

Chapter 13

Prophets in the Season of Transition

Transition is a common word for prophets to speak out for prophets are always looking to move on to the next phase. Indeed one way of looking at life is to see that it is made up of transitioning from one phase to another: from the womb to the world, from babyhood to infancy, from infancy to childhood, and so on. Each phase is to be a good and healthy experience but each and every phase must give way to the next one.

This is exactly how it is in the kingdom of God. There is a phase of God's activity that is to shape the community of faith during that period, but there comes a time when there is a fresh breath of God and the community must move on. Discerning the time of transition is one of the roles that prophetic ministry should exercise. Transition, whether of an individual or corporate nature, is always a key and difficult time. It can be particularly challenging to those who have carried a weight of responsibility for leadership, for old certainties are shaken and roles are challenged during this time.

The narrative of Saul's kingship giving way to David's rule seems a very appropriate story-line to reflect on during a season of transition. Whenever a biblical story of this nature is used there are often aspects that do not fit, or when we force them to fit it becomes obvious that we are making more of the narrative than we should be. Nevertheless this narrative remains as a helpful guide in these seasons.

Saul – a good beginning

At the start of his reign Saul was not arrogant, nor did he believe that he was the one to fulfil the task. His coming to the kingdom was marked by God's choice, by God's anointing. By the end of his reign, however, the mark of God on him was evidently lacking. It was simply his physical stature, being head and shoulders above others, that remained. This is a salutary lesson for us all. We can begin well, in humility and with deep gratitude to the Lord, but we can still end up having no significant evidence of God's Spirit on us, and even resisting the next move of God.

I am not looking in these paragraphs to analyse Saul, although that is something that would have great value. My purpose is rather to consider how we live in the period of transition. It is important, though, to note that Saul quickly abandoned any practice of waiting on the Lord to seek his face for direction. That was probably what led to his downfall. If we do not seek the Lord we will resort to human wisdom as far as decision making is concerned.

Saul's leadership increasingly became a leadership devoid of the ongoing anointing of the Spirit and we could say that that it was dependent on position and this stature of being 'head and shoulders' above others. It is not a surprise that David, by contrast, is called a man after God's own *heart* (1 Sam. 13:14). The head with knowledge and ability, or the heart with a yieldedness and submission to the Lord's directive – that is a summary of the contrast between the two.

David – not lifting his hand against the Lord's anointed

Saul became motivated by jealousy, and pursued David seeking to kill him. Rather than supporting the one who would become king and enabling him to start well, he wanted to shut down all possibility of David ever coming to the throne. During that time David had two opportunities to kill Saul (1 Sam. 24:1-22; 26:5-25). On both occasions he refuses to take his fate in his own hands by ending Saul's time prematurely. In the time of transition we will have opportunities to move things forward in the 'right' direction, but must resist manipulating anything.

We can admire David for not taking Saul's life, but it would have been convenient if the Lord had removed Saul through death a short time after David acted righteously when he spared Saul's life. This would have confirmed that Saul's reign was over, that David was righteous and that he was evidently the Lord's choice; it would have confirmed that one era was over and another

was ready to begin. But the Lord did not do that, and Saul carried on as king over Israel for a number of years. Further, he carried on as king in spite of Samuel having proclaimed that the kingdom had been removed from him, and in spite of David having already received the anointing of the Spirit to be king. The Lord does not remove Saul from the scene and we will discover that in transition there are many things that carry on (and are allowed to carry on by the Lord) although their 'sale-by-date' has long since expired.

Why is it this way? I consider the issue is as simple as the Lord's focus is on what is rising, not on what is passing. The real issue is not to end Saul but to get David ready. We will return to this in more detail as this chapter closes. I now want to focus on another Old Testament narrative that challenges our sense of fairness but is a vital passage for prophets (and aspiring prophets) to read.

Spare a thought for the young prophet

Every prophet should read 1 Kings 13. The story is as follows. A young prophet comes from the south to Bethel and pronounces a judgment over it. The judgment is declared because this place (Bethel meaning 'house of God') had become a perverted house. The king is offended and stretches out his arm to call for the young prophet to be seized. As the king does this his arm becomes paralysed, and at the same time the altar splits open just as the young man had prophesied. As a result the king asks the young prophet to pray for him. A miracle takes place and his arm is restored. The king then asks for the young prophet to go home with him to eat and to receive a gift, but this offer is turned down for the young man cannot be bought and he is adamant about being committed to the instructions God gave him. He said,

Even if you were to give me half of your possessions, I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water here. For I was commanded by the word of the Lord: 'You must not eat bread or drink water or return by the way you came.' (1 Kings 13:8,9).

Thus far the story is a challenge to all who aspire to move prophetically, and it contains patterns that those who are prophetic within something fresh the Lord is doing have to note of. The issue of obedience and the practical (but really it is a spiritual) issue relating to material reward are areas where such a person has to be clean.

From this point on the story takes a strange twist, for an old prophet begins to get involved. This old prophet hears about what has taken place and wishes to make contact. He finds out where the young prophet has gone and eventually meets up with him. He, like the king before, invites the young man to eat with him. Again he replies,

I cannot go turn back and go with you, nor can I eat bread or drink water with you in this place. I have been told by the word of the Lord: 'You must not eat bread or drink water there or return by the way you came.' (1 Kings 13:16,17).

The old prophet then proceeds to deceive the young man claiming not only that he too is a prophet, but that he had had an angelic visitation and has been instructed to bring the young man back to eat (1 Kings 13:18). The young man is understandably intimidated and goes back to eat. Now the ultimate twist takes place. In the middle of the meal the old prophet begins to prophesy to the young man saying that he had been disobedient and so would now die prematurely. That very day the young man loses his life.

I read that one day and was somewhat incensed. I spoke out, 'The old prophet should have known better. That is most unfair.' No sooner had I said that when clearly I heard the following words, 'No the young prophet must know better.'

I meditated on this for days and came to the conclusion that the young man suffered as he did because he had the keys to the future. The old prophet no longer had access to those keys. He was by now a 'has-been', his days were over, and the weight of responsibility *for the future* now lay on the young man's shoulders.

Whether it is David or the young prophet the principle is the same. They are part of the new manifestation of what the Lord is doing and as such the real issue is getting them ready to carry the move of God forward. The issue is not one of having to deal with the old order by removing them, for that order is now all-but irrelevant. The issue is of making sure that what is new is ready to step up and take responsibility. Once the new is ready to step into the gap the old can go.

What then are the lessons to be learned? I am sure there are many but here are ones I believe are worthy of consideration:

- transition is a reality. We have to be ready to adjust what we have been doing in the light of a new season. Whatever has served in its season has to give way to what is the next relevant manifestation. God makes everything beautiful in its time (Eccl. 3:11).
- God will declare things over long before they are removed. We, however, must not focus on trying to get rid of what has been. Our focus has to be on the development of what is rising.
- old things remain because the weight of responsibility is on preparing what is rising. Although the old is over it still acts in the purposes of God (and in a strange way to our perspective) as a temporary protection for what is rising.
- the old no longer has the keys to the future, so the requirements on those embracing something new is greater. They have to know better and submit to the discipline of the Lord. They cannot take their level of response from a previous generation as what is required of each subsequent generation is higher than for the previous one. (See how Isaac cannot follow in the footsteps of Abraham when he experiences famine – Gen. 26:1-11 and Gen. 12:10-20.)

Generational transfer

The term 'generation' is not necessarily defined by age. It is more defined by position on the journey. There was a generation in Egypt, a generation that died in the wilderness, and a 'rising' generation that crossed over into the land. Within that generation were two elderly gentlemen: Caleb and Joshua. The tragedy is that there were only two – there could have been many more of that age group. As always we are in desperate need of another rising generation. As they are drawn together, from across the age spectrum, they will form one rising generation. However, although generation is not defined by age, we will not see a generation rise and be released if there is no focus on the younger generation. There has to be a strong element of those who are younger that rise at the forefront of that new generation.

There comes a time when there has to be a generational transfer. Such seasons are often marked by the deaths of some who have stood as generals in the army of God within a previous move. At such a time there will be the raising up of those whose hearts are soft (like David) and there will also be the marking out of certain movements as they become a shadow of what they were, but still having a 'head and shoulders' stature. There will be the raising up of those, at a grass roots level, who will carry the young prophet anointing. They will be marked in their radical commitment to the Lord. They will not be bought by the lure of success nor money. And there will also be the manifestation of those who are like the old prophet who can potentially derail the new prophetic voice.

With the application I have given to the biblical passages that have been quoted above, it becomes clear that the responsibility on the rising generation in a season of transition is enormous. They cannot raise their hand against what has been in place, but neither can they simply submit to it as there is a new level of call being issued forth from heaven. This calls for them to walk a path of great tension, but it is in walking that path that they are prepared for what they will step into. If they cannot walk that path of transition then the move of God does not move forward as it could.

A helpful analogy to generations working together is that of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God is a trans-generational God for he is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But we must not understand that Abraham is father, Isaac son, and Jacob, rather it is father Abraham, father Isaac, and father Jacob. The generations are not to line up hierarchically but alongside each other. This becomes very evident in a season of transition when former generations have to yield to the subsequent generation. Too often the older generation demands that the younger lives within their 'house' but without disturbing any of the 'furniture'. If there has to be an order it must be the reverse of the above. We have to encourage the older generation to follow those who are increasingly carrying the keys to open up the future. The reality is that some of the furniture has to be disturbed so that we can see a significant reshaping of the house itself.

Transition time is very critical and if we are going to attain the maximum amount of movement forward it is vital that former generations bless the rising generation. Where a blessing is not given a vacuum is left, and sadly the vacuum actually draws a curse into it. Too often a fresh move of God begins in a state of being disapproved of and this makes it difficult to really move forward. In response to curse we are told to bless and this is why the rising generation have to

bless, yet without compromising through any false loyalty.

Hezekiah – no thought for the future

Hezekiah received a wonderful miracle. Isaiah brought a message to Hezekiah and instructed him to set his house in order as he was going to die. But the king interceded, weeping before the Lord, and before Isaiah had left the palace grounds he had to return and say that the prophetic word had been reversed. The power of intercession is immense. Isaiah now said that God had heard his prayer, he was going to be healed and his life would be extended another fifteen years (2 Kings 20:1-6). An amazing miracle given that he was literally about to die, and one that we would wish to see repeated over and over. The remainder of the story, though, is so sad.

The relevance of the sign (let the shadow go back) seems at first to be simply incidental, but as we read through we realise that the direction of the shadow is not arbitrary. In calling for it to go back reveals a major problem in Hezekiah. This becomes clear when I paraphrase his request as asking for the clock to be turned back.

In life we have to learn that we cannot turn the clock back, and in a season of transition we have to resist the temptation of wanting to go back to a former time. Hezekiah is healed, a sign appears, but as the story unfolds we soon realise that this sign was an indication that Hezekiah is not making the transition to the next phase nor making preparations for the next generation.

Through his pride (2 Chron. 2:35) he allows Babylonian envoys to see everything within the palace. Isaiah then says,

The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord. And some of your descendents, your own flesh and blood, that will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon (2 Kings 20: 17,18).

Unbelievably Hezekiah responds with, 'The word of the Lord you have spoken is good' (2 Kings 20:19). This is a man who has lived through the power of repentance and intercession to see his own life extended, but now when something much bigger than his own personal survival is at stake he does not intercede at all. Now the relevance of the sign becomes evident. He received the word as a 'good' word because he thought that it would not happen in his lifetime (2 Kings 20:19). He had no sight of the future, his focus was on yesterday ('turn the clock back'), and he had no concern for what would follow him.

We must be those who are future-oriented. We can be thankful for every day that has gone, but we must long for the days we have never had.

I write from within a European, Western and Northern hemisphere context. We are at a major crisis point in history. Church as I have known it will survive throughout my lifetime, but that is not enough. We must be radically future-oriented now so that there will be something even more vibrant for our children and children's children. Otherwise what our 'fathers have stored up' will be lost and our children will be taken captive unable to bear fruit spiritually. Prophets must always be those who act today for the sake of tomorrow.

Premature death is a difficult thing to come to terms with, but lives that are extended (even through God's wonderful grace) and do not take thought for the future are an absolute disaster. The weight of responsibility is on the rising generation as the key-holders for the future, but the former generation have a responsibility to make preparations. They must be those who say, give us a sign, not just for us, but a sign of a new future. They must be those who ask for the clock to go forward.

Making personal transitions

Jesus always calls us to move forward and we often find ourselves battling with the desire to settle for a quiet life. The Lord calls us to journey with him in order to settle the land. The call is to respond to the cry of creation, to fill it with the presence of the Lord. In moving forward there are personal transitions and prophetic people have to make many personal transitions for they are to embody what the Lord is saying. As prophets they have to learn to do this for the sake of others, so they, more than any others, need to understand how to make successful transitions.

There are a number of issues that become relevant during personal transition. Understanding those issues will not remove every emotional reaction, but will help us know how to walk through that season.

- Transition is marked by a season ending in crisis

Most times of transition are normally marked by a season ending in a measure of *crisis*. It can often happen when we were not even considering making a transition. Our situation could well be interrupted by circumstances beyond our control. (We will label it is 'our circumstances' but we will later understand that the Lord was in the circumstances at an amazing level.) This change can involve a change of geography or of relational connections. The greater the transition the greater the change of circumstances we will experience.

- Transition takes place before we are ready

When a transition begins to take place there will always be a sense of a 'what could have been, what might have been, and even what should have been' aspect to it. If we do not realise that seasons end in what seems an unfinished way we will try to hold on rather than yield. We will experience that the full manifestation of the vision we were running with in that last phase has not taken place. We will have to let go, deal with regrets and grief, and then be ready to embrace the next season. At the end of a season there will be seed that remains but they have to go into the ground and die for the next harvest. Harvest only comes forth from seed that is sown, but the harvest is not identical to the seed. So a harvest comes from what goes into the ground. This will mean that the fulfillment of the visions we have carried will usually be different to what was originally expected. If we try and hold out for the fulfillment to be exactly as we thought we can run the danger of seeing the vision come to a stop at that point.

- How we leave a phase will shape how we enter the next phase

In marriage a major issue is of leaving the home of the parents in order to be joined to the marriage partner. If there is an inadequate leaving there will be very little effective joining that takes place. In personal transitions when the extent of the change is a significant one, then the measure of crisis will be greater, and there will be a very real experience of grief that ones goes through. Grief is there to cleanse us and take us to a new level, but if we do not pass through grief we will end in the prison of self-pity. (Grief that remains brings a crushing in spirit and will outwork in bodily pains – Prov. 17:22.)

Personal transition is a challenge for it appears as if things are ending prematurely, there is crisis around us, and it is not immediately evident as to the way forward. If these aspects are not understood then we hinder what is taking place, and the key way we do that is by holding on to the past.

Abraham's life was one of many transitions. The most traumatic one was when he was called to sacrifice the very thing (and for him, person) that the Lord had given him. He had to sacrifice the fulfillment of the promise that the Lord had given to him. He had to be willing to sacrifice his future, trusting in the Lord that there would be a resurrection. He patterned something for us. There will be some transitions where the very thing that we believe the Lord has given us he will ask to be placed on the altar. In such situations there will be a grace for yielding and a corresponding release of new authority.

Prophets will help the community of faith make effective transitions but they will not do that from some objective position. They will do so because they have been willing to make transitions in the private and public arenas. We began the first chapter with a welcome to the world of journey as a prophetic call was embraced. We end this final chapter to underline that our journey does not stop at some given point in our lives. Constant change is here to stay. We cry out, 'Maranatha', and we work and pray for the Bride to also call 'Maranatha', for the Spirit and the Bride must call for his return (Rev. 22:17).