is really admirable. It is great to have a leader like that in Colossae.

The another thing I noticed in Paul's letter is the way he appealed. His appeal was filled with statements based on love and not on position or authority. He gently abolished the "master-slave" relationship. Anyone who accepts Jesus as Lord becomes our brother or sister even if they work under us. How can a brother / sister be our slave?

From useless to useful, unprofitable to profitable, slave to saint, Onesimus is a great example of one who loved God. He was willing to travel all the way back from Rome to Colossae and reconcile with Philemon his master. He was ready to submit himself to his masters authority. A willing heart made Onesimus to grow as a great leader.

Is it not true what Jesus said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave". Onesimus displayed the heart of a great servant, a slave and a saint.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Day Of The Lord

Last week in our gathering in Cappadocia, Peter uncle's letter was read. I remembered seeing Peter uncle, couple of years back for the first time on the day of the Pentecost, the day I will never forget in my life. Suddenly we heard a sound like the blowing of a violent wind. That's when Peter uncle stood up and talked about the prophecies of Joel with regards to the great and glorious day of the Lord. Moved by the Spirit I got baptized along with many others on that day. From that day onwards my life was so different.

The day of the Lord is the time when the current state of affairs will be replaced with the Lord's intended order – a time of justice and covenant fulfillment. This will result both in judgment on those opposing God and in blessing for God's people. When we are right with God, we look forward to the day of the Lord. We wanted God to intervene and bring His intended order. When we are not right with God, we dread the day of the Lord. Many prophets at different times talked about the day of the Lord...

- **Isaiah** : See, the day of the LORD is coming --a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger-- to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it.
- **Ezekiel** : For the day is near, the day of the LORD is near-- a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations.
- **Joel** : Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand-- a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness.
- **Amos** : Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light.
- **Obadiah** : "The day of the LORD is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head.
- **Zephaniah** : Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near. The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has invited.
- **Zechariah** : A day of the LORD is coming when your plunder will be divided among you.
- **Malachi** : "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.

Though many nations experience a "day of the Lord", there will be a final "day of the Lord" when a permanent world order of God's choosing will be established. It will come like a thief. Let us be on our guard so that we may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from our secure position. Let us grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. (2 Peter 3:14)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

No One Like Him....

Few years back the condition of Jerusalem was very bad. No regular sacrifices to God, no singing, not much of any organized events. King Ahaz made a mess of everything. He closed the temple in Jerusalem, imported a pagan altar from Damascus and erected shrines to other gods on every street corner. He followed the detestable ways of nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He even sacrificed his son in the fire. He took the silver and gold found in the temple of the LORD and sent it as gift to the kings of Assyria. When we follow the practices of other nations, will it not arouse the anger of the Lord?

After his death, his son Hezekiah became the king. It was to our surprise that he was totally different. In the first month of the first year of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple of the LORD and repaired them. He called all of us (the priests and the Levites) and said...

- "Listen to me, Levites! Consecrate yourselves now and consecrate the temple of the LORD, the God of your fathers. Remove all defilement from the sanctuary.
- Our fathers were unfaithful; they did evil in the eyes of the LORD our God and forsook him. They turned their faces away from the Lord's dwelling place and turned their backs on him.
- They also shut the doors of the portico and put out the lamps. They did not burn incense or present any burnt offerings at the sanctuary to the God of Israel.
- Therefore, the anger of the LORD has fallen on Judah and Jerusalem; he has made them an object of dread and horror and scorn, as you can see with your own eyes.
- This is why our fathers have fallen by the sword and why our sons and daughters and our wives are in captivity.
- Now I intend to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger will turn away from us.
- My sons, do not be negligent now, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before him and serve him, to minister before him and to burn incense."

Unlike other kings, King Hezekiah did not scurry around seeking political alliances to bolster his strength. He began by cleaning out God's house – the temple in Jerusalem. When he began this task, some of the priests and Levites who had been assigned to coordinate temple worship had dwindled away, demoralized. King Hezekiah rallied them like an army and gave them marching orders: Clean up yourselves and clean up the temple. We celebrated a great Passover in his reign. Some ridiculed him but he held fast to the LORD and did not stop following him. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah. Love and faithfulness keep a king safe; through love his throne is made secure.

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. (I Corinthians 3:16-17)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Loved it like love songs....

I was among the first wave of captives to Babylon, nearly 500 miles away from Jerusalem. We were living in a refugee settlement beside a river. We longed for a chance to return to our homeland. But we had a neighbor who constantly talking bad news about Jerusalem. He was constantly talking about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. We really don't want to hear but he was confident of whatever he was talking.

We also felt weird about his life. He conveyed many things dramatically...

- He drew a map of Jerusalem to depict the siege by the Babylonians
- He lied down on his right side 390 days and on his left side 40 days to symbolize the sin of Israel
- He ate a small amount of food and water over a fire kindled with cow dung (consequence of the seige).
- He shaved off hair, burnt it and scattered it (fate of the people of Jerusalem)
- He dug a hole in the wall of his house and went through it like someone who would be escaping (fall of Jerusalem).
- He ate and drank with lots of trembling (fear of the people).
- He drew a picture of the route taken by the conquering troops (Nebuchadnezzar's military route).
- He did not mourn for his wife who died suddenly (lack of mourning for Jerusalem).
- He inscribed the names of Israel and Judah on two sticks (reunion of the nations of Israel and Judah).

None of us believed, that most of this would happen in our lifetime. We thought that he was just telling stories. Would God let Jerusalem fall as he was stubbornly predicting? Not only about Jerusalem, he was also talking about other nations like Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon and Egypt. Being a refugee we wondered how he was able to talk about this boldly. He was not happy about some prophets and said, "Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! They would 'whitewash' a bad situation with claims that God could never let Jerusalem be destroyed".

Then, after few years, news came that Babylon had conquered Jerusalem. Suddenly this neighbor Ezekiel became popular. People talked about him, flocked to hear his words, expresses devotion. But they listened to Ezekiel without changing their hearts. He was just someone "who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well". Let us not put out the Spirit's fire, let us not treat prophecies with contempt. Let us test everything and hold on to the good. Let us avoid every kind of evil.

Before his downfall a man's heart is proud, but humility comes before honor. He who answers before listening-- that is his folly and his shame. (Proverbs 18:12-13)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

From a man of standing to almost a scoundrel

I was remembering the divided kingdom of Israel, when I heard the following statement from Jesus, “Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined and a house divided against itself will fall”. I was curiously doing a study and came across the following statement again and again, “sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat”. The Lord removed the Israelites from his presence because of sins of Jeroboam. I found the following about Jeroboam.

- Jeroboam was a man of standing, and when Solomon saw how well the young man did his work, he put him in charge of the whole labor force of the house of Joseph.
- One fine day prophet Ahijah showed Jeroboam that he would lead ten tribes of a divided Israel after the death of Solomon.
- This may be the reason why Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam.
- Fearing for his life, Jeroboam fled to Egypt, to Shishak the king and stayed there until Solomon’s death. Probably he married one of the princess there in Egypt.
- Years later he came back to make peace with Solomon’s son Rehoboam, but found the son harsher than Solomon. The fed-up northern tribes rebelled.
- Jeroboam became the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel.
- He started his own compelling religion in the north, clever but terrible choice.
- God made him a king but he made gods. He made two golden calves, one in Bethel and other in Dan. He built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites. The Levites even abandoned their pasturelands and property, and came to Judah and Jerusalem because Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them as priests of the LORD.
- One day when King Jeroboam heard what the man of God cried out against the altar at Bethel, he stretched out his hand from the altar and said, "Seize him!" But the hand shriveled up, so that he could not pull it back. Based on Jeroboam’s request, the man of God interceded with the LORD, and the king's hand was restored.
- Even after this, Jeroboam did not change his evil ways, but once more appointed priests for the high places from all sorts of people. Anyone who wanted to become a priest he consecrated for the high places.
- This was the sin of the house of Jeroboam that led to its downfall and to its destruction from the face of the earth.

All in all, Jeroboam is an example of sinful failure. He failed despite great blessing and favor from God. He failed for the sake of mere political advantage. Jeroboam’s rule may have begun with God’s approval, but he never lived up to God’s call. God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Let us desire to live honorably in every way.

**Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.
(Galatians 1:10)**

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Crisis in Caesarea

I live in Caesarea, which is about 70 miles from Jerusalem. You follow Jesus Christ in this city, then you are risking your life. Even though it's been around 400 years since Christ came, the Romans were torturing disciples for their faith. Time and again we see many people die because they followed Christ. The list of Martyrs includes Lucius, Absalom, Lorgius, Mammes, Dorothea.... The following give more details about Caesarea....

- Around 300 years before Christ, the Phoenicians built a small port here, and called it Stratos Tower.
- It was captured by Alexander Janneus around 100 years before Christ and became a Jewish community
- When general Pompey conquered Israel in around 60 years before Christ, Stratos Tower became a non Jewish city. Emperor Augustus gave the city to King Herod, who built an entirely new city and called it Caesarea to honor the emperor.
- It was designed as a model Roman city, complete with aqueducts, sewers, a forum, mosaic walkways covered with marble colonnades, a racetrack [hippodrome], an amphitheater (larger than the Coliseum in Rome) & a large temple dedicated to Augustus & Roma.
- It had 8000 acre seaport that rivaled Alexandria & Antioch in commercial importance.
- It had 40 acre harbor which was bigger than that at Athens.
- It was the capital of Roman province of Judea for about 600 years.
- It was the official residence of the Herodian kings and headquarters of Festus, Felix and other Roman Governors and the Roman troops.
- Peter first took the message of Gospel to Gentiles at Caesarea, while in the house of Cornelius, the centurion in what was known as the "Italian Regiment".
- Philip the Evangelist lived in Caesarea with his four daughters who prophesied.
- Not long after his conversation, Paul sailed from Caesarea to his native Tarsus. Paul passed through this city during his 2nd and 3rd missionary journeys. Later he was held prisoner in the city for two years, where he was put on trial before his voyage to Rome. Paul's powerful speech before Felix, Festus and King Agrippa happened here.
- It was at Caesarea that Herod Agrippa was struck down by God for his blasphemy.
- Later Caesarea became a famous church center and the church fathers, Origen and Eusebius, taught in its school and its library (from this library came the edition of Hebrew Bible known as the Hexapla). We can also see the original Hebrews version of Mathews Gospels here.

There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siegeworks against it. Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man. (Ecclesiastes 9:14-15)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Probably the second wisest man

Once when I was attending a gathering in Ephesus, Paul's letter was read. I got more inspired to read the book of Psalms. In that letter, Paul mentioned, "*Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*". As I was doing this, I came across this Psalm where it says "a maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite". I was more keen on finding out who Ethan was?

This Psalm begins with word of praise for Yahweh's goodness and covenant faithfulness. It recounts the promises made to king David and the covenant which God had established with him. Also the Psalmist laments what seemed like God's lack of remembrance of his covenant promises. But finally, the tone changes once again with these words, "Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen".

Who was Ethan the Ezrahite? When I looked into the books, this man is mentioned as someone who was famous for his wisdom yet surpassed by Solomon's greater wisdom - *Solomon was wiser than any other man, including Ethan the Ezrahite--wiser than Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol*. He was a standard of wisdom to whom King Solomon is compared favorably. Could Ethan be the second wisest man?

Interestingly the same four names - Ethan, Heman, Calcol and Darda, also mentioned as sons of Zerah and grandchildren of patriarch Judah - *The sons of Zerah: Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol and Darda --five in all*.

Ethan's Psalm ended with the following lines..

- How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire?
- Remember how fleeting is my life. For what futility you have created all men!
- What man can live and not see death, or save himself from the power of the grave?
- O Lord, where is your former great love, which in your faithfulness you swore to David?
- Remember, Lord, how your servant has been mocked, how I bear in my heart the taunts of all the nations,
- the taunts with which your enemies have mocked, O LORD, with which they have mocked every step of your anointed one.
- Praise be to the LORD forever! Amen and Amen.

Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD. They rejoice in your name all day long; they exult in your righteousness. For you are their glory and strength, and by your favor you exalt our horn. (Psalm 89:15-17)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Believers who are still worldly

I am from Corinth. My childhood days were horrible. The city of Corinth was prosperous, busy and growing. It had a reputation of reckless pursuit of pleasure. The Corinthian people were known for partying, drunkenness and loose sexual morals. Having lost all sensitivity, I gave myself over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. But thanks to God who sent Paul who started the church in Corinth. Not only me, many started believing and the church grew in numbers.

Paul spent around 18 months establishing the church while working as a tentmaker and then left to Syria. After few years, the church faced many challenging situations. Hearing all this, Paul wrote a letter to us and challenged us not be worldly. If there is jealousy and quarreling among us, then we are worldly. We are either in the process of "regeneration" by obeying the word of God or "degeneration" by obeying the word of the devil. Is the church influencing the city, or is the city influencing the church? Given below are few of the directions given by Paul in that letter.

Dilemma	Direction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christians' hearts were divided because of their lack of spiritual understanding and growth. • They were divided over a number of issues. • There were factions within the church. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to work together to build up each other and give Christ the glory. • We must work hard to build upon the truth of God's Word and not the foolishness of the world. The world around us offers many theories, but God gives us facts! • Paul instructed them to drop their pride and strive for unity. Love is not "self seeking".
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abuse and Misuse of Spiritual Gifts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Corinthians were much more crazed by the "Love of Power" than the "Power of Love". • Paul instructed the Christians that their main concern should be love and unity in the body.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life after death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the resurrection had not been happened, all preaching would have been in vain, as would be our faith and we would still be in our sins. • Paul appealed to the Corinthians to remember the purpose of their own baptism

"Everything is permissible"--but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"--but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others. (1 Corinthians 10:23-24)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh

When I think about water problem, I remember this place Kadesh. When we were there in Kadesh few years before, there was no water for the community. The people gathered in opposition to Moses grandpa and Aaron grandpa. By the waters of Meribah they angered the Lord and trouble came to Moses grandpa because of them, for they rebelled against the Spirit of God and rash words came from Moses grandpa's lips. Later grandpa told me that, because of this, in which Aaron grandpa too was involved, neither of them will be setting foot within the promised land. In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared.

After that incident my father told me that it was test from the LORD for their hardened hearts. He recollected another incident at Kadesh when he was in his early fifties. I too remember to some extent as I was 15 years old then. The whole assembly talked about stoning Moses grandpa and Aaron grandpa. Many people wanted to choose another leader and go back to Egypt. Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the meeting and shook the desert of Kadesh. "What really happened?", I asked my father.

He told me that, from Kadesh Barnea Moses grandpa sent twelve leaders from each tribe to explore the land of Canaan. They came back and ten out of the twelve leaders made the whole community grumble by spreading a bad report about it. They discouraged the people from entering the land the LORD had given them. The LORD's anger burned against Israel and He made all of us wander in the desert. Those who grumbled against the LORD and those who were twenty years old or more will not enter the promised land. He said..

- How long will these people treat me with contempt?
- How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them?
- How long will this wicked community grumble against me?

My father encouraged me to follow the LORD whole heartedly. He also added, "Do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them".

Now we have crossed the Zered valley. My father is no more. It's been thirty eight years since the time we left Kadesh Barnea. The entire generation of fighting men had perished from the camp. Only Joshua uncle and Caleb grandpa with us. Soon we will be missing Moses grandpa. We are looking forward to enter the promised land. Dear LORD help us to remember Kadesh when we face any fears and trials in our journey. You are our refuge.

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you. Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD. (Psalm 89:14-15)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The blood of Zechariah

I was in the gathering when Jesus said the following statements.... *Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.* This made me to search about the blood of Abel and Zechariah.

I found that Abel's blood cried out to God from the ground. Abel, the first righteous martyr. I found Zechariah, probably the last righteous martyr in the Hebrew Bible. He lived during the reign of King Joash. During that period the people abandoned the temple of the LORD, the God of their fathers, and worshiped Asherah poles and idols. Because of their guilt, God's anger came upon Judah and Jerusalem.

Although the LORD sent prophets to the people to bring them back to him, and though they testified against them, they would not listen. Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. He stood before the people and said, "This is what God says: 'Why do you disobey the Lord's commands? You will not prosper. Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.'" But they plotted against him, and by order of the king they stoned him to death in the courtyard of the Lord's temple. As Zechariah was dying he said, "May the LORD see this and call you to account." Are we able to identify the LORD's prophets amid us? When we abandon God's kingdom, He sends them.

Interestingly I also noticed that the name "Zechariah" was so common. I could see more than 20 Zechariahs in the books. Some of them are listed below...

1. Zechariah, son of Jeroboam, king of Israel.	9. Zechariah, the prophet, a descendant of Iddo
2. Zechariah, son of Azaz	10. Zechariah, son of Jehoida
3. Zechariah, son of Meshelemiah	11. Zechariah, son of Bebai
4. Zechariah, son of Jeiel	12. Zechariah, son of Amariah
5. Zechariah, son of Isshaiah	13. Zechariah, son of Pashur
6. Zechariah, son of Hosah the Merarite, a wise counselor.	14. Zechariah, son of Jonathan
7. Zechariah, son of Benaiah	15. Zechariah, son of Jeberekiah
8. Zechariah, son of Jehoshaphat	16. Zechariah, father of John

Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets. (Luke 6:22-23)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The righteous will see and fear

Recently I attended a funeral of a rich and arrogant man. He was a mighty influential man who used to boast, all day long. He did not make God his stronghold but trusted in his great wealth and grew strong by destroying others. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors. Those who are far from God will perish. Sometimes I get deceived seeing such people, they have no struggles, their bodies are healthy and strong, free from the burdens common to man, clothe themselves with violence, scoff and speak with malice, always carefree and increase in wealth. But God places them on a slippery ground and cast them down to ruin. The righteous will see and fear.

I remember another man, Doeg, the Edomite, king Saul's head shepherd, when I was working as an official under king Saul. Something happened between king and David, and king wanted to kill David. Just few weeks back king hurled his spear at Jonathan, his son, to kill him because he talked in favor of David. King's anger flared up at Jonathan and he scolded him. I remember king saying to Jonathan, "as long as David, son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!" Jonathan was not happy about his father's shameful treatment.

After some time, at Gibeah, this man Doeg told the king that he saw David at Nob with priest Ahimelech. He also added that the priest had inquired of the LORD for him and gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine. Then the king sent for the priest Ahimelech and his father's whole family, who were the priests at Nob. The conversations between king and the priests went on and the king ordered us to kill the priests of the LORD. But we were not willing to raise a hand to strike the priests of the LORD.

The king then ordered Doeg, "You turn and strike down the priests." So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep. Doeg was a man who loved evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth, loved every harmful word. His tongue plots destruction, it is like a sharpened razor, he practiced deceit. I can't believe even the king could go to that extent of killing the priests of the LORD.

The unfaithful people make ready their tongue like a bow, to shoot lies; it is not by truth that they triumph in the land. They go from one sin to another; they do not acknowledge the LORD. But God will refine and test them. It is good to be near the LORD.

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Ebenezer - The Stone of Help

I was along with the Israelites when we went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek. The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield. When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, "Why did the LORD bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies."

When the ark of the Lord's covenant came into the camp at Ebenezer, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. But still the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. The ark of God was captured. We felt that the Glory has departed from Israel. When the ark was in Philistine territory, we heard God's hand was very heavy on them. The city was filled with panic. Many died and many were afflicted with tumors.

After around seven months, when I was there with the people of Beth Shemesh, we saw the ark. We rejoiced at the sight. The Levites took down the ark of the LORD and placed them on the large rock. We offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices to the LORD. But God struck down some of the men of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy of them to death because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. The people mourned because of the heavy blow the LORD had dealt them, and the men of Beth Shemesh asked, "Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God?"

Then all the people of Israel turned back to the LORD. Samuel was serving as the leader of Israel at Mizpah. Samuel asked us to assemble at Mizpah to intercede with the LORD. On that day we fasted and confessed how we had sinned against the LORD. Suddenly we heard the rulers of the Philistines coming to attack us. We were afraid and asked Samuel to cry out to the LORD our God to rescue us from the hand of Philistines.

While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them. Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far has the LORD helped us". The LORD Almighty -- he is the King of glory.

Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. The LORD guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant. (Psalm 25:8-10)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

Poor people who owned nothing

We were all hoping that the LORD will miraculously deliver us from the hands of Babylonians. Except for Jeremiah, many prophets promised deliverance. But Jerusalem was burned and destroyed. The Chaldeans burned the king's house and the houses of the people with fire and broke down the walls of Jerusalem. People were carried away as captive to Babylon. We being poor and had nothing, were left behind. We were given vineyards and fields to work with. We had to start our life all over again.

The King of Babylon appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam as governor over the land. Earlier Jeremiah also was bound in chains among all the captives but he was freed. Later he stayed with Gedaliah. When all the army officers who were still in the open country heard about Gedaliah, they all came to him. Gedaliah took an oath to reassure them with the following words. "Do not be afraid to serve the Babylonians, " he said. "Settle down in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go well with you. I will represent you before the Babylonians who come to us, but you are to harvest the wine, summer fruit and oil, and put them in your storage jars, and live in the towns you have taken over."

After some time all the Jews in Moab, Ammon, Edom and all the other countries heard about Gedaliah, and they all came back to the land of Judah. We harvested an abundance of wine and summer fruit. Things were going fine till we heard the death news of Gedaliah. Ishmael son of Nethaniah along with this men struck down Gedaliah. He also killed many Jews as well as the Babylonian soldiers who were there.

The day after Gedaliah's assassination, Ishmael and his men slaughtered more than 50 men and threw them into a cistern. Then we became captives to Ishmael and he was planning to take us to the Ammonites. But we saw Johanan with other army officers to our rescue. Ishmael and his men escaped but we were near Bethlehem on our way to Egypt to escape the Babylonians. Then we all approached Jeremiah to pray for us and ask for directions from the LORD. Jeremiah told us not to go to Egypt. But Johanan with few other arrogant men said to Jeremiah that he was lying and took us to Egypt. Jeremiah also was taken along with us. We see the army officers not listening to the words of Jeremiah.

Every time we think, the LORD is on our side without listening to His words and not doing things according to His will. Will God again say "Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways". Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. (Hebrews 3:12-13)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

The Righteous will live by Faith

My grandfather always shares the story of his life in Babylon as exile and his travel back to Jerusalem. He had so much of faith in God and taught me to have faith in God. I was curious to know more about why God sent his chosen ones as exiles. That's when I found this interesting book of prophet Habakkuk. I am not sure how long Habakkuk had been praying for God to do something about the injustice around him in the nation of Judah.

Habakkuk : *How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted....*

God : *"Look at the nations and watch-- and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own. They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor.*

When we pray for God to change a situation, it would be hard to hear from God that he is raising up some ruthless people to handle that situation. Habakkuk continues...

Habakkuk : *O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?*

God : *See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright-- but the righteous will live by his faith..... But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him."*

The righteous will live by faith not puffed up or proud. True faith looks outside of self unto the LORD, while pride always looks to self. If you are declared righteous, you have done it by a relationship of faith. We are called to live by faith and nothing else. At the end Habakkuk said *Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.* Let us live by faith not by sight. Trust in the Lord forever.

"He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him". But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. (Hebrews 10:37-39)

VOICE OF THE SERVANTS

Christian Fiction Series

An Imposing Altar

The LORD gave us, Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and we took possession of it. The LORD gave us rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. I remember the day Joshua calling the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh and blessing them and sent them back to their homes. For almost seven years these fighting men, leaving their families behind east of Jordan, came along with us to help us conquer the west of the Jordan. Also they were completely obedient and helpful to Joshua. Great to have brothers like that who can go the extra mile.

After some time we heard that these men built a great, impressive altar on the border of Canaan at Geliloth near the Jordan on the Israelite side. So the whole assembly of Israel gathered at Shiloh to go to war against them. Ten men were chosen, one for each of the tribes of Israel. I was one among them. Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, and we went to the land of Gilead--to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh. We asked them, "How could you break faith with the God of Israel like this? How could you turn away from the LORD and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him now? If you rebel against the LORD today, tomorrow he will be angry with the whole community of Israel". With many other words we confronted them. We wanted to reconcile before we wage war with them.

Then Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh replied, "The Mighty One, God, the LORD! The Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows! And let Israel know! If this has been in rebellion or disobedience to the LORD, do not spare us this day. If we have built our own altar to turn away from the LORD and to offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, or to sacrifice fellowship offerings on it, may the LORD himself call us to account. We build this altar--not for burnt offerings or sacrifices. On the contrary, it is to be a witness between us and you and the generations that follow, that we will worship the LORD at his sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices and fellowship offerings".

We were pleased to hear what they spoke to us with many other explanations. They have not acted unfaithfully toward the LORD in this matter. We misunderstood them. They just built that altar so big and impressive so that it would last and stand as a memorial to future generations. I was so impressed to see the way both the sides were willing to go all out to love the LORD, love one another and to think the best for one another and future generations. A single moment of misunderstanding is so poisonous that it makes us forget the hundred lovable moments spent together within a minute. We went back and reported to all Israelites. They were glad to hear the report and praised God.

It is not good to punish an innocent man, or to flog officials for their integrity. A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered. Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue. (Proverbs 17:26-28)