

Part 3.

Let's look at what seems to be developing. I spoke of a pattern that can now begin to be seen. If you go back into the early days of man, say, from Adam until the end of the Egyptian captivity, you'll note that God did His own speaking. We assume that God spoke directly to Adam, even after the man had sinned, for there is no mention of any other channel being used when God sought out Adam, who was hiding because he had become aware of his nakedness. We find the same 'One to one' with Enoch, and on up to Noah. It is direct communication. It continues in the same way with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the same seems to apply with Joseph. Each was a prophet in his own right, but not with the commission that the later 'prophets' had. These latter don't come onto the scene until the 'family' has developed into a Nation. When God begins to deal with them as a Nation, He raises up Moses and the Nation begins to hear from God via those Prophets. Moses is the first of the Prophets and their ministry applies to that nation until the death of John the Baptist. John seems to have been aware of the transition that was taking place from prophets unto 'Son of God' as we read in Jn: 3v30, (see from v22.) When, as humans, we compare John with the miracles of Moses or Elijah and co: we probably wouldn't rate him quite so highly as them; yet the scriptures do. Their comment is found in Matt: 11 v 7-11-14, and we need to bear in mind that those words were spoken by Jesus Himself. John didn't just speak the Words of God, as a prophet would, he actually introduced the Word Himself to the People. So, whilst we can't say that John was the greatest of all, we can say that there were none greater than he was. In fact the Lord Himself made John to be – v9 – '*A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.*' However, the Lord hadn't finished there for He then revealed that 'he that is least in the kingdom of heaven' is greater than John – v11. Don't miss that. Greater than the one whom the Lord Himself had declared to be, 'more than a prophet'. It makes one begin to appreciate more those words found in Heb: 2v3, where it terms what we've got as 'this so great salvation?'

I came across a very interesting statement that was made by a Jew, who was an authority on their history. In fact he was said to be the leading authority on their history and culture. He was born in 1825, of Jewish parents in Vienna. He was a convert to Christianity and his scholarship was well recognised. He states that at the time of John the Baptist's birth, there was a system in place that was, shall we say, not the norm. As you will be aware, after the Babylonian captivity, the return to the Land consisted largely of two tribes, Judah and Benjamin; the other ten tribes, who had split off under the kingship of Jeroboam, having set up their capital in Samaria, had already gone into captivity about 130 years before the Southern Kingdom were taken into Babylon. Some of the Northern Kingdom people had returned to Jerusalem because of the paganism that Jeroboam had introduced, but the bulk of them had gone into captivity and been lost to history; though those with B.I leanings have other ideas about that. Anyway, according to this man, at the time of the birth of John the Baptist, the Jews had a very large number of Priests and only two tribes left to minister to. He states that the wealthy ones lived mainly in Jerusalem, a large portion of the community in that city being priests, whilst something like half of Jericho was occupied by more of them. The poorer families of priests lived in the hill country round about Jerusalem.

It seems that because of the surfeit of priests, there was no way that they could all get into the Temple to minister. It was decided therefore that they should have a system of casting lots. This was a well-established way of solving problems and of getting God's mind on a matter. Each priest's name was put into the bag and whoever's name came up, got to minister in the Temple. The downside to this was that you were then exempt from all future lotteries. The result was that if you were lucky you got **one** crack at officiating in a ceremony ***during the whole of your life***, or, if you were unlucky, you never did get a chance. Now let me explain my purpose in telling this. It is to make you aware that God is in total control, all the time, even if it doesn't make the headlines in the national news. The leaders of the nation at that time don't really shine through as 'close to God', do they? So, take a look at what follows and see the controlling hand of God in it all, despite a pretty dead system. You'll find the account in the beginning of Luke's gospel. Because Zacharias and his wife are living in the hill country, they would not be as wealthy as the majority of the priests. They are very old, God-fearing and have no children; a matter that is causing Elizabeth anguish, due to the general attitude towards barrenness. Lots of prayer has gone up – we see this in other cases where God is going to do something special – but apparently all of this prayer hasn't moved God. However, God was completely aware of the situation, but the timing hadn't been right. Now it is. The first thing that happens is that Zacharias, this old priest, comes up on the lottery. He is the one who is to burn the incense. That gets him to be exactly in the place, where Gabriel is waiting for him with the news that their prayers for a son are about to be answered. Try and put yourself in his position and you'll understand why he got troubled and scared. Not only is this fact revealed about the child but also a briefing on the life of that son who was to come into their home. When we consider their apparent age, one has some sympathy for the fellow's doubts. After all, he has been told what the son's name is to be, and that will cause a break with long held traditions, and also that the promised son was to come in the spirit and power of the long awaited Elijah. This must have come as a real shaker on the top of his lottery win. The whole nation was waiting for this 'Elijah' event, and I've no doubt that it just about blew his mind. Then too, in view of the fact that he was from the hill country, he would certainly not be highly thought of by the hierarchy. 'A poor boy from the hills', sort of thing. However, there is more, for the timing is absolutely running in line with the arrival of God's Own Son. **Now, that is control.** Furthermore, it is worth noting that the choice went to a poor couple whose line was about to die out. That information alone, i.e, that their name would continue in Israel, was, in itself, of no small significance to them. Now, they were 'something else' as we would say today. I'll make just one more point on this subject for now, because if there is a pattern emerging, it could be relevant, and it's this. John the Baptist, who turns out to be the last of the prophets, which line had begun with Moses, was just six months older than Jesus. As John died sometime after the start of Jesus' ministry, their lives overlapped by over thirty years, something we might expect to see if there should be another 'speaking' to come.

What we have then adds up to this. God has come and 'spoken' **directly** to men, seemingly from Adam through to Joseph. After Joseph's time, the family had developed into a nation and God 'raised up' a line of Prophets to bring His Word **indirectly** to the nation. (*The change in the Priesthood that was brought in through the Prophet line is another subject.*) The next stage occurs, as we see in Hebrews, when the Son is brought into the world, and is shown to be the second 'speaking'. Once again, this is **directly** through a member of the Godhead. It will be obvious, of course, that the prophets didn't choose themselves. After all, the desire

to prophesy doesn't make you a prophet, and 2 Pet: 1v21 proves this fact – *'For no prophecy of scripture is of (its) own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever borne by man's will; but men spake from God, being borne (on) by (the) Holy Spirit.'* There we have it settled. Scriptural prophecy cannot originate from man. Therefore, God selected and anointed the prophets through the Holy Spirit. Once again, we would expect this practice to be repeated when it came time for the Lord to speak through them 'that heard Him' – Heb 2v3-4. Those 'who heard Him' were obviously the Twelve and that is confirmed by the many signs and wonders and powers that accompanied their witness. It is worth noticing here the scripture found in 1 Cor: 1v22, showing the desire on the part of the Jews for a sign. This, it seems, was not the way of Gentiles, in that they preferred wisdom. *(Beware of this subject of 'signs' though, for Jesus told the leaders of the Jews that they wouldn't be getting any, other than the sign of Jonah being in the belly of the whale for three days, as He Himself would be in the belly of the earth for that time'. It is necessary to grasp 1 Cor; 1 v 17-31 where we see that God has come in on His Own terms altogether and that those terms do not make any sense to the wise or to the seekers of wisdom, but to those who come in faith. We are grounded upon the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. When in extremities that is certainly where Paul put his faith, as 2 Cor: 1v8-10.)* When we look at such scriptures as Acts 4v33 circa, we note that the witness was 'of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus', and therefore, that He was alive within them. Paul's argument in 1 Cor: 15v 12-22 explains the logic of the argument.

At this point I'd like to explain something about Paul the apostle. I've heard it said that the disciples made a mistake when they replaced Judas. The argument being that it should have been Paul who got the position, and not Matthias. After all, we don't find ourselves overwhelmed by what Matthias did afterwards. I have to admit that I did give this some thought for a while, but the issue was settled for me when I saw exactly what happened when the lots were given. We find the account in Acts 1v15—26. There are a couple of points here that we need to take into our thinking, the first being that, at that time Paul was anything but a convert to Christianity. In fact, one can say with little fear of any contradiction that he was its leading opponent. Hardly likely to be their choice! The second point is the basis upon which Peter set the proposition, namely that the candidate was required to have 'compared with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that He was taken up from us' - Acts 1 v 21-2 – and Paul certainly doesn't fit that requirement. So, we can't fit him and his ministry into that slot. If we feel that he needs a place in this picture, it will have to be somewhere else.

What have we got now? We have seen that in the beginning of His dealings with mankind, God did His own talking. This phase continued until the family had developed into a nation and that nation was in bondage to the Egyptians. When the time was ripe – and the Lord had told Abram exactly when that would be – they would come forth again to take up their inheritance in the Land. If you take a look at the time when the Lord showed this to Abram, you will see a principle come through, and that is concerning 'fullness'. Look at Gen: 15v16 and note that God looks to see what you are by what you are full of. In this case, the Land would not be handed over to the Israelites until the Amorites were 'full' of their iniquity. When that occurred, their judgment would come forth too. Its the same as when one picks fruit. You wait until its ripe and then you know for sure just what it is. With hindsight, we know that at the appropriate time, Moses would be trained in 'all the arts of the Egyptians', his position would ensure that his schooling was of the highest standard available, and if history is anything to go by, he was the finest, and probably the bravest, leader the Egyptians had ever

had. Who better to handle a nation of slaves and turn them into a superb fighting force? Israel had a leader who knew the Egyptian mind through and through.

This second stage – the time of the Prophets – would continue until the coming on to the scene of time of the second member of the Godhead, i.e. The Son. As this ‘speaking’, where God talks to the nation through His Son, is another story altogether, we have surely found the third division of the Word, the sequence being as follows. First, God spoke directly to men, secondly, God spoke indirectly to His People through the Prophets, and then, thirdly, He spoke through ‘a Son’.

I suppose that at this stage, before we move on from the first ‘speaking’, it would be appropriate to see what God talked about to these People, whom we now know generally as the Jewish nation. We should not be unaware of the fact that during that time period, i.e. the time of the Prophets, that ten of the tribes affectively faded from the scene, when they were taken into captivity, and that from then on, there were just two tribes left, i.e. Judah and Benjamin, along with those who had returned to them from the Northern Kingdom because of the idolatry that developed there.

Briefly then, we find that God dealt mainly with a family, and you can trace that through the lists of names that we are given. Mankind effectively divided into two lines, namely those who stuck with God and those who went their own way. There seems to be a general rule used in the scriptures, that when the family increases in a generation, say there are three brothers, as with Noah’s sons, that there will be a brief sketch of the future of two of them, and then the account continues with the line that God is working through. Thus we see that Ham and Japheth are dealt with before the main line continues with Shem. I used to wonder how the pre-flood history came through to us, because to me, Noah was such a remote character. However, when we work out those lines of life, we find that Shem, who came through the Flood, was still alive for the first one hundred and fifty years of Abraham’s life, and furthermore, there is no doubt whatsoever in my mind, because of the system then in operation, that Abraham knew him.

You will know, as well as I do, that God took the family and taught them His ways. He told them what He would do, as with Abraham for instance, who was promised that he would become a great nation, etc; and told to the year when the captivity would end. Etc, etc. As one reads these accounts in the scriptures it is good to note how often God says, ‘And **I** will ---’. Once they had developed into a nation during their captivity, God began to deal with them through the Prophets, who were used to bring in the Law, establish them in the Land and to set up kings over them. When the last of the Prophets arrived, Israel was a captive nation, under a foreign king, and in no mind to accept their true One. That, basically – *there is much more of course* – is what God **‘said’**, directly to them and then indirectly via their prophets. They are God’s chosen People

We know that Jesus taught many things, but we need to ask ourselves, is there an underlying something that it all revolves around? I can suggest one thing that stands out. However, we shall have to face the fact that a lot of what Jesus said and did was later to influence **all** of mankind. We’re going to concentrate first on the portion that appertained to Israel as we go into the fourth session.

To be continued.

End of Session 3 - 9 Dec 2009