



An introduction to the
book of Revelation

PART I

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LAMPSTAND CHURCHES

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PART 1

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Preface

In this book, which we have called *Lampstand Churches*, we will focus on the first three chapters of the book of Revelation. We will consider the personal admonition of Christ to each presbytery, and the nature of His priestly ministry as He walks among His lampstand churches. However, by way of introduction, it is helpful to remember that the book of Daniel is *the prelude* to the book of Revelation.

Jesus identified the sign of the end of the age by saying, 'When you see the abomination of desolation, which was *spoken of through Daniel the prophet*, standing in the holy place (let the one reading understand), then those who are in Judea must flee into the mountains.' Mat 24:15. When approaching the subject of Bible prophecy, it is necessary to begin with these words of Jesus, which direct our attention to the book of Daniel.

The book of Daniel reveals that there will be an 'abomination of desolation' standing in the holy place for 2300 years. Dan 8:12-14. The term 'abomination of desolation' is more accurately translated to be 'the abomination *which makes desolate*'. The abomination is the iniquity and religious idolatry that exists among God's people, which causes the loss of first love, the corruption of offering, and the violation of fellowship among brethren.

This iniquity, or lawlessness, is also called 'the transgression which causes horror'. Dan 8:13. It causes horror because it has granted Satan an advantage in the heavenly places, and has enabled him to empower the secular principle of the little horn in the world. The principle of the little horn is the manifestation of the spirit of antichrist in the world that persecutes and tramples the messengers of Christ. The Lord revealed to Daniel that 'the horror' of this trampling will continue for 2300 years. It began during the reign of the Greek empire, and will continue until the time of the end. Dan 8:8-17.

Daniel prophesied that those who have insight into the mystery of the cross will give wisdom and understanding to many believers during this time. Dan 11:33. They will shine brightly like the stars in the expanse of heaven, and lead many to the righteousness of faith. As the messengers of Christ fulfil this mandate, they will continue to fall and be trampled until the 2300 years have been completed. However, in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, this is a refining, purging, and purifying process for every messenger in the right hand of Christ. Dan 11:35.

The abomination which makes desolate is *the sign of the end of the age*, because the transgression which causes horror *will increase* among believers as we approach the time of the end. Mat 24:8-11. Jesus said, 'Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold.' Mat 24:12. As we approach the time of the end, the spirit of antichrist, which operates within the church, will increase, and will precipitate a great falling away from Christ. Many believers will reject the need to participate in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, and will draw back to perdition in unbelief. Heb 10:38-39.

During this same time, the persecution of the church by the principle of the little horn in the world will also reach a climax. The transgression which causes the horror of trampling will reach its fullness! Dan 8:23. The persecution of the church by the spirit of antichrist, along with the great falling away of many believers, will be the evidence that the church has entered the period which the Scriptures call 'the fullness of times'. Eph 1:10. The fullness of times is the period that immediately precedes the beginning of the time of the end.

The seventh world kingdom

The fullness of times is also the phase when the seventh world kingdom will fully emerge from the sea of the nations. The book of Daniel reveals that there will be ten political and economic groups of nations in the

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seventh world kingdom. The ten toes on the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the ten horns on the fourth beast in Daniel's vision both represent these ten groups of nations. Dan 2:41. Dan 7:7,24. They will be formed by political alliances and economic agreements, and will be governed by democratic principles.

Significantly, Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the kingdoms of the world also revealed that the seventh world kingdom will be 'a divided kingdom'. Daniel explained to him, 'In that you saw the feet and toes [of the statue], partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it will be a *divided kingdom*; but it will have in it the toughness of iron, inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with common clay. As the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of pottery, so some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle.' Dan 2:41-42.

'The 'strength of iron' represents the principles of democracy that govern many modern nations in the world today. It is the rule of the majority for the sake of the majority. Its strength is derived from the rule of law and the belief that the common good is more important than any one individual's good. In contrast to this, the 'weakness of the clay' represents the principle of the little horn that is the fierce advocate for minority and special interest groups. The principle of the little horn progressively erodes and removes the rights of the majority for the sake of the minority. It is the promotion of individual rights above all else.

In the first phase of the seventh world kingdom, there will come a time when this principle of lawlessness will be personified in a leader who will rise to prominence in world affairs. In his vision of the kingdoms of the world, the prophet Daniel saw 'a little horn' rising up among the ten horns that belong to the seventh world kingdom. Dan 7:8. Dan 8:9-10. In contrast to the ten horns, the little horn will not rise up as an elected representative of the people. He will rise to political and economic power by 'the deceit of diplomacy'. Dan 8:25.

As we have considered, the little horn will be empowered from the heavenly places because of the iniquity and lawlessness that abounds among believers. However, even though the little horn derives his power in this manner, he will not recognise any authority that is from above. The little horn will promote a secular and humanistic philosophy among the nations. He will repudiate all gods, and will exclusively promote the worship of man and of human achievement. Rom 1:25.

Daniel described the little horn as having 'eyes like a man' and 'a mouth speaking great boasts'. Dan 7:8. He will use the media to promote his

agenda, and to strongly influence public opinion. All those who promote a different view will be subject to public humiliation and ridicule. We already observe among the western nations of the world that the media is often the mouthpiece for the social and political agenda of the spirit of antichrist.

The little horn will be the personification of the spirit of antichrist in the world during the first phase of the seventh world kingdom. Paul said that he will 'exalt himself above every so-called god or object of worship'. 2Th 2:4. The little horn will be opposed to all religions, but his most vehement opposition will be reserved for the Christian church. He will speak monstrous things against 'the God of gods'. He will make it his goal to destroy the credibility of the Christian faith. Dan 11:36-37.

An administration that is suitable

In this context, Jesus said, 'Learn the parable of the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; so, you too, when you see *all these things*, recognise that He [Christ] is near, right at the door.' Mat 24:32-33. When the transgression that causes horror is reaching its fullness, we will know that we are in the fullness of times, and that the time of the end is near. Jesus was clear that we do not need to be troubled when we witness these events unfolding in the world. We know that the Lord is sovereign in the affairs of men. Furthermore, He is speaking from heaven through His messengers, and is restoring His administration that is *suitable for the fullness of times*.

In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul declared that God has made His purpose known to us 'with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth'. Eph 1:10. The administration that is suitable for the fullness of times is the administration of presbyteries in the right hand of Christ and lampstand churches. During his ministry, Paul pioneered lampstand churches among the Gentile nations. He also established an apostolic administration, which included men such as Timothy and Titus, to function within the presbyteries of these lampstand churches.

The apostle John saw that this administration of stars and lampstand churches has been sovereignly initiated and endorsed by Christ for the church age. Rev 1. It is the *only administration* that is suitable for

the fullness of times. Every other man-made administration and self-righteous mode of ministry will not endure the persecution that will confront the church in the days just ahead of us. In our day, the Lord is restoring the administration of lampstand churches which will overcome the spirit of antichrist in the world. More importantly, however, this administration will accomplish the purpose of God in heaven and on the earth.

Behold, I am coming quickly

The final testimony of Christ, recorded at the end of the book of Revelation, is, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' Rev 22:20. In our present season, there is an imperative in the Spirit to receive and to heed the ministry of Christ, who is our great High Priest. The reason for this imperative is that the hour of this present age is late. In the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins, it was at midnight that the cry was heard, 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Mat 25:6. The midnight hour is fast approaching. The darkness of corruption and godlessness is covering the nations of the earth. Isa 60:2. Like the five wise virgins, we must be ready for the coming of Christ.

The Lord was referring to His coming as our great High Priest when He declared, through the prophet Malachi, 'Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, *even the Messenger of the covenant*, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming.' Mal 3:1. The Messenger of the covenant is Christ, who is our great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. He is walking among His lampstand churches, with seven stars in His right hand, to *personally admonish* the presbytery that belongs to each church. Rev 2-3.

The Lord continued to describe the *mode of His coming* by saying, 'Who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness.' Mal 3:2-3. Christ addresses each presbytery with eyes like a flame of fire and feet like fine brass, as though refined in a furnace. Rev 1:14-15. Rev 2:18. In the first case, He is walking among His lampstand churches to confront every presbyter concerning their iniquity and their self-righteous modes of ministry.

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When we meet Christ 'eye to eye' and 'heart to heart', it is a deeply personal and relational encounter with Him. His 'eyes like a flame of fire' reveal the iniquity that resides within our heart. We know that 'there is no creature hidden from *His sight*, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account'. Heb 4:13. This is a most confronting encounter. However, if we do not recoil from His gaze in shame, His eyes also reveal His jealous love toward us. Christ is jealous over the name and predestination of every son of God. He is also jealous over His church, which has been betrothed to Him and will become His bride in the time of the end.

In our day, Christ is coming to every presbyter, and to every congregation, as a refiner's fire and launderers' soap. Mal 3:2. He is coming to purify us so that we can be a kingdom of priests who offer up spiritual sacrifices in righteousness. He does this by granting us a participation in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. The outcome of His priestly ministry toward us is that we can make offering in the righteousness that comes by faith, rather than from the basis of our own righteousness. Php 3:8-11. This means that we can reveal His righteousness to the world as active participants in His administration that is 'suitable for the fullness of times'.

Chapter I

Introduction to the book of Revelation

The apostle John was an elderly man when he received the revelation of Jesus Christ while he was in exile on the island of Patmos. Even though it is likely that John wrote his Gospel narrative and his three personal letters *after* receiving this revelation, the book of Revelation is the final word of the Scriptures. It contains the fulfilment of the purpose of God in the heavens and on the earth. It has been considered by many to be a difficult book to understand, because of its symbolic language. However, the book of Revelation uses the same symbolic and prophetic language that we find from the beginning to the end of the Scriptures. It is a most profound book because it weaves all the prophetic themes of the Scriptures together into one cohesive narrative that reveals the completion of God's purpose in the time of the end.

As its name suggests, the book of Revelation is the culmination and the summation of all the written Scriptures as *the full revelation of Jesus Christ*. It is the full revelation of His name and glory as 'Him who is and who was and who is coming'. Rev 1:4. Rev 1:8. It is also the full revelation of *the administration* that the Father has given to Him, which is suitable

for the fullness of times and the time of the end. Jesus testified, 'The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.' Joh 3:35. Christ reveals His administration *to the slaves* who are in His right hand, and then, *through these slaves* - His messengers - to His church in every generation.

The first chapter of the book of Revelation is split into three broad sections. The first section, from verse one to verse three, nominates the pattern by which the revelation of the administration of Jesus Christ has been delivered to us. It defines the work of the apostle John and of all the holy prophets of old, in writing the Scriptures. It also identifies the work of the apostolic administration today, which is bearing witness to the written Scriptures. Furthermore, it explains the outcome for those who read the Scriptures, hear the word of present truth proclaimed, and 'heed the things written', by becoming active participants in the administration of Christ.

The second section, from verse four to verse eight, contains John's greeting to the seven churches in Asia. It is applicable for every lampstand church from that time to the present day. He proclaimed Jesus Christ to be Yahweh, and the One who has been anointed with the seven Spirits of God. John identified the four aspects of the Person of Jesus Christ that reveal the four dimensions of the grace of God. These four dimensions are revealed by the 'four faces' of Christ's administration. Further to this, John revealed that Christ has made us to be a kingdom of priests to His God and Father, and that there is a ministry of incense and worship that ascends to Him as the Lamb of God.

In his greeting to the seven churches, the apostle John also declared that Christ is 'coming with the clouds'. Rev 1:7. This is one of the most important prophetic statements in the book of Revelation. We will consider that Christ was coming *to the Father* with clouds of incense when He made His way from the last supper to the cross. His journey *to the Father's house* concluded when He committed His spirit into the hands of the Father, and breathed His last. Following His physical resurrection, His journey *to the Father's throne* concluded when He ascended from the Mount of Olives.

From His ascended position, He is now coming *to His church* through the administration that He holds in His right hand. The administration of Christ in the heavenly places is likened to 'a great cloud of witnesses' and 'the clouds of heaven'. Heb 12:1. Mat 26:64. The outcome of the ministry of Christ through the administration in His right hand will be that 'every

eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him'. Rev 1:7.

The third section, beginning in verse nine, includes John's vision of the glorified Son of Man. John saw Jesus Christ clothed in priestly garments in the middle of seven golden lampstands. Rev 1:12-16. He nominated seven specific elements of priesthood that Jesus Christ possesses. The Father glorified Christ with these seven elements of priesthood, through the seven wounding events that He endured from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. The seven elements of Christ's priesthood are now fully active as He ministers as our great High Priest among His lampstand churches. The elements of Christ's priesthood, along with all of His priestly possessions, are being given to the seven stars that He holds in His right hand, as they walk with Him in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings.

The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him

We read in the first verse that the entire book of Revelation is 'the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave [to] Him'. Rev 1:1. At first glance, this seems to be an unusual statement. It is not as though Jesus Christ needed to be reminded of who He is. Even though He laid aside all of His intrinsic prerogatives as Yahweh the Son before the foundation of the world, He never emptied His identity. Php 2:7. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus testified on multiple occasions that He is 'I AM'. Luk 22:70. When Christ ascended on high, He was fully glorified by the Father as the Son of Man, the Son of God, and Yahweh the Son. At this time, He received authority from the Father to give the Holy Spirit, and to give ministry graces, to men. God the Father gave to Christ the *authority and the capacity to be revealed* to the world, through the administration in His right hand.

The first verse of the book of Revelation continues to explain that the revelation of the administration has been given to Jesus Christ to 'show' to His slaves. Rev 1:1. The Lord has revealed His administration to His holy prophets throughout history. Amos declared, 'Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants [slaves] the prophets.' Amo 3:7. When the Lord reveals Himself and His administration, He is inviting His slaves into a fellowship. There is a fellowship in the revelation, and then a fellowship in the administration that has been given to Jesus Christ. The apostle John declared, 'We announce to you what we have seen, and what we have heard, that you

also may have fellowship with us. And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.' 1Jn 1:2-3.

We can identify the progressive revelation of the administration of Christ to His slaves. The Lord instructed Moses, who is called 'the slave of God', to make the tabernacle 'according to the pattern *shown* to you on the mountain'. Heb 8:5. Exo 25:40. Moses received the revelation of the tabernacle, and he also carried the authority of God within the administration of the tabernacle. In a similar way, the Lord revealed the pattern of the temple to His slave, King David. 1Ch 28:19. Even though David didn't build the temple, he motivated and organised the entire nation to provide the necessary resources for it to be built. 1Ki 8:17-18. 1Ch 22:2-5.

We observe that, in the days of Zechariah and Haggai, a greater distinction occurred between the revelation of the administration, and the administration itself. It was Zechariah and Haggai who received the revelation of the restored temple in the days of the Jewish return from Babylon; but they did not build it. Hag 1:1-2,8. It was Zerubbabel, the governor, who stood in the office of kingship, who received the mandate to build the temple. Zec 4:9. He and Joshua the high priest carried the authority of God within the administration itself, but they did not receive the revelation of it. In the same way, when we come to the book of Revelation, we see that the apostle John received the revelation of the administration of Jesus Christ, but that he was not primarily involved in building lampstand churches. In fact, he was in exile on the isle of Patmos when he wrote to the seven churches in Asia. Rev 1:9-11. These churches had been established and built by the apostle Paul some thirty years earlier.

The apostle Paul was unique in the sense that he received revelation of the administration of Christ, *and* established this administration among the Gentiles. He did this before John wrote the book of Revelation as the final word of the Scriptures. The letters of the apostle Paul are part of the written Scriptures, and he laid the foundation of lampstand churches in every place as 'a wise master builder'. 1Co 3:10. Paul committed the mandate of proclaiming the Scriptures as being the word of present truth, and of building on the foundation that had already been laid, to an apostolic administration. An apostolic administration includes those who have received apostolic, prophetic, teaching and evangelistic grace from Christ. In the days of Paul, men such as Timothy and Titus were part of an apostolic administration. The Father has given Christ the authority to

raise up an apostolic administration in every generation of the church. Christ does this by *revealing Himself*, and by *giving ministry grace* to His slaves.

The things which must soon take place

In every generation, the Lord is showing ‘the things which must soon take place’ to His apostolic administration. Rev 1:1. ‘Soon’ does not mean ‘about to happen’, as measured by time. The word ‘soon’ is better translated ‘quickly’ or ‘speedily’, which is a word that describes the coming of the Son of Man and the fulfilment of the covenant purpose of God. Jesus said, ‘Will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He *delay* long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them *quickly* [speedily]. However, when the Son of Man *comes*, will He find faith on the earth?’ Luk 18:7-8.

Implicit within the concept of ‘speedily’ is the fact that God has a prophetic timetable for the fulfilment of His covenant purpose, and He will ‘not delay’. Heb 10:37. Having identified the macro prophetic timetable of the Lord, the apostle Peter declared, ‘The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness.’ 2Pe 3:9. Rather, we are ‘looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God’. 2Pe 3:12. The book of Revelation closes with the testimony of the Lord Jesus, ‘Yes, I am coming quickly.’ Rev 22:20.

We gain a valuable insight into the meaning of the phrase, ‘the things which must soon take place’, when we consider the first prophetic vision of Jeremiah. The Lord said to him, ‘What do you see?’ Jeremiah replied, ‘I see a branch of an almond tree.’ Jer 1:11. In this way, he saw a lampstand administration. We recall that the lampstand in the tabernacle of Moses was crafted from one piece of gold, using the symbolism of the cup, bud and flower of an almond tree. The Lord said to Jeremiah, ‘You have seen well, for I am ready to perform My word.’ Jer 1:12. Another translation promises, ‘I am watching over My word to perform it’. The Lord is not merely revealing what He is about to do. He is revealing the *administration* that He will use to bring His covenant purpose to completion. He is showing to His slaves, who are part of an apostolic administration in His right hand, the administration that is suitable for the fullness of times.

Signified by His angel

Some translations read that Christ sent and ‘communicated’ the revelation by His angel. The word ‘communicated’ is a little weak, because this is much more than the simple communication of a message. The better translation is ‘signified’ by His angel. To understand the meaning of ‘signified’, we need to consider the relationship of the word of the covenant, with eternity and time. The word of the covenant is much more than a dialogue between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that took place before the foundation of the world. It is a total package. It is the substance of the finished work of God. The Father’s works were finished from before the foundation of the world. Heb 4:3. All things are summed up in Christ from the very beginning. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End of the covenant purpose of God. Rev 1:8. Rev 21:6. Rev 22:13. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to separate the end from the beginning, and to sanctify eternity and time for the sake of our inclusion in the fulfilment of the covenant.

Two things are happening when the word of the covenant, anointed with the Spirit of God, is proclaimed by a messenger of the covenant. First, the word is proceeding and breaking in upon us. It is bringing things eternal, even things from before all ages, into our lives. Mat 4:4.

Second, the equal but opposite is true. The word transcends time, and connects us to things eternal and things from ‘before’, in the covenant of Yahweh. This is the meaning of the word ‘signified’. It is the capacity of the word, by the Spirit of God, to bring the substance of the covenant *into time*. And it is the capacity of the word, by the Spirit, to join us to the fellowship of Christ’s offering, so that we can participate in the substance of the covenant, which is *outside of time*. This is what it means to be ‘in the Spirit’.

When John was caught up in the Spirit, elements of the book of Revelation were explained to him by men who did not yet exist. He fell at the feet of one of his brethren in an apostolic administration. This man was *part of the vision*, and hence, he would not be alive until the time of the vision’s fulfilment. Rev 19:10. Rev 22:8. In a similar way, Moses was caught up in the Spirit to behold the glory of Yahweh and Yahweh-*Elohim*. Exo 3:1-15. Exo 6:1-8. He beheld the glory of Yahweh *Elohim*, who is our God. He beheld the beginning of the Everlasting Covenant. But, more than this, he beheld the glory of ‘Yahweh’ who is ‘before all things’. This is a most staggering revelation! Moses was caught up in the Spirit into a

fellowship which predated not only his own existence, but also predated the Everlasting Covenant and the beginning of eternity!

The substance of the revelation of Jesus Christ was 'signified by His angel' to the apostle John. In the final chapter of the book of Revelation, we read that Jesus called this one, 'My angel'. Rev 22:16. Even though he was not nominated by name, we can be reasonably confident that this was Gabriel. We are reminded of his testimony to Zacharias, 'I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.' Luk 1:19. Gabriel is the angel of the Lord and he is, evidently, a revelatory, messenger angel. We know that angels do not have the same predestination as mankind. They have not been predestined to inherit the divine nature and to be included in the fellowship of Yahweh as sons of God. The writer to the Hebrews declared, 'To which of the angels did He ever say, "You are My son, today I have begotten you"?' Heb 1:5. Nevertheless, the Lord has given tremendous dignity to the angelic host.

The Scriptures record that it was Gabriel who brought the word of the Lord to the prophets of old. The Lord placed His name in Gabriel, and Gabriel spoke on behalf of the Lord, as though the Lord Himself was speaking. Quite amazingly, Gabriel not only brought the word itself, but he also brought *understanding* of the word, and *strength* to the hearer, enabling them to receive the word. Gabriel said to Daniel, in essence, 'I have come to give you an understanding.' Dan 8:15-19. And, more than this, Daniel testified that this 'one with human appearance touched me and strengthened me'. Dan 9:21. Dan 10:18. In the same way, most likely it was the angel Gabriel who strengthened Christ with the capacity of Eternal Spirit in the garden of Gethsemane. Luk 22:43. Certainly, we witness the work of Gabriel to bring the word, understanding of the word, and strength to receive the word, so that the revelation to John was 'signified' by him.

The word of God, the testimony of Jesus, and the prophetic vision

We read that the apostle John, having received the revelation of Jesus Christ and His administration, 'bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all the things that he saw'. Rev 1:2. These are the three components of the revelation of the administration of Jesus Christ. In the first case, bearing witness to these three things was the mandate of the holy prophets of old, who wrote the Scriptures. The apostle John was the last man with this prophetic mandate and,

as a result, the book of Revelation is the final word of the Scriptures.
Rev 22:18.

Further to this, the Lord has given grace to men so that there is an apostolic administration in every generation of the church. The apostle Paul declared that He has given some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be teachers. Eph 4:11. Those who have received these dimensions of grace from Christ are an apostolic administration that functions as part of a presbytery in the right hand of Christ.

An apostolic administration will not add to the Scriptures by exceeding the things written. Rather, it is the work of an apostolic administration to shed light on the written Scriptures in the midst of a presbytery, by continuing to bear witness to the word of God, to the testimony of Jesus, and to the prophetic vision of the administration of Christ. This is a ministry of the Spirit that enables those who receive their testimony to be illuminated to see everything that Christ revealed to the apostle John.

The *word of God* is the word of the covenant. It is the word that is settled in the heavens, from before the foundation of the world. Psa 119:89. This word is the sum of all truth. And, most significantly, it is the word, proceeding from the covenant fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that fully reveals Yahweh-*Elohim*. The psalmist proclaimed, 'For You have magnified Your word according to all Your name.' Psa 138:2. In his first letter, the apostle John referred to the word of God as 'the word from the beginning'.

The word from the beginning is proclaimed by an apostolic administration as *the testimony of Jesus*. The testimony of Jesus is the word of present truth. It is the wisdom of God that comes down from above as the bread of life in every generation of the church. It is the word of life in the mouth of Jesus Christ and His messengers, which is relevant for a particular time and place in the unfolding covenant purpose of God. Throughout the book of Revelation, we read that John heard the testimony of Jesus as a great voice 'as of a trumpet', the voice from the throne, the voice of thunder, and the voice from heaven. Rev 1:10,15. Rev 10:3-4. Rev 16:7. Rev 19:1.

The *prophetic vision* reveals the nature and detail of the administration of Christ in prophetic symbol. John was illuminated by the Spirit of God to 'see', and was then empowered by the Spirit of God to record 'what he was seeing'. Jesus said to him, 'Write in a book what you see.' Rev 1:11. And, likewise, 'Write the things which you have seen, and the

things which are, and the things which will take place after these things'. Rev 1:19. The apostle John gained 'understanding' of the administration of Christ as he participated, by the Spirit, in the administration that was revealed to him.

Blessed is he who reads, hears and heeds

We have considered that the work of the apostolic administration is to bear witness to the word of God, to the testimony of Jesus, and to the prophetic vision of the administration of Christ. The apostle John identified the outcome for those who receive this threefold witness. He declared, 'Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it.' Rev 1:3.

John used a key word in relationship to each of the three aspects of witness. The key word concerning the word of God is 'read'. The key word with respect to the testimony of Jesus is 'hear'. And the key word in relationship to the prophetic vision of the administration is 'heed'.

It is incumbent upon every believer to 'read' the word of God that is fully revealed in the written Scriptures. The apostle Paul commended the Bereans for their great eagerness in receiving his word, and in searching the Scriptures daily to see if 'these things were so'. Act 17:10-11. The Scriptures have been given to every man, but they are not the subject of every man's private interpretation. 2Pe 1:20-21. Reading the Scriptures alone is not enough; they must be proclaimed as the word of present truth in every generation, so that all men can 'hear'. This is why John said, 'Blessed is he who *reads* and those who *hear*'. Rev 1:3. We are reminded of the words of Paul, 'How will they hear without a preacher?' Rom 10:14.

The word of life that is proclaimed by an apostolic administration, both publicly and from house to house, is the wisdom of God that comes down from above. Jas 3:17. We cannot inherit the blessing of eternal life without hearing the testimony of Jesus as 'wisdom from above' in the mouth of the messengers whom He sends. Jesus said to the religious leaders in His day, 'You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.' Joh 5:38-40.

We receive the wisdom of God when the testimony of Jesus is proclaimed to us. However, we also need to apply our hearts to understanding

by 'heeding' the things written in the prophecy. Let us say again that the prophecy contains the revelation of the 'administration' of Jesus Christ. The word 'heed' means to 'watch, guard and fulfil a command'. It describes our accountable obedience to join the fellowship of Christ's offering as slaves in His administration. We 'heed' the things written, by fully participating in the administration that is revealed by the things written. Hearing the word of our name proclaimed in the message preached is not enough; it also requires a practical commitment to the administration in which we present ourselves to prove the good, acceptable and perfect will of God. The outcome of this obedience of faith is 'blessing'. It results in our finding our sanctification, and in obtaining our eternal inheritance as sons of God.

From Him who is and who was and is coming

We come now to John's greeting to the seven lampstand churches in Asia, which represent all lampstand churches. In this greeting, John gave us an overview of the entire administration of Christ; how we are included in it; and its effect on every nation and tribe of the earth in the end of the age. He began by saying, 'Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is coming.' Rev 1:4. The phrase, 'who is and who was and who is coming', signifies that Jesus Christ is Yahweh. He is 'I AM'.

When the Lord met Moses in the burning bush, He said to him, ' "I AM WHO I AM" ... thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you".' Exo 3:14. This is the most fundamental testimony of life, identity and being. The writers of the Gospels recorded at least seven occasions when Jesus testified that He is 'I AM'. Joh 4:26. Joh 6:20. Joh 8:24,28,58. Luk 21:8. Joh 13:19. Joh 18:5. Luk 22:70. The Hebrew phrase, 'I am who I am', implicitly includes the statements, 'I was who I was' and 'I will be who I will be'. It is this timeless testimony that is carried forward into the New Testament in the phrase 'Him who is who was and is to come'. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Heb 13:8.

When we consider the phrase, 'Him who is', it is the description of the One who is seated upon the throne. Rev 1:4. We know that He was, and is, and always will be Yahweh the Son. However, before the foundation of the world, He emptied Himself to the Father's bosom to be begotten as the Son of God. He became the Father's firstborn Son. In the fullness of time, He also emptied Himself to be born in the flesh of mankind as the Son of Man. The One who is seated upon the throne is Yahweh the Son, the Son of God, and the Son of Man.

In relation to His eternal priesthood, Jesus explained the meaning of the phrase, 'Him who is and who was and who is coming', when He described Himself as 'the Living One'. He declared, '[I am] the Living One [Him who is]; and I was dead [Him who was], and behold, I am alive forevermore [Him who is coming].' Rev 1:18. Jesus Christ became the One who *was dead* when He died the death of our sin in the garden of Gethsemane. As His blood was shed, during each wounding event in His journey from Gethsemane to the cross, He came back from the death of our sin. When He declared, 'It is finished!', He was alive again from the death of our sin while still in His mortal body. His physical death was a pure and undefiled offering to the Father. Having been raised in immortality, He is alive forevermore as our great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. The order of Melchizedek is the power of an endless life. Christ forever lives to apply the seven times sprinkling of His finished work to our hearts as we join the fellowship of His one offering.

Further to this, in relation to the kingship of Christ, we note that the phrase, 'Him who is and who was and who is coming', is always associated with His name as the Lord God Almighty. The Lord God Almighty is the title that belongs to the Son of God, who reveals the full authority and sovereign expression of Yahweh-*Elohim*. He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Rev 4:11. He is also the Lord of the angelic hosts. Jesus testified to the apostle John that He is the Almighty. Rev 1:8. However, it is not until the time of the end that He will be fully revealed as the Lord God Almighty in this world. At this time, the apostolic administration in His right hand will proclaim, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, *the Almighty*, who was and who is and who is to come.' Rev 4:8.

From the seven Spirits of God

Grace and peace are coming to us from Him who is and who was and who is coming, and from the 'seven Spirits who are before His throne'. Rev 1:4. We know that there are not seven numerical spirits in Yahweh. The number seven is symbolic of fullness and completeness. The seven Spirits of God describe the full capacity of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit in the fellowship of Yahweh. The Scriptures also call this 'Eternal Spirit' and 'the Spirit of Yahweh'. The capacity of the sevenfold Spirit of God is applied by the Holy Spirit, but we need to be careful that we do not confuse the sevenfold Spirit of God with the Person of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is one Person of the Godhead. The power of the sevenfold Spirit of God is given to us by the Person of the Holy Spirit, in the fellowship of Christ's offering.

Yahweh the Son was anointed with this sevenfold capacity in the covenant before the foundation of the world. He became the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One. It was this anointing that enabled the Son to empty Himself, and to establish the beginning of the Everlasting Covenant. And it was this same anointing that empowered every element of His earthly ministry. Right from the very beginning, Jesus declared, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me.' Luk 4:18. Most significantly, in the garden of Gethsemane, He was strengthened to offer Himself to God, by the capacity of Eternal Spirit. The seven wounds that Christ experienced from Gethsemane to the cross resulted in His blood being sprinkled seven times on His physical body, for our sake. It is the capacity of Eternal Spirit that enables us to be joined to the fellowship of this historical event when we are baptised into Christ.

The seven Spirits of God have also been given to Christ *as an administration*, which enables His ongoing heavenly ministry through the seven stars that are in His right hand. There is a distinction between the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars. However, it is the work of the stars in the right hand of Christ to minister the illumination and power of the seven Spirits of God to lampstand churches. In turn, it is the mandate of lampstand churches to reflect and focus the illumination and power of the seven Spirits of God to the world.

It is for this reason that the fully restored lampstand churches are revealed as seven lamps of fire burning before the face of the throne. Rev 4:5. The literal meaning of 'before the throne' is 'in the face of the throne'. The light of the seven Spirits is illuminating the face of the One who sits on the throne; that is, the face of Jesus Christ. The mandate of a lampstand church is to manifest the light of the seven Spirits of God so that Christ is lifted up and revealed to all men. Joh 12:32. The outcome of this ministry will be that every eye will see Him - even those who pierced Him - and that all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Rev 1:7.

From Jesus Christ – four dimensions of His grace

The apostle John continued by declaring that, as the One *who is seated on the throne* and the One *who possesses the seven Spirits of God*, He is 'Jesus Christ'. We know that Jesus has been raised and seated at the right hand of the Father. He has received the name that is above every name. Peter proclaimed to the great crowd that had gathered on the day of Pentecost, 'Let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ - this Jesus whom you crucified.' Act 2:36. He is the Lord Jesus Christ; and the Father has given all things into His hand.

As we have already noted, He is now *the possessor* of the seven Spirits of God as an administration in His right hand. He addressed the church in Sardis as the One who 'has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars'. Rev 3:1.

As the possessor of the seven Spirits of God, Jesus Christ has the authority and capacity to minister the four dimensions of the grace of God from His throne. In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul referred to the throne of the Son as 'the throne of grace'. He encouraged every believer to 'draw near with confidence to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need'. Heb 4:16. In the first case, it is the grace of God that joins us to the fellowship of Christ's offering. In the fellowship of Christ's offering, we receive all four dimensions of the grace of God that belong to Christ. The four dimensions of the grace of God are the Spirit of God, the life of God, the love of God, and the word of God.

In his Gospel, the apostle John declared that Jesus Christ is the full embodiment of the four dimensions of the grace of God in the flesh of mankind. He said, 'The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.' Joh 1:14. Christ is the full revelation of the four dimensions of the grace of God as the faithful Witness, the Firstborn from the dead, the Ruler of the kings of the earth, and the One who loved us and released us from our sins by His blood.

The faithful Witness

Jesus Christ is called 'the faithful Witness', because He is the Word of God and *the faithful Messenger* of God. He fully reveals the testimony of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit regarding Their covenant purpose for mankind. John the Baptist said, concerning Jesus, 'He who comes from heaven is above all. What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies ... he who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure.' Joh 3:31-34. Jesus testified, 'I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak.' Joh 12:49.

Jesus was the faithful Witness on the earth during His earthly ministry. He is now the faithful Witness *in heaven* who is still speaking from His ascended position through the administration that He holds in His right hand. The writer to the Hebrews declared, 'See to it that you do

not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth [referring to Moses], much less will we escape who turn away from Him who speaks from heaven.' Heb 12:25. As the glorified Son of Man and the faithful Witness in heaven, Jesus addresses the presbytery of each lampstand church. As the faithful and true Witness, He addressed the church in Laodicea. Rev 3:14. Similarly, as the One who is holy and the One who is true, He addressed the church in Philadelphia. Rev 3:7.

The Firstborn from the dead

Jesus is called 'the Firstborn from the dead' because He has been begotten from the dead as *the Son of God*. Jesus said that He is the Living One. Rev 1:18. He testified that He 'became dead' and is now 'alive forevermore'. Rev 1:18. In the first case, Jesus *became dead* to God when He became the sin offering in the garden of Gethsemane. As His blood was shed from the wounds that He received on His journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, He came back from the death of our sin. With each wound that caused His blood to be shed for our sake, He was being *begotten* from the dead as the firstborn Son of God. Further to this, the fully mature and perfect Son of God offered Himself without spot into the hands of the Father when He breathed His last, and physically died. He was raised three nights and three days later, with an incorruptible and immortal body. As the Firstborn from the dead, Jesus proclaimed, 'I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and the grave.' Rev 1:18.

The apostle Paul declared that Christ has abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light. 2Ti 1:10. When He cried, 'It is finished!', from the cross, Jesus had abolished the death of sin and brought eternal life to light. Furthermore, He brought immortality to light when He was physically raised from the grave. For forty days, Jesus presented Himself 'alive after His suffering' to the disciples, and He taught them about the kingdom of God. Act 1:3. Every believer who dies in the fellowship of His offering will receive an incorruptible and immortal body. Their resurrection body will be fashioned like His glorious body, to be their inheritance for the age to come. In the resurrection at the last day, the Scripture that says, 'Death is swallowed up in victory', will be fulfilled. 1Co 15:54.

The Ruler of the kings of the earth

Christ is called 'the Ruler of the kings of the earth' because He is *the King of kings* and Lord of lords. When Christ ascended from the Mount of Olives, the Scriptures account that 'a cloud received Him out of their sight'. Act 1:9. Looking forward to this day, the prophet Daniel saw One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven to be presented before the Ancient of Days. Dan 7:13. He was presented before the Father to receive dominion, glory, and a kingdom. Dan 7:14. However, He is still waiting for all His enemies to become a footstool for His feet. The psalmist proclaimed, 'The Lord (Father) said to my Lord (Son), "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool". The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!' Psa 110:1-2.

Even though Christ has been raised and seated at the Father's right hand, we do not yet see all of His enemies as a footstool for His feet. We will not begin to see Christ reigning in this way until the time of the end. In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul explained that we 'do not yet see all things subjected to Him'. Heb 2:8. He continued by saying, 'But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour so that by the grace of God He might taste death for every man.' Heb 2:9. Paul was explaining that we do not yet see Him ruling and reigning in the world as our King. Rather, we behold Him ministering among His lampstand churches as our great High Priest.

Our great High Priest

Finally, Jesus Christ is called the One 'who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood'. Rev 1:5. This description signifies that He is *our great High Priest* and *the Lamb of God*. As our great High Priest, He *loved us* and offered Himself to God for us. Eph 5:2. As the Lamb of God, He released us from our sins by the sprinkling of His blood. His blood was sprinkled seven times, from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, to release us from our sins. The apostle Peter declared that we have been redeemed 'with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot'. 1Pe 1:18-19.

Significantly, as our great High Priest, Jesus has granted us a participation in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. In this fellowship, He has made us to be a kingdom of priests to His God and Father. The outcome of the ministry of this great multitude of priests is that worship is given

to our great High Priest, who is *the Lamb of God*. John declared, 'To Him be the glory and dominion forever and ever.' Rev 1:6.

Grace and peace

The apostle John identified the outcome of Christ's ministry from His throne, through His administration, as being the multiplication of grace and peace. Rev 1:4. We recall that the apostle Paul began all his letters by saying, 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' Rom 1:7. Likewise, Peter declared in his first letter, 'May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.' 1Pe 1:2. And, again, in his second letter, 'Grace and peace be multiplied to you.' 2Pe 1:2. It is evident that all the apostles understood that the outcome of an effective administration, connected to the throne of Christ, is the multiplication of grace and peace to every member of the body of Christ.

As we have considered, we are enabled to receive the four dimensions of the grace of God because Christ is the faithful Witness, the Firstborn from the dead, the Ruler of the kings of the earth, and the One who loved us and released us from our sins by His blood. Rev 1:5. We receive a measure of all four dimensions of the grace of God when we participate in the fellowship of Christ's offering. For this reason, we can testify that 'of His fullness we have all received and grace upon grace'. Joh 1:16. In a similar way, we can know the fullness of the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, as we participate in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. Following John's greeting to the seven churches, Jesus immediately interjected with His own personal greeting to the seven churches and to every believer! He proclaimed, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.' Rev 1:8.

We can know the peace of God in every circumstance of our lives, because Jesus is the Pioneer of our salvation. Heb 2:10. From the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, He has pioneered and authored the pathway that we must walk as sons of God. In this pathway of discipleship, Christ joins us to the fellowship of His suffering for the whole of our lives. In this fellowship, we know that God is working all things together for our good. Rom 8:28. This includes the circumcision and removal, through suffering, of the other law from our hearts. The other law is our self-righteous motivation that causes us to lay hold of the Law of God in the pursuit of becoming like God. Rom 7:23. By motivating us to define our own name and works, the other law compels us to live in a way that is contrary to the purpose of God. It causes us to live as enemies of

God. Rom 8:7. The other law must be circumcised from our hearts so that we can be reconciled to God, and find our sanctification as sons of God.

It is important to recognise that the peace of God is more than the outcome of the other law being removed from our hearts. It is the outcome of the sprinkling of Christ's blood upon our hearts, in the fellowship of His sufferings, so that *His life becomes our life*. Gal 2:20. It is the life of Yahweh in the blood of Christ that equips us to serve God as His priests forever. This is our eternal inheritance as sons of God. Furthermore, the peace of God is the outcome of receiving the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us by Christ. Joh 14:26-27. Jesus testified that the goal of His journey as the Pioneer of our salvation was to give us the Holy Spirit. Joh 7:39. It is the Holy Spirit who joins us to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. He leads and guides us on the pathway that Christ has authored for us, and He enables us to manifest the life of Christ in our mortal bodies. We know the peace of God when we submit, by faith, to the leadership and direction of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Chapter 2

Behold, He is coming with clouds

John concluded his greeting to the seven churches by declaring, 'Behold, He is coming with clouds and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be so. Amen.' Rev 1:7. In our previous chapter, we considered John's description of the One who is seated upon the throne as 'Him who is and who was and who is coming'. Rev 1:4. In this chapter, we will shift our focus to how Jesus Christ is coming *as our great High Priest*. What does it mean that Christ is coming 'with the clouds'? As we have already noted, this is one of the most important prophetic statements in the book of Revelation.

We need to consider the statement that Christ is coming with clouds, in three ways. First, this statement describes Christ's personal journey, by offering, from the last supper *to the bosom of the Father* and, subsequently, *to the Father's throne*. Second, it describes the way in which Christ is coming *to His church* through the apostolic administration that He holds in His right hand. Third, it describes the way in which Christ is coming *to the world* through the administration of lampstand churches

in every nation. Jesus was referring to this element of His coming to the world when He declared to Pilate, 'You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.' Mat 26:64.

The clouds of incense

The first interpretation of the term 'with clouds' means that Christ is coming 'with the clouds of incense'. We recall that, in the tabernacle of old, the priests offered incense upon the golden altar in the morning and in the evening. Exo 30:7-8. This altar was also called 'the altar of incense'. The incense itself included four sweet spices. On the Day of Atonement, the altar was taken into the most holy place. The priest then placed two handfuls of incense on the fire of the golden altar that was before the Lord. This created a 'cloud of incense' that covered the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. Lev 16:12-13. Significantly, if the high priest entered the most holy place without this cloud of incense covering the mercy seat, he would die.

In the New Covenant, the cloud of incense is the outcome of the offering of prayer and worship by the Spirit. Jesus Christ fully revealed the true offering of incense in the garden of Gethsemane. As our great High Priest and the Lamb of God, He offered up the incense of prayer and worship to His Father. Luk 22:44. Heb 5:7. The garden of Gethsemane was the most holy place of the true tabernacle in heavenly places.

Jesus began His journey to the Father's house with the offering of incense in the garden of Gethsemane. The cloud of this incense continued to ascend as a pleasing aroma to the Father as Jesus offered Himself willingly to become our sin offering. It continued to ascend as He was brought back from the death of our sin through the sprinkling of His blood upon His physical body. We know that His physical body was the Mercy Seat of the true tabernacle. Rom 3:25. His offering of incense culminated when He committed His Spirit into the hands of the heavenly Father. Luk 23:46. This was the culmination of His offering of prayer and worship.

The seventh sprinkling of blood upon His physical body occurred when His side was pierced with the spear. Joh 19:34. At this time, a spirit of grace and supplication was made available to all men, so that they could look upon Him whom they had pierced, and mourn for Him. Zec 12:10. Joh 19:37. John declared, 'Behold He is coming with clouds and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him.' Rev 1:7. Further to this, the Scripture recorded

that, when Christ's side was pierced with the spear, the veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Mar 15:38. This signified that a new and living way has been opened for us into the true tabernacle. Heb 10:20. By joining the fellowship of Christ's prayer and worship in the garden of Gethsemane, we are able to draw near to God and to come boldly to the throne of grace.

Even though Jesus Christ has now ascended to the right hand of the Father, He has not ceased to offer the incense of prayer and worship to the Father. In his letter to the Hebrews, Paul explained that Christ holds His priesthood perpetually. Heb 7:24. He is a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. For this reason, Christ is able to save, forever, those who draw near to God through Him, because He *always lives* to make intercession for them. Heb 7:25. He is leading us to join His prayer and worship in the garden of Gethsemane.

When we join the offering and worship of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, we are granted a participation in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. In this fellowship, Christ is making us to be a kingdom of priests to His God and Father. Rev 1:6. As the sweetness of His life is transferred to us, in the fellowship of His offering, we are becoming the witnesses of Christ. We are becoming part of a great 'cloud of witnesses' who manifest the aroma of His life in every place. Heb 12:1. 2Co 2:14.

The great cloud of witnesses includes all those who have joined the fellowship of Christ's offering to become part of the cloud of incense ascending to the Father. When Jesus Christ ascended on high, He raised this great cloud of witnesses with Him so that they are now seated with Him in heavenly places. Eph 2:6. Scripture refers to this cloud of witnesses in heavenly places as 'the clouds of heaven'. In his prophetic vision, Daniel saw the Son of Man presenting Himself before the Father with all the clouds of heaven. Dan 7:13. We also recall the words of Jesus to Pilate, 'You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven.' Mat 26:64. Mar 14:62.

The prophet Daniel also identified the reality that Christ has been given dominion, glory and a kingdom. Dan 7:14. He was progressively receiving dominion and glory from the Father as He made His journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. At each wounding event, He received dominion by disempowering and overcoming the enemies of the cross through the shedding of His blood. This is an everlasting dominion. On this same journey, He was progressively glorified as

our great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. This is an eternal priesthood.

Furthermore, Christ was gathering a great cloud of witnesses with Him to be *a kingdom* of priests to His God and Father. He has raised this kingdom of priests with Him to heavenly places, and He is leading them and teaching them to worship in the Spirit as they participate in the fellowship of His offering. As they learn to worship before His throne, they are ascribing to Christ, who is the Lamb of God, all of the virtues and attributes that belong to Him as the outcome of His offering. For example, we have already identified the fact that Christ received dominion and glory from the Father as the outcome of His offering. John recorded in the first chapter of the book of Revelation that a kingdom of priests will ascribe 'dominion and glory' to Christ for ever and ever. Rev 1:6.

This brings us to a key point. The church is called to be a community of true worshippers. As a kingdom of priests, we are learning to extol the virtues that belong to Jesus Christ, who is the Lamb of God. Significantly, as we worship and appreciate the virtues of the Lamb, the Father is granting us the capacity, by the Holy Spirit, to demonstrate these same virtues. We manifest the virtues of Christ as a community of true worshippers who belong to the Lamb. We are receiving this capacity through 'offering transfer' as we walk with Him in the fellowship of His offering. The apostle Peter rejoiced that we have been called to be a royal priesthood who are able to proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out darkness and into His marvellous light. 1Pe 2:9. Not only are we learning to proclaim His excellencies, but we are also receiving the grace to manifest His excellencies in the world!

The events described in the first three chapters of the book of Revelation are relevant to the time that precedes the beginning of the time of the end. The focus during this time is the restoration of an administration of stars in the right hand of Christ, and of lampstand churches in each nation. Jesus Christ personally addresses each presbytery in order to join them to the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. In this fellowship, each presbytery can receive dominion over the spirit of antichrist, and can demonstrate the glory of an effective priestly ministry among Christ's lampstand churches. Christ promised to give the elements of His priesthood to the overcomers in each presbytery. Dominion and glory will be the outcome for each presbytery as they learn to worship with Christ, who is the Lamb of God, as He walks and ministers among His churches.

In Chapters four and five of the book of Revelation, the apostle John recorded that he saw an apostolic administration in the midst of a world-wide presbytery, for the time of the end. This presbytery will have twenty-four courses of elders according to the pattern that was prophetically established by King David as the order of his throne. The first work of this presbytery will be to lead the members of the body of Christ, who are gathered around the throne of the Lamb, to worship Him. Rev 5:8. The elders who belong to the twenty-four courses of the presbytery will possess harps and golden bowls of incense. The harps are the instruments of worship, and the golden bowls of incense are the prayers of the saints. The presbytery will proclaim a new song, which is unique to this period of history, as they worship the Lamb. They declare that the Lamb is worthy to take the book that contains the covenant purpose of God for the time of the end, and to break its seven seals.

The twenty-four courses of elders will proclaim that the Lamb has established a kingdom of priests through the shedding of His blood. Rev 5:9. We note that this is the same proclamation of worship that John identified in the first chapter of the book of Revelation. However, further to this, the twenty-four elders will proclaim that it is time for this kingdom of priests to reign upon the earth. Rev 5:10. This proclamation of worship initiates the events of the time of the end, as the Lamb breaks the seven seals, and establishes His kingdom on the earth through the administration of His throne in the heavenly places. We observe that the members of the body of Christ who belong to the various orders of the throne at that time will proclaim the eschatology of their own sanctification and mandate in the world, as they worship the Lamb.

The culmination of the church's offering of incense will occur when the seventh seal is broken by the Lamb, and the great Day of Atonement is fulfilled. At this time, our great High Priest will add *much incense* to the prayers of the saints that are already on the altar of incense before the throne. Rev 8:3. When the smoke of this incense ascends before God, it will activate the next phase of God's purpose in the time of the end. Rev 8:4. The censer which was used to add much incense to the prayers of the saints on the golden altar will be filled with the fire of the altar and thrown to the earth. Rev 8:5. This will activate the final cleansing of the temple in heavenly places, and the final judgements of God in the earth.

How do we see Jesus?

John proclaimed that Christ is coming with clouds so that every eye will see Him. This raises an important question: *how do we see Christ in*

our present phase of history? Jesus Christ has been raised, seated, and glorified at the right hand of the Father. He has been given the name above every name. He has been raised far above all principalities and powers in the heavenly places. The Father has put all things in subjection under His feet. In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul identified this reality, but also said that *we do not yet see* all things in subjection under His feet. Heb 2:8. He continued by identifying *how we do see Christ*. Paul said, 'But *we do see Him* who, for a little while, was made lower than the angels; namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for every man.' Heb 2:9.

We see Christ as the glorified Son of Man because He was crowned with glory and honour as the outcome of His offering and sufferings. Paul declared that He was crowned in this way '*because of* the suffering of death. 'The suffering of death' refers to the specific 'wounding events' that Christ experienced in His journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. When we consider each of the wounding events that Christ experienced for our sake, we can identify the element of the flesh that is being removed from our fallen heart as we participate in each specific wound. We can also identify the outcome of our participation in each wound, as sons of God.

It is also important to consider the various enemies of the cross that Christ disempowered and overcame during His journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. First, in Gethsemane, Christ overcome the willfulness of our flesh. The Father laid upon Christ the 'disobedient will' of every fallen human being. When Christ prayed to the Father, 'Not My will, but Yours, be done', He was praying on behalf of every person. Luk 22:42. This is the prayer that we cannot pray in the strength of our own flesh. Christ has prayed on our behalf so that all we need to do is to join the fellowship of His prayer, by the Spirit. In the fellowship of Christ's prayer, we are asking the Father to circumcise and remove the other law from our hearts. It is important to recognise that the other law, which resides within the fallen human heart, is the greatest enemy of the cross of Christ.

Second, in the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, Christ overcame the persecution of the religious leaders of the day. These religious leaders were 'a synagogue of Satan'. He removed the Old Covenant and its priesthood, and was established as our great High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. He possesses the true Urim and Thummim,

which represent His spiritual insight and capacity for the ministry of an enduring and effective priesthood.

Third, in the court of Pilate, before Herod, and in the Praetorium, Christ overcame the rulers of this world. This included the breaking of the yoke of Edom upon the people of God, when Christ was sent to Herod and was abused and humiliated by him. Christ removed the dominion of the rulers of this world, and was established as the Ruler of the kings of the earth, even though we do not yet see all of His enemies under His feet.

Fourth, on the cross, Christ overcame the collusion of every power that has raised itself up in opposition to God. This includes Satan and the spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenly places. When Christ was lifted up on the cross, He disarmed all principalities and powers, and 'made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it'. Col 2:15. In every case, Christ overcame all His enemies by the shedding of His blood. This is how He received *dominion* over all of His enemies, even though we do not yet see all things in subjection to Him. Christ has received dominion over the carnality of man, the synagogue of Satan, the rulers of this world, and the spiritual host of wickedness.

Even more significantly, we need to identify the specific element of Christ's priesthood that was being glorified with each wounding event. As Christ suffered each wounding event, with its accompanying humiliation and abuse, on His journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, He was progressively glorified by the Father to be our great High Priest. Likewise, He was being crowned with glory and honour. Heb 2:9. It was the sovereign work of the Father to bestow this glory and honour upon the Son. In his letter to the Hebrews, Paul explained that no one takes this honour to himself but, rather, receives it when he is called by God. Heb 5:4. This was the case for the Aaronic priesthood, and it is also the case for the Melchizedek priesthood of Christ. It was the Father who declared that Christ is a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. Heb 5:5-6. This is how we see Him - as the glorified Son of Man, who is our great High Priest.

The hour when the Son of Man was glorified

The Scriptures record that, after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, a number of the Gentiles came to Philip and said, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Joh 12:21. Jesus answered their request by saying, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be *glorified*.' Joh 12:23. He was not referring to His ascension to the right hand of the Father. Rather, He was referring to the

hour of His offering, circumcision and travail. Jesus continued by saying, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.' Joh 12:24.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus had fully revealed the name and glory of the Father. He was the perfect manifestation of a son of God. He recognised, however, that if He did not proceed to death, then He would be the *only* son of God. He would remain alone. Jesus also declared that His death would bear much fruit. It would bring to birth a multitude of sons for God. Recognising the need to die our death as a sin offering, Jesus testified that His soul had become troubled. He posed the rhetorical question, 'What should I say, "Father, save Me from this hour?"' He answered this question by declaring, 'For this purpose I came to this hour.' Joh 12:27. With this declaration, He fixed His face toward the cross.

Jesus continued by praying, 'Father, glorify Your name.' Joh 12:28. At this point, a voice like thunder came out of heaven, saying, 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.' Joh 12:28. The name of the Father had already been glorified in Christ as the Son of God. However, the Father was declaring that His name would be glorified again through the offering of Christ, which would bring forth a multitude of sons for God the Father. There were many people who heard this voice from heaven. Jesus explained that it had come for their sake. Joh 12:30. He offered Himself to the Father to become the sin offering for our sake alone. It is through the sin offering that we are begotten from the death of our sin, with Him, as sons of God.

Jesus said, 'If I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to Myself.' Joh 12:32. The term 'lifted up' is a reference to how He was nailed to the cross, and then how the cross was physically raised up so that Christ was crucified before the eyes of all. More significantly, however, it means that He was *exalted*, or *glorified*, in this same process. He was raised up and glorified to be the Light of the world. This fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the suffering Messiah, 'Behold, My slave will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted'. Isa 52:13.

The fine linen garments

When the apostle John turned to see the voice that was speaking to him, he saw Christ standing in the middle of the seven golden lampstands. He was clothed in a priestly garment reaching all the way to His feet, and was girded across His chest with a golden sash. We know that this was a *white* priestly robe, because Christ said to the leaders who had not soiled

their garments in Sardis, 'They will walk with Me *in white* ... he who overcomes will thus be clothed in *white garments*.' Rev 3:4-5.

It is significant that John saw Christ wearing these white priestly robes, and not the ceremonial garments of the high priest. We recall that the high priest who ministered under the Old Covenant had two sets of garments. The first were the holy garments that he wore during the year as he ministered in the sanctuary and at the altar. They were called the garments for 'glory and beauty', and included a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a skillfully woven tunic, a turban and a sash.

The second set of garments worn by the high priest were made of fine, white linen. These holy garments were worn only on the Day of Atonement, when the high priest made atonement for himself, his family, the most holy place, the sanctuary, the altar and the whole nation of Israel. The Lord said to Moses, concerning the high priest on the Day of Atonement, 'He shall put the holy linen tunic and linen trousers on his body; he shall be girded with a linen sash, and with the linen turban he shall be attired. These are *holy garments*. Therefore he shall wash his body in water, and put them on.' Lev 16:23.

The high priest did not remove these white linen garments until the ministry of the Day of Atonement was complete. This included the sprinkling of blood upon the mercy seat in the most holy place, in the sanctuary, and upon the altar. It also included confessing the sins of the people over the head of the live goat, and sending it into the wilderness. The Lord said that once this atoning work was complete, 'then Aaron [the high priest] shall come into the tabernacle of meeting, shall take off the linen garments which he put on when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there'. Lev 16:23.

This highlights the significance of Christ still wearing the white linen garments. It clearly shows us that the context of the book of Revelation represents the propitiatory work of the Day of Atonement. This propitiatory work is not yet complete, because Christ is still wearing His white garments. Even though Christ's offering and suffering is complete, He is still applying the sprinkled blood of His finished work to our hearts as we join the fellowship of His offering and sufferings.

The elements of His priesthood

Having identified the reality that Christ is still wearing His *working garments* as our great High Priest, John proceeded to identify the seven elements of Christ's priestly ministry toward us as He walks among His

lampstand churches. John did not identify the seven wounds of Christ, but he did identify how Christ applies *the outcome* of each of His wounds to our life. John saw the specific element of His priesthood that was activated by each of the seven wounds. We will briefly summarise the seven elements of Christ's priesthood, and then consider each element in more detail in our next chapter.

The *first wounding of Christ* occurred in the garden of Gethsemane. In the travail of prayer, He began to sweat clots of blood from every pore in His body. In this offering, He was fully sanctified to be the Lamb of God. He is the Lamb for the burnt offering, and the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. He is also the Lamb who has become the Head of His church. John identified the truth that, as the outcome of this first wounding, His head and hair are white like wool; that is, as of a lamb.

The *second wounding of Christ* occurred in the palace of Caiaphas the high priest. Christ was punched, slapped and beaten. He was bruised for our iniquities. The outcome of this wounding was that Christ was able to look at Peter and to expose the iniquity that resided within his heart. John acknowledged that the eyes of Christ are like a flame of fire. His eyes reveal the jealous love of God toward us, and the true condition of our heart. They also illuminate us concerning the pathway of the cross that we need to walk, so that our heart can be circumcised in the fellowship of His sufferings.

The *third wounding of Christ* also occurred in the presence of Caiaphas, the high priest. Christ was beaten with rods. He was chastened for our peace. Having been chastened by the Father for our sake, He has become our judge. This judgement occurs at the altar of the true tabernacle, which is the communion table. John recognised that, as the outcome of this wounding, the feet of Christ are like burnished bronze. As the outcome of the second and third woundings of Christ, which both occurred before Caiaphas, Christ became the possessor of the true Urim and Thummim as our great High Priest.

The *fourth wounding of Christ* occurred before Pilate. Christ was scourged with the cat o' nine tails, causing His blood to be shed from a multitude of wounds. This blood was shed for our healing, which includes the regeneration of our identity as sons and daughters of men. As the outcome of this wounding, regeneration and healing are available to all men and women through His voice, which is like the sound of many waters. In the first case, this water of life is ministered by the many members of His body at the communion table. It is also ministered by a

great multitude of sons of God in the world, who have gone with Christ 'outside the camp' to bear His reproach, and to proclaim the testimony of their sonship in every place.

The *fifth wounding of Christ* occurred in the Praetorium. A crown of thorns was twisted together, and placed on His head. It was then driven into His head by the soldiers, using a reed that they had placed in His right hand as a mock sceptre. During this encounter, the soldiers mocked the kingship of Christ. As the outcome of this wounding, Christ now exercises the authority of His kingship in the church, through seven stars in His right hand. The seven stars are the true sceptre in His hand. In the time of the end, He will also use the stars in His right hand to express the authority of His kingship in the world.

The *sixth wounding of Christ* occurred when He was nailed to the cross. He was pierced through for our transgressions. In this action, the Law was nailed to the cross, the Old Covenant was abolished, and the New Covenant was inaugurated. During His crucifixion, Christ was reviled by all who passed by. However, He did not revile in return; nor did He defend Himself in any way. As the outcome of not opening His mouth, the word of the New Covenant now proceeds from His mouth as a sharp two-edged sword. It is the word of faith.

In terms of the last wound, the apostle John recorded that blood and water flowed from the heart of Christ when the soldier pieced His side with a spear. This was the fulfilment of the prophecy of Zechariah. At that time, a spirit of grace and supplication was poured out upon us so that we can look upon Jesus Christ whom we have pierced. The outcome of the *seventh* wound is that we behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. His face is shining like the sun in all its strength. When we behold the face of Christ, we see the hope of our sonship, and the full provision of the New Covenant that has been given to us. The water that flowed from Christ's side signifies that the Spirit has been given to us as the essence of the New Covenant. The blood that flowed from Christ's side is the life of the New Covenant that has been given to us in the fellowship of His sufferings.

John fell at His feet like a dead man

Before we consider the relationship between the wounds of Christ and the elements of His priesthood in more detail, we will briefly consider John's response to his vision of the glorified Son of Man. When John saw Christ, with the seven elements of His priesthood, he immediately

fell at His feet *like a dead man*. Rev 1:17. Why did this vision of Christ have such a profound and significant impact upon John? We recall that John had already seen the glory of Christ when He was transfigured on the mountain, and it did not have this same impact upon him. In fact, John had already seen many miraculous things over the course of his life and ministry. He had been an eye-witness to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. He had witnessed His physical ascension into heaven from the Mount of Olives. John had also witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the great ingathering that followed the fulfilment of the Day of Pentecost.

The book of Acts recorded that John was one of the primary leaders of the early church in Jerusalem. He was personally involved in performing miracles, and witnessed the sovereign initiative of the Lord to give the promise of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles. When the apostle Paul submitted the gospel and the mandate that he had received from Christ, toward the Gentiles, John was among those who extended 'the right hand of fellowship' to him. He commended the apostle Paul to his work and ministry. Over the course of the years, John witnessed the tremendous fruit that the ministry of Paul produced among the Gentile nations. He also witnessed the rapid rise of alternative 'gospels' and forms of administration that caused many believers to fall away from Christ.

As an elderly man who had experienced all of these events, the apostle John was perhaps praying about the fallen condition of the church when he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. We know that he was in exile on the island of Patmos, and it is likely that the severe persecution that the church was experiencing at that time was also a significant concern for him. He may have been also reflecting on world events at that time. By that stage in history, the Jewish temple and the city of Jerusalem had been plundered and destroyed by the Roman army, under the leadership of Titus. Perhaps John was reflecting on the prophetic words of Jesus regarding that event. We recall that Jesus had pointed out the temple buildings to His disciples and said, 'Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.' Mat 24:2.

We do not know whether it was the fallen condition of the church, the persecution of the believers, the escalation of world events, or the prophetic words of Jesus that were in the forefront of John's mind as he went to prayer. What we do know is that John was endeavouring to watch and pray with Christ. He was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. Rev 1:10. By his own admission, however, John was still looking in the wrong direction! The veil of his own self-righteousness continued to cover

his eyes. We know that this is the case, because He heard the voice like the sound of a great trumpet coming from *behind* him. When he turned to see the voice, the veil that had been covering his eyes was removed, and he saw the glorified Son of Man standing in the middle of the seven golden lampstands.

John testified, '*When I saw Him*, I fell at His feet like a dead man.' Rev 1:17. Because John personally met the Lord in this prophetic vision, it had a profound impact upon him. The eyes of the Lord, burning like a flame of fire, revealed the iniquity and self-righteousness which still resided in his heart. In this deeply personal interaction with the Lord, he realised that his great concern for the affairs of the church, and even his fervent prayer, had no merit or value in the eyes of the Lord. He became poor in spirit when the Lord revealed that his self-righteous motivations and ministry activities were worthless, and were an offence to God. When the apostle John *saw Christ* in this way, he reckoned himself to be dead, and counted all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord.

We observe that the prophet Daniel had the same experience as the apostle John. During the Jewish captivity in Babylon, he had been praying and fasting for three entire weeks. At the end of this period of intense prayer and fasting, Daniel saw the angel Gabriel coming as a theophany of Christ. Daniel recounted, 'His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.' Dan 10:6. We note the similarities between this theophany and John's vision of Christ as the glorified Son of Man. Daniel testified, 'I was left alone when I saw this great vision, and no strength remained in me; for my vigour was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength.' Dan 10:8. The literal translation of this verse reads, 'My glory was turned within me into corruption'. Dan 10:8.

In this confronting encounter with the Lord, the glory of Daniel's own righteousness was revealed to be a corruption within him. This would have been a stark realisation for a man who had spent three entire weeks praying, fasting and humbling himself before God. He realised that he had no strength in his flesh to meet the Lord or to receive His word. Daniel testified, 'When I heard the sound of His words, then I was on my face, stunned, and my face was toward the ground.' Dan 10:9 LITV. In this regard, the prophet Daniel found himself in the same situation as was experienced by the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane. He had no capacity, in the flesh, to watch and pray with Christ.

Furthermore, his self-righteous willingness to pray and repent was his greatest impediment. It was revealed to be a corruption within him. This illumination caused Daniel to become poor in spirit.

Once Daniel had become poor in spirit, the Lord reached out His hand to lay hold of him. Daniel recalled, 'Then behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said to me, "O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words".' Dan 10:10-12. In the same way, Christ laid His right hand upon the apostle John, and said, 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.' Rev 1:17.

When Christ said to John, 'Do not be afraid', He was imparting *His faith* to him. We recall that the Lord said to Abram, 'Do not be afraid, I am your shield.' Gen 15:1. This means, 'I am your faith'. When Christ imparted His faith to John, it replaced all his concerns and anxieties. He was able to believe that God would accomplish His purpose in the heavens and on the earth. Jesus declared to John that He is the First and the Last. He is the Pioneer of our salvation and the Author and Finisher of our faith. Heb 2:10; Heb 12:2. John needed only to continue to walk with Christ in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. When Christ laid His right hand upon John, he received the grace that was necessary for him to fulfil the works that had been prepared for him. We know that those works included writing the book of Revelation. Jesus commanded him to 'write the thing which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things'. Rev 1:19.

Chapter 3

The seven elements of Christ's priesthood

The apostle John saw the glorified Son of Man standing in the middle of His lampstand churches. He was clothed in priestly garments. John described the appearance of Christ as our great High Priest by saying, 'His head and hair were white like wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.' Rev 1:14-16. We observe that John identified *seven elements* of Christ's priesthood.

In our previous chapter, we considered that Christ was glorified by the Father with these seven elements of priesthood, as the consequence of the seven wounding events that He experienced in His journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul declared that 'although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation *being*

designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.' Heb 5:8-10. In this chapter, we will consider in more detail the relationship between the seven wounding events that Christ experienced, and the seven elements of His priesthood.

Head and hair were white like wool

The apostle John identified the first element of Christ's priesthood by saying that 'His head and hair are white like wool, like snow'. Rev 1:14. Christ was glorified with this element of His priesthood as the outcome of His travail in the garden of Gethsemane. In this travail of prayer, worship and offering, He was fully revealed as the Lamb of God. We need to consider three distinct aspects of what it means for Christ to be the Lamb. He has been fully revealed as the Lamb for the burnt offering, the Lamb for the sin offering, and the Lamb who is the Head of the church.

In the first case, Christ was revealed as the Lamb for the burnt offering. He freely and willingly offered Himself to the Father. He offered Himself to be *fully obedient* to the Father's will. His ongoing confession was, 'Behold, I have come - in the volume of the book it is written of Me - to do Your will O God.' Heb 10:7. The offering of Christ as a burnt offering was a pleasing and soothing aroma to the Father. Paul declared that Christ 'has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-swelling aroma'. Eph 5:2.

The offering of Christ as the Lamb for the burnt offering began in the garden of Gethsemane, and continued all the way through His journey to the cross. It culminated with His physical death when He willingly yielded His spirit into the hands of the heavenly Father. This was a completely unique death! Jesus testified that no-one took His life from Him. Joh 10:18. He did not die from loss of blood or from suffocation. Nor did He take His own life. Rather, His death was the expression of a pure and undefiled offering. The world does not comprehend such a death, but it was fully revealed by Christ before the eyes of all men when He breathed His last on the cross. When the centurion who stood at the foot of the cross saw the way in which Christ breathed His last, he declared, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!' Mar 15:39.

The centurion bore witness to *the same offering* that the disciples had been invited to watch and join in the garden of Gethsemane. In the garden, Jesus offered up the fullness of prayer and worship to the Father. His prayer and worship ascended to the Father as a cloud of incense. The cloud of incense continued to ascend before the Father as Christ made

His journey all the way from the death of our sin to the Father's house. The offering of incense culminated when He finished His journey by committing His spirit into the hands of the Father. Christ's pure offering of prayer and worship is the first application of the statement in the book of Revelation, 'Behold, He is coming with the clouds'. Mar 14:62. Rev 1:7. We considered in our previous chapter how Christ is coming with 'a cloud of witnesses', who are also called 'the clouds of heaven'.

Jesus offered Himself to the Father as a burnt offering so that the Father could make Him to be *our sin offering*. The prophet Isaiah declared that the Father made the soul of Christ to be an offering for sin. Isa 53:10. Likewise, Paul explained that the Father made 'Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him'. 2Co 5:21. Christ became the sin offering by fully identifying with our sinful and wretched condition. He became our sin, and died *our death*. Christ was cut off from God, and He suffered God's wrath and judgement upon *our sin*. However, as He willingly and obediently continued to offer Himself to the Father, He destroyed sin in His flesh, and came back from the death of our sin through the shedding of His blood. Christ had returned from the death of our sin, and had finished the work of authoring the pathway of our salvation, when He declared from the cross, 'It is finished!'

In this way, Christ has been fully revealed as the Lamb for the burnt offering, and the Lamb for the sin offering. As the burnt offering, He is the Lamb who fully reveals the fellowship of offering that exists in Yahweh. He is also the Lamb for the sin offering 'who takes away the sin of the world'. Joh 1:29. His head and hair are white like wool and like snow because of the effectiveness of His propitiatory work as our sin offering. We recall the words of the Lord through the prophet Isaiah, 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white *as snow*, though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool'. Isa 1:18. Sin is removed from our lives as we join the fellowship of His death and sufferings. In this same fellowship, we also receive His life, which enables us to present ourselves to God and to serve Him in an acceptable manner.

The Head of the church

Jesus Christ is also the Lamb of God, who has become the Head of the church. When we look at *His head* and hair that are white like wool, we know that we are observing an important element of His headship. Further to this, when we consider the vision of the prophet Daniel, we know that Christ has received this element of headship *from the Father*.

When Daniel saw the Father as the Ancient of Days, He said that 'the hair of His head was like pure wool'. Dan 7:9. This is an important point. The principle of the Lamb is, firstly, found in the Father. The headship of the Father was revealed when it was given to Christ. The apostle Paul declared that God the Father 'gave Him to be Head over all things to the church'. Eph 1:22.

The Father has given Christ to be the Head of the church. The headship of Christ is expressed in the church by overseers who are part of a presbytery in His right hand. Jesus likened overseers to faithful and sensible slaves who have been 'put in charge of His household to give them their food at the proper time'. Mat 24:45. Significantly, the headship of Christ is always expressed in meekness. The apostle Paul admonished all overseers within the church to exercise headship with meekness and gentleness. 2Co 10:1. Eph 4:2. 2Ti 2:24-25. This is the mode and demeanour of the headship that Christ has received from the Father and committed to overseers, which is typified by a lamb.

Body to bride

When Jesus Christ offered Himself to God in that journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, He created in Himself 'one new man'. Eph 2:13-15. This 'new creation' included both Jew and Gentile in one body. Unlike the present heavens and earth, which He created by His word, Jesus Christ brought forth this new creation by offering as the Lamb of God. He didn't bring forth the new creation by *speaking*; rather, He created it by *the shedding of His blood*. Having done so, He was made by the Father to be the Head over His body. Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father as the immortal Head of His many-membered body, which is His church.

Further to this, the church is betrothed to Christ, and will become His bride when the ministry of the Day of Atonement is fulfilled in the time of the end. The church will be taken as a 'rib' from the side of Christ, and presented to Him in the same way that Eve was taken from the side of Adam and presented to him, in the beginning. The water and blood that flowed from the side of Christ, when the spear was thrust into His heart, are the elements that sanctify and perfect the church so that it can be presented to Him as a glorious bride in that day.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul said that Christ 'loved the church and gave Himself for her [as the Lamb of God], that He might sanctify

and cleanse her with the washing of the water by the word, that He might present to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish'. Eph 5:25-27. This description of the glorious church clearly demonstrates that she is 'of the Lamb', and is 'one Spirit' with Him. In the end of the book of Revelation, the church is clearly portrayed as 'the Lamb's wife'. Rev 21:9.

Eyes like a flame of fire

John described the *second element* of Christ's priesthood by saying that 'His eyes [are] like a flame of fire'. Rev 1:14. Jesus introduced Himself to the presbytery of the church in Thyatira as 'the Son of God who has *eyes like a flame of fire*, and His feet are like burnished bronze'. Rev 2:18. He addressed the seven churches as the One who is searching, illuminating, and judging the hearts of those who are in the household of God. At the end of the age, Christ will return with eyes as a flame of fire to judge the world. Rev 19:11-12.

When Jesus Christ looks at us, it means that His attention is directed toward us. We are the *focus* of His attention. The Scriptures refer to the *focal point* of the Lord's eye as 'the apple of His eye'. We recall the prayer of the psalmist, 'Keep me as the apple of Your eye, hide me under the shadow of Your wings'. Psa 17:8. The Israelites understood the significance of gaining and maintaining the Lord's attention. When Solomon dedicated the temple, he rejoiced that the Lord had turned to look upon him and upon the nation. 1Ki 8:28. Speaking of the temple, he said, 'For your *eyes are open* toward this house night and day, toward the place of which You have said, "My name shall be there"; to listen to the prayer which Your servant prays toward this place.' 1Ki 8:29.

When the Lord turns and looks at us, we are able to meet Him *eye to eye*. This is an intimate and personal interaction with Him. When we meet Him eye to eye, we are also meeting Him *heart to heart*. Following Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, the Lord responded to him by saying, 'I have heard your prayer and your supplication which you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built by putting My name there forever, and *My eyes and My heart* will be there perpetually.' 1Ki 9:3. The eyes of the Lord reveal His heart toward us. They reveal what He is thinking and feeling about us.

In the first case, the eyes of the Lord are as *a flame of fire*, because they reveal the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit toward us. This is a

jealous love. The Lord is jealous over the name and predestination that we have been given as sons of God. In the Song of Songs, the jealous love of God is likened to 'flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord'. Son 8:6. When we meet the Lord eye to eye, we come to know and believe the great love that God has for us, and the magnitude of His precious thoughts toward us.

In the second case, the eyes of the Lord are as *a flame of fire*, because He is searching and testing the hearts of men. Jesus said to the church in Thyatira, 'I am He who *searches* the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.' Rev 2:23. In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul explained that 'there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account'. Heb 4:13.

The eyes of the Lord are searching the innermost depths of our heart to *illuminate* the true condition of our heart to us. The Lord declared through the prophet Jeremiah, 'The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind.' Jer 17:9-10. It is not possible to know the true condition of our heart until the Lord reveals it to us. We are reminded that the eyes of the Lord have been fully activated toward us, because He was bruised for our iniquity. It is the iniquity of our heart that is exposed when He looks at us with His eyes. The Lord also said through Jeremiah, 'For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their *iniquity concealed from My eyes*.' Jer 16:17.

Not recoiling from His gaze

When the Lord begins to reveal the iniquity of our heart to us, it is a most confronting experience. The other law within our heart will often cause us to respond to His gaze from the basis of self-justification or self-condemnation. Such a self-righteous response highlights the issue that He is bringing to our attention and addressing in our heart. In this situation, it is vitally important that we do not recoil from His gaze. We know that the illumination of our iniquity is always accompanied by the illumination of His love toward us. This love enables us to believe that our heart can be changed in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings.

We observe that Job struggled with the temptation to recoil from the Lord's gaze when He was addressing an issue in Job's heart. Job asked the Lord, 'What is man that You magnify him [by calling him by name], and that You are concerned about him, that you examine him every

morning and try him every moment? Will You never *turn Your gaze* away from me?' Job 7:17-19. We know that Job was in the middle of a severe trial when he uttered these words. More than this, he was struggling to cope with the duress of being under the Lord's judgement. He continued by asking, 'Why have You set me as Your target, so that I am a burden to myself?' Job 7:20. It is evident that Job had become severely depressed.

In a similar way, King David became depressed under the duress of the Lord's eye upon him. He considered that he was perishing because of the opposition of the Lord's hand. Psa 39:10. He even went as far as saying to the Lord, 'Turn Your gaze away from me, that I may smile again before I depart and am no more.' Psa 39:13. In his distress, David mistakenly believed that if the Lord removed His chastening hand from him, then he would be able to find some relief and happiness in life. He did not yet understand the nature of the Lord's eyes as a flame of fire upon him.

Thankfully, the Lord did not turn His gaze away from him. In another psalm, David recorded that the Lord said to him, 'I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you *with My eye upon you.*' Psa 32:8. When the Lord looks at us, He reveals the iniquity that is in our heart. However, more than this, we are illuminated to know *the way in which we should go*, so that the iniquity can be removed from our heart. This is the way of the cross, in which the righteousness of God is revealed in us. The psalmist referred to it as 'the paths of righteousness'. Psa 23:3.

Having been illuminated regarding the way of righteousness, David understood that the discipline of the Lord was not killing him. Rather, it was saving his life! He could proclaim in faith, 'I will not die, but live, and tell of the works of the Lord. The Lord has disciplined me severely, but *He has not given me over to death.* Open to me the gates of righteousness; I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to the Lord.' Psa 118:17-19. The apostle Paul had this same testimony of faith when he declared, 'We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.' 2Co 4:8-10.

When the eyes of Christ reveal the iniquity in our heart, we can either recoil in shame and condemnation or we can recognise that we are bankrupt in spirit, and flee to Him for refuge. The psalmist declared that 'none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned'. Psa 34:22.

Likewise, Paul proclaimed that 'there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus'. Rom 8:1.

Peter and Judas

We observe these two distinct responses to the illumination that comes from the eyes of Christ when we consider Peter and Judas. We know that Peter was offended when Jesus said that all the disciples would fall away on the night of His arrest. Motivated by his religious zeal and self-righteousness, Peter effectively called Christ a liar, and declared that he was ready to die with Christ. Jesus reiterated His words that Peter would fall away. In fact, He foretold that Peter would deny Him three times. While Jesus was being bruised for Peter's iniquity in the house of Caiaphas, Peter denied knowing the Lord on three separate occasions.

Luke recorded that, at this time, 'The Lord turned and looked at Peter'. Luk 22:61. The eyes of Jesus were like a flame of fire. He looked into the depths of Peter's self-righteous heart. In that moment, the iniquity of Peter's heart was revealed to him. Peter immediately remembered the words that Christ had spoken to him and understood, by illumination, the true nature of his wretched condition. He had betrayed the Lord's friendship, and had also denied the confession of his own self-righteous faith. He had been proven to be a liar with no integrity in his heart.

When Jesus looked at Peter, he recognised that he was bankrupt in spirit. He went out and wept bitterly. These were not tears of regret. It was godly sorrow that led Peter to repentance. Following His resurrection, Jesus met Peter again on the beach by the Sea of Galilee. In this interaction, Peter understood the inadequacy of his own love for the Lord but, at the same time, he knew that he was the apple of the Lord's eye. Jesus revealed to Peter the high calling of his name, and He also explained the way in which Peter needed to walk in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. He illuminated the pathway of Peter's salvation.

We know that Jesus looked at Peter with eyes as a flame of fire, and that it led to his conversion. It is most likely that He also looked at Judas. It is reasonable to assume that, having led the cohort to arrest Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, Judas also accompanied them to the house of Caiaphas. This means that Judas, like Peter, would have witnessed the bruising that Christ experienced because of his iniquity. However, it appears that witnessing this suffering had little impact upon Judas until Christ looked at him. Christ probably looked at Judas while He was being led away from the house of Caiaphas to be delivered to Pilate.

The Gospel of Matthew recorded that 'when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders'. Mat 27:3. Until this time, Judas did not believe that Christ was going to die. He believed that Jesus was the Messiah who would reign upon the earth, and that all the disciples would reign with Him. When Judas saw that Jesus had been condemned to death, it exposed his own deception, and undermined all of his religious expectations.

In a similar fashion to Peter, Judas was illuminated to see the iniquity of his own heart. He confessed to the chief priests and elders that he had sinned by betraying innocent blood. Mat 27:4. However, in contrast to Peter, he did not let go of his self-righteousness in order to become bankrupt in spirit. He sought to make amends by returning the thirty pieces of silver and, when this was not successful, he moved to self-righteous condemnation. Rather than looking to Christ for mercy, he passed judgement upon himself, and decided to take his own life.

Addressing the presbyteries

The first three chapters of the book of Revelation show that Jesus Christ is walking among all His lampstand churches with eyes like a flame of fire. He specifically introduced Himself to the presbytery in Thyatira as 'the Son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire'. Rev 2:18. He spoke of bringing judgement upon a certain matter among them so that 'all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts'. Rev 2:23. We know that Christ was interfacing with all the churches in this way. He could say to each church, 'I know your deeds', because His eyes were upon them. Further to this, whenever Christ said to a presbytery, 'I have this against you', it was because His eyes had searched the innermost depths of every heart.

Jesus addresses each presbytery with eyes as a flame of fire, with the goal of bringing illumination to every heart. Those who repent can overcome the issue that is being addressed by Christ, by joining the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. A presbytery that overcomes in this way receives the capacity of the sevenfold Spirit of God to minister the illumination of His eyes among a lampstand church. It is for this reason that the seven lamps upon a lampstand are also likened to seven eyes. In the time of the end, the light of the stars in the right hand of Christ, which is reflected and focused by lampstand churches, will be the ministry of the eyes of the Lord sent out into all the earth. Rev 5:6.

Feet like burnished bronze

The third element of Christ's priesthood is that His feet are like burnished bronze. This is the outcome of His chastening for our peace. We do not know how many times Christ was beaten with rods as He stood before the chief priests and elders. The Jewish law nominated that a wrongdoer could not be beaten with more than forty stripes, otherwise he would be dishonoured before the eyes of all. Deu 25:2-3. Motivated by envy, it is likely that the chief priests had every intention of dishonouring Christ, and so it is possible that they beat Him with many stripes.

Regardless of the exact number of stripes, Christ received this judgement from the hand of His heavenly Father. He willingly received the 'many stripes' that we deserve as the consequence of our wickedness. As He willingly received this judgement from the hand of God for our sake, the element of His priesthood that was being activated was His authority to be our judge. The Father has ordained Him to be the judge of the living and the dead. Act 10:42.

Christ is not yet judging those in the world who are 'dead' in their trespasses and sin. We know that He will judge the world in righteousness at the end of the age. However, at this present time, He is judging the 'living' who are in the household of God. The 'living' are those who have joined the fellowship of His offering. If we are in Christ, our eternal judgement has been commuted to chastening. Jesus chastens those whom He loves, with a 'few stripes', so that we can bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness as sons of God.

Jesus said to the presbytery of the church in Laodicea, 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.' Rev 3:19. John bore witness to this element of Christ's ministry when he said that the feet of Christ were 'like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace'. Rev 1:15. The feet of Christ represent the altar in the true tabernacle that He has established in heavenly places. The altar of the true tabernacle is the communion table. This is the place where the judgement of Christ is active toward us.

In the tabernacle of old, the altar of sacrifice was made of acacia wood, and was then completely overlaid with bronze. For this reason, it was often called 'the bronze altar'. This altar was the place of the burnt offering. A lamb for a burnt offering was offered upon this altar each morning and evening. The Lord instructed the priests that the fire needed to burn continually on the altar. He said, 'Fire shall be kept burning continually on the altar; it is not to go out.' Lev 6:13. In contrast to the

bronze altar in the tabernacle of old, which had a continual fire burning *on top of it*, the altar in the true tabernacle is *in the midst* of a perpetual fire. The King James version of the Bible notes that the feet of Christ were like fine brass 'as if they burned *in a furnace*'. Rev 1:15. This conveys the sense that the fire completely enveloped the altar. The fire has refined the altar, and is continuing to sanctify the altar as the place of all acceptable offering.

The fire that envelops the altar is the presence of Yahweh. It is the fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who dwell together, by offering, in perfect unity. We recall that the Lord spoke to Moses from the midst of a fire. Further to this, He instructed Moses to explain to the nation of Israel that 'the Lord your God is a consuming fire'. Deu 4:24. This fire also reveals the jealous love of God. We have already considered that the jealous love of God is illuminated to us by the eyes of Christ that are like a flame of fire. The eyes of Christ are illuminating our heart. The fire of God, in relation to the altar, is refining, purging and purifying.

The Urim and Thummim

Jesus addressed the presbytery of the church in Thyatira as the One who has eyes like a flame of fire *and* feet like burnished brass. It is apparent that these two elements of Christ's priesthood work together. When we consider the illumination of the eyes of Christ and the refining work of the furnace that envelops the feet of Christ, we observe that our great High Priest possesses the true Urim and Thummim. His eyes as a flame of fire are the true Urim that bring illumination to the heart of man. His feet in the refining furnace are the true Thummim as the context for the perfection of a multitude of sons of God.

Under the Old Covenant, the Lord instructed Moses that the high priest would carry the Urim and Thummim in the breastplate of Judgement over his heart. Urim means 'lights' and Thummim means 'perfections'. These two precious stones, for illumination and perfection, were kept over the heart of the high priest whenever he went into the presence of the Lord. In this way, the high priest would 'bear the Judgement of the children of Israel over his heart before the Lord continually'. Exo 28:30. We are not told exactly how these stones worked, but we do know that the high priest could use them to enquire of the Lord when divine guidance and direction was needed for the nation. For example, the Lord said concerning Joshua, 'He shall stand before Eleazar the priest who shall inquire for him by the Judgement of the Urim before the Lord.' Num 27:21. This was particularly relevant in times of warfare.

Following the exile of the Jewish nation in Babylon, they returned to their land and rebuilt the temple. We know that the ark of the covenant did not return to this temple. The glory of the Shekinah had returned to heaven prior to the exile and did not come again to the earth until Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Joh 1:14. In a similar way, it is apparent that the priests did not possess the Urim and Thummim when they returned from Babylon. Nehemiah instructed the priests, who could not substantiate their genealogy, that 'they should not eat from the most holy things until a priest arose with Urim and Thummim'. Neh 7:65. This did not happen until Christ came and offered Himself.

When Jesus Christ stood before the chief priests and elders, they did not perceive that He was their great High Priest and the Builder of the true temple in the heavenly places. If they had recognised Him, they would have placed upon His head the gold and silver crown that had been prepared in the days of Zechariah. Instead of honouring Him in this way as they should have, they dishonoured Him with many stripes. They mocked His capacity for spiritual discernment by putting a blindfold upon His eyes, and saying, 'Prophecy to us, you Christ; who is the one who hit You?' However, as Christ endured this mocking, He stood up as our great High Priest in full possession of the true Urim and Thummim.

It is significant that the Urim and Thummim were carried *over the heart* of the high priest. As we have already considered, the eyes of Christ are illuminating us so that we can see the iniquity that is in our own heart. However, more than this, the eyes of Christ are illuminating us so that we can see what is in *His heart* toward us. When He looks at us, we can know and believe the great love that God has for us. Further to this, when He enters into judgement with us at the communion table, His discipline is also motivated by His love for us. We recall again the words of Jesus, 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline'. Rev 3:19.

The Lord revealed the operation of the true Urim and Thummim to Abraham when he enquired, 'How shall I know that I will inherit?' Gen 15:8. In response to this query, the Lord instructed him to bring a sacrifice that represented the offering of Christ for his sake. Abraham understood the need to participate in this offering as he drove the vultures away from the sacrifice during the heat of the day, and then endured a horror of great darkness as the sun went down. However, once it was dark, a 'smoking furnace' and 'a torch of fire' passed between the pieces of his sacrifice as the Lord spoke to him about the way ahead for himself and his descendants. Gen 15:17. Abraham had already met Christ as Melchizedek. Gen 14:18-20. However, as the 'smoking furnace'

and the 'torch of fire' examined his offering and his own heart, he also understood how we meet our great High Priest, who possesses the true Urim and Thummim, in the fellowship of His offering.

His voice like the sound of many waters

The fourth element of Christ's priesthood is that His voice is like the sound of many waters. This was the outcome of His scourging before Pilate. During this aspect of His suffering for our sake, it is likely that Christ suffered somewhere in the vicinity of 1600 wounds upon His body. The blood that was shed from these wounds is sufficient to bring deliverance from every aberrant behaviour, and to bring healing to the dystrophy that every individual experiences in their identity as a person. The prophet Isaiah declared that 'by His scourging we are healed'. Isa 53:5.

If we have joined the fellowship of His offering, the many and varied trials that we experience in life are a participation in His considerable wounding. It is the washing of the water of the word that sanctifies us to our participation in His sufferings, so that we receive the deliverance and healing that is available to us in His blood. In his letter to Titus, the apostle Paul said that we have been delivered, 'not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the *washing of regeneration* and renewing by the Holy Spirit'. Tit 3:5.

We note that Jesus was able to minister the washing of regeneration to His disciples before He was scourged by Pilate. At the last supper, Jesus said to Peter, 'You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.' Joh 15:3. Furthermore, at the last supper, Jesus girded Himself with a towel, and washed His disciples' feet. He was sanctifying them for a participation in His sufferings. However, it was not possible for the disciples to fulfil His command to 'wash one another's feet' until He had been scourged for their sake, and they had joined the fellowship of His sufferings.

When Jesus was scourged for our healing, it was not only His personal testimony that was activated, it was also the activation of His testimony in a *great multitude of sons of God*. As the outcome of His scourging, His voice is like the sound of *many waters!* His testimony is now in the mouth of *many sons* who have been delivered and healed in the fellowship of His scourging. Each of these sons of God can bear witness to the resurrection life that they have found in the fellowship of His death.

The first element that is being restored within us, as we are regenerated and healed in the inner man, is our capacity to worship God in spirit and truth. It is the spirit of adoption within us that enables us to worship our God and Father. Christ also worships the Father from within us, once He has taken up residence in our heart when we are born of the Spirit. The worship of those who have been born of the Spirit is the expression of His voice like the sound of many waters. His voice is heard in the expression of our worship as we gather together for communion.

The voice of Christ like the sound of many waters is also heard when the many members of His body come to minister His word, by the Holy Spirit, at the communion table. This is how the members of His body wash one another's feet in a fellowship of giving and receiving. The testimony of Christ that is ministered in the communion gathering is sanctifying and equipping every son of God for their unique participation in His offering and sufferings.

In the first case, the voice of Christ is heard like the sound of many waters *in the household of God*. It is heard in the worship of many sons, and through the ministry of the many members of the body of Christ at the communion table. However, we are reminded that Christ was scourged before Pilate, who was the representative ruler of the nations of the world. The blood that was shed from His many wounds was for 'the sprinkling of many nations'. Isa 52:15. This is possible because a multitude of sons of God proceeds from the communion gathering to be witnesses of Christ in the world.

The Scriptures liken a believer, who has committed their life into the hands of the Father in the fellowship of Christ's offering, to a tree that has been planted by streams of living water. Jeremiah declared, 'Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit.' Jer 17:7-8. We could liken the *green leaves* to the positive demeanour and confession of faith that a Christian will demonstrate in the world when they are joyfully receiving all of their sufferings from the Lord's hand.

Significantly, the prophet Ezekiel said that the leaves of the trees that grow on either side of the river of the water of life will be 'for healing'. Eze 47:12. When we maintain our confession of faith, with a spirit of thanksgiving, in the middle of the adverse circumstances of life that we encounter in the world, it is a powerful testimony of the healing that

is available to all men in Christ. This is particularly true when we are being persecuted or treated unfairly by those who are in the world. We are called to bear the reproach of Christ in the world, while continuing to offer up a sacrifice of praise to God. Heb 3:13,15. In this way, the testimony of Christ is heard as the fruit of our lips in every place.

Seven stars in His right hand

The fifth element of Christ's priesthood is that He holds seven stars in His right hand. This is the outcome of the wounding that He experienced at the hands of the soldiers in the Praetorium. We recall that the soldiers placed a crown of thorns upon His head, and a reed in His right hand as a mock sceptre. They mocked His kingship as they bowed down to Him. They then used the reed to drive the crown of thorns into His head. As Christ was being beaten around the head with this reed, He was disempowering the kingdoms of this world.

Christ overcame the kingdoms of this world by the shedding of His blood. At the same time, the authority to express His kingship, in heaven and on earth, was being activated. We are reminded of the words of Jesus to Pilate, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.' Joh 18:36. Christ did not seek to be delivered from His suffering. Rather, the authority to express His kingship was activated through His suffering.

The authority of Christ's kingship is expressed through the seven stars that He holds in His right hand. The seven stars are the 'true sceptre' in His hand. Christ currently expresses His authority in the church through these seven stars. Habakkuk prophesied concerning Christ, 'His radiance is like the sunlight; He has rays flashing from His hand, and there is the hiding of His power.' Hab 3:4. In the same way that the power and authority of Christ were activated in weakness, the right of the star to express His authority in the church is also established through weakness. We clearly observe this principle in the life of the apostle Paul. He testified to the Corinthians that Christ 'was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you.' 2Co 13:4.

Jesus Christ willingly submitted Himself to be humiliated and mocked by Pilate and his soldiers, because He was joining Himself to the suffering and plight of all the messengers of God. The book of Daniel

likened the messengers of God to stars who are called to shine brightly in the expanse of heaven, and to lead many believers to righteousness. Dan 12:3. However, the book of Daniel also reveals that these same stars will be cast down and trampled by the spirit of antichrist that is in the world, for a period of 2300 years. Dan 11:33. Dan 8:13-14. This period began with the corruption of the priesthood and the altar among the Jewish nation during the reign of the Seleucid empire. It will not conclude until the economy of offering has been fully restored in the body of Christ in the time of the end.

Christ has *laid hold* of the fallen stars *in His right hand* by joining the stars in their affliction that results from the spirit of antichrist that is in the world. He suffered at the hands of Pilate, who was the governor of the region and the representative of the Caesar who ruled the Roman empire at that time. Jesus bore witness to the truth of His kingship before Pilate, but this truth was flung to the ground as the soldiers mocked and humiliated Him with the crown of thorns upon His head. Joh 18:37. Dan 8:12. However, as Christ suffered with the fallen stars, He established the pathway for the restoration of every star in His right hand.

As Pilate and his soldiers persecuted Christ, the kingdoms of this world were disempowered and destroyed. In the same way, the stars in the right hand of Christ will receive authority over the nations as they are being persecuted by the nations of this world. The authority of Christ over the nations of the world is symbolised as 'a rod of iron'. Jesus said to the presbytery in Thyatira, 'He who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations - he shall rule them with a *rod of iron*; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels.' Rev 2:26-27.

In the time of the end, Christ will use the stars in His right hand to express His authority in the world. The stars are likened to arrows that flash forth like lightning from His hand. Deu 33:2. Isa 49:2. Rev 2:1. During this time, the church will enter a period of great tribulation in the world. However, out of this tribulation, the kingdom of God will be fully established in the earth. We will witness the fulfilment of the prophecy of Daniel concerning the stone that is 'cut without hands', which will destroy the kingdoms of this world, and will grow into a mountain that fills the whole earth. Dan 2:34-35.

The sword from His mouth

The sixth element of Christ's priesthood is the sharp two-edged sword from His mouth. Rev 1:16. This is the outcome of His wounding when He was nailed to the cross. Speaking of Christ's crucifixion, the prophet Isaiah recorded that He was *pierced through* for our transgressions. Isa 53:5. He was 'pierced through' when the nails penetrated His hands and feet. He was then lifted up to be crucified between the two thieves. In this way, the Scripture that states that 'He was numbered with the transgressors', was fulfilled. Isa 53:12. Mar 15:28. We could say that the thieves who were crucified on either side of Christ were representative of us all. Christ bore our sin in His physical body, and was sentenced to death by crucifixion, because of all our transgressions.

In the first case, a transgression is the violation of the Law of God. When the Law was bound upon the nation of Israel as a covenant with their flesh, any person who violated this covenant became a transgressor. The law covenant invoked a judgement upon them. However, a transgression is not limited to being a violation of the law covenant. The apostle Paul explained that death reigned from Adam to Moses - that is, prior to the law covenant - even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of *the transgression* of Adam. Rom 5:14. Adam was a transgressor because he violated the *Royal Law*, which is the law of love, in the fellowship of the Everlasting Covenant.

The sword from the mouth of Christ was activated when He nailed the Law and all of the ordinances of the law covenant to the cross. The Law was nailed to the cross when He suffered under its curse and judgement while, at the same time, He fulfilled its righteous requirements. The curse of the law covenant was invoked upon Christ when He was crucified, because it is written in the Law, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'. Gal 3:13. However, when the covenant invoked a curse upon the One who was the full revelation and the perfect fulfilment of the Royal Law of God, it destroyed its own validity.

Jesus Christ abolished the law covenant, but He did not remove or nullify the Royal Law of God. Rather, He fulfilled the Royal Law of God, and established the cross as the *new context* for its revelation and fulfilment. The righteousness of God is no longer revealed through the law covenant; it is fully revealed through the cross of Christ. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul declared that the righteousness of God has now been revealed apart from the Law. Rom 3:21. The cross was the full revelation of the love of God. And our participation in the fellowship of the cross,

by the Spirit, is the only context in which the righteous requirement of the Law is fulfilled in us.

The word of the cross

The sword that proceeds from the mouth of Christ is the word of the cross. In contrast to the Law, which resulted in *condemnation*, the word of the cross brings *conviction* to the hearts of all those who receive it. The apostle Paul declared, 'For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.' Heb 4:12. The word of the cross *convicts* every believer of the need for them to personally join the fellowship of Christ's offering, so that the other law can be removed from their heart by the circumcision of Christ.

The word of the cross is also called 'the word of reconciliation', because it joins all believers to the ministry of reconciliation that is only available in the cross. 2Co 5:18-20. The cross is the instrument of reconciliation, because it has removed every impediment to our reconciliation with God and with one another. Christ has abolished the law covenant. By becoming our sin, and tasting the suffering of death for us as a sin offering, He has condemned sin in the flesh. It is condemned in our flesh when we join the fellowship of His offering and suffering. 2Co 5:21. Heb 2:9. Rom 8:3. He has also established the process by which the other law can be removed from our hearts in the fellowship of His sufferings. The law covenant and sin were significant impediments that needed to be removed, but the greatest source of enmity between God and man is the other law that resides in the heart of every person. The other law is the greatest source of enmity in all of our relationships.

The word of the cross joins us to the circumcision of Christ, so that the cause of the enmity in our relationships can be removed. However, more than this, the word of the cross is the word of faith that joins us to the offering of Christ, so that we can be joined together in one Spirit. It is helpful to remember that the cross is *a two-edged sword*. On one side, it removes the impediments to fellowship that are within us. At the same time, it heals divisions and joins people together, thereby establishing peace. The cross is a necessary element in every relationship. It is essential to the success of Christian marriages, and to the fruitfulness of families. It is also the basis for first-love fellowship in the body of Christ.

The apostle Paul explained that, in the broadest sense, it was the ministry of the cross that enabled both Jew and Gentile to be joined together in the one body of Christ. Speaking of Christ, Paul said, 'For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.' Eph 2:14-16. The evidence that the word of the cross is being received by presbyters is that the relational impediments and divisions between brethren in the presbytery are being removed, and men are able to meet one another in spirit and in truth.

He did not open His mouth

The cross is an instrument of reconciliation. Jesus preached peace to all men from the cross. Eph 2:17. However, the cross is likened to a 'sword' that proceeds from the mouth of Christ, because it is also an instrument of *warfare* and *judgement*. The most significant point here is that, when Christ was confronted by the religious leaders, the rulers of the world, and the satanic principalities and powers, He did not war against them according to the flesh. That is, He did not react to them; nor did He open His mouth against them. Isa 53:7. By this means, the cross became the active instrument by which His enemies were judged and destroyed.

When Jesus was lifted up on the cross, He was mocked and ridiculed by all who passed by. This included the chief priests, the elders and the scribes. However, Peter said that 'He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously'. 1Pe 2:22-23. The prophet Isaiah declared that Christ was oppressed by satanic principalities and powers, and was afflicted by wicked men, 'Yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth'. Isa 53:7.

The abuse that Jesus endured on the cross went well beyond false accusation. The crowds sought to undermine and to destroy the truth of His identity as the Son of God, and His relationship with the Father. They tested Him by saying, 'If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' Mat 27:40. The underlying inference of this test was clear - if He did not come down from the cross, then He was not the Son of God! When Jesus did not engage with their test in any way, they used it as proof to substantiate their false claim that He was an imposter.

In the same way, the chief priests and elders mocked Him, and said, 'He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him.' Mat 27:43. Again, when Jesus did not engage with their test, nor answer them in any way, they felt that they were justified in their assumption that God did not delight in Him! The perceived failure of Jesus reinforced their belief that they were doing God a service by putting Him to death. This belief shows how deceived the religious leaders had become. They had been deceived by Satan, and had been taken captive by him to do his will. 2Ti 2:26.

The judgement of Satan

Jesus referred to Satan as 'the ruler of this world'. Joh 12:31. He was the ruler of this world because he had the power of death. Satan had the power of death for three reasons. First, he was the father of lies, and the source of the sin that was killing mankind. Second, he was our 'adversary at law' who could rightly accuse and condemn us in relation to our failure to obey the Law of God. Third, he held the whole human race in bondage to *the fear of death*. Heb 2:15. Christ destroyed all three aspects of Satan's power through His death on the cross. In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul said that Jesus Christ destroyed him who had *the power of death*; that is, the devil. Heb 2:14. He did this 'through death'.

Satan put forward the lie that mankind could find life apart from fellowship with God. He deceived Eve with this lie. She then proposed this alternative word to Adam, who disobeyed God. The outcome of Adam's disobedience was that the whole of mankind died in him. 1Co 15:22. In this regard, Satan was the father of lies and the source of sin. Death entered the world because of sin. However, Satan has successfully deceived the whole world into thinking that death is avoidable, despite our sin-sick condition. When Christ was lifted up as the embodiment of our sin as 'the serpent on the pole', He dispelled this lie and destroyed the source of the deception. He revealed before the eyes of all that it is the venom of the serpent that has caused our death. Moreover, Christ destroyed sin in His physical body, and demonstrated how we can be delivered from the death of our sin when we join the fellowship of His offering.

When Jesus was lifted up as the serpent on the pole, He removed the deception that prevented us from seeking a remedy to the venom of sin in our lives. He also established the process for the removal of the venom, so that we can be healed. Further to this, when Jesus nailed the

Law to the cross, He removed the Law from the hands of Satan so that he can no longer use it to accuse and condemn us. In this regard, Christ has *disarmed* Satan by removing the Law as the ground for his accusation. We are no longer being judged by the Law. Paul said that there is no condemnation for those who have joined the fellowship of Christ's offering. Rom 8:1.

Christ *disarmed* principalities and powers by removing the Law from their agency and nailing it to the cross. He then made a public spectacle of them, and triumphed over them in the cross, because of their misuse of the law. Col 2:15. Christ did this by drawing Satan and the spiritual host of wickedness onto the ground of the cross. Satan motivated the crowd to use the Law to abuse and to discredit Christ. He thought that he would be victorious. He did not realise that he was being lifted up with Christ, as the serpent on the pole, to be disempowered, cast out and destroyed. Satan did not comprehend that the cross is the wisdom and power of God. Paul concluded that if the rulers of this age had understood the cross as the wisdom and power of God, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 1Co 2:7-8.

Jesus Christ has established the cross as the instrument of judgement by which He will judge the world. The apostle John described the return of Christ at the end of the age, by saying, 'Out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations'. Rev 19:15. This is a significant point. At the end of the age, we will not be judged because of the fall of Adam, because of our personal sin, or because of the condemnation of the Law. Every person will be judged on the basis of their response to the cross of Jesus Christ.

His face shining like the sun

The final element of the priesthood of Christ was His face 'like the sun shining in its strength'. Rev 1:16. This was the outcome of the seventh wound, which occurred after Jesus had breathed His last, having committed His spirit into the hands of the Father. The apostle John recorded that a soldier thrust a spear into the side of Christ. Joh 19:34. Blood and water flowed from His pierced heart. This final wound opened up a new and living way for all believers to join the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. Heb 10:20.

Until this time, Christ appeared to be no different from a common criminal. Isaiah explained that He had no stately form or majesty. Isa 53:2. There was nothing in His physical appearance that would cause

people to be attracted to Him or to look upon Him. In fact, those who did look upon Him, as He was being crucified, wagged their heads and hurled abuse at Him. Mat 27:39. However, when the soldier thrust the spear into His heart, a spirit of grace and of supplication was poured out upon all those who witnessed this event. Instead of wagging their heads, the crowd began to beat their breasts and to return to their homes. Luk 23:48.

The apostle John witnessed the blood and water flowing from the side of Christ. John could bear witness to the personal impact of this event on himself. Joh 19:35. John also observed the impact that this event had on all those who had gathered at the cross. He declared that this was the fulfilment of the prophecy of Zechariah. Joh 19:37. John recalled that the Lord had said, through Zechariah, 'I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.' Zec 12:10.

There were some individuals who received illumination regarding Christ's offering for their sake during His journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. For example, we have considered that, when Jesus turned and looked at him in the house of Caiaphas, Peter understood that Jesus was 'bruised' for *his* iniquity. We also know that one of the thieves who was crucified that day understood that Jesus was 'pierced through' for his transgressions. Luk 23:40-43. However, once His offering was finished, a new and living way was opened, so that all believers could join the fellowship of His offering. A spirit of grace and supplication was available for the whole world to look upon Him whom they had pierced. Rev 1:7.

With the seventh and final sprinkling of His blood, the face of Jesus Christ began to shine 'like the sun shining in its strength'. Rev 1:16. This expression signified that He had become *the Light of the world*. He is the Light of the world because He is the full revelation of the hope of our sonship. He has fully revealed the glory of the Father as the perfected Son of God. This was the fulfilment of the prayer of Jesus, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You.' Joh 17:1. The apostle Paul declared, 'For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness", is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God *in the face of Christ*.' 2Co 4:6.

The seven elements of Christ's priesthood

Jesus Christ has been glorified as the firstborn Son of God. He has also been crowned with glory and honour, by the Father, as our great High Priest. In the same way that the seventh and final wound has granted us a participation in the preceding six wounds of Christ for our sake, all of the elements of Christ's priesthood are revealed to us by His marred face, which now shines like the sun in all of its strength. The face of the glorified Son of Man reveals all of the elements of His priesthood as we look upon Him whom we have pierced. Further to this, all of these elements of His priesthood are active toward us as we join the fellowship of His offering and sufferings on His journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross.

Chapter 4

The seven angels of the seven churches

The apostle John saw Jesus Christ standing in the middle of seven golden lampstands with seven stars in His right hand. Jesus immediately explained the meaning of the seven stars and the seven lampstands to John. He said, 'As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.' Rev 1:20. It is the Greek word *aggelos* (pronounced *angelos*) that is translated 'angel' in this verse. It simply means a 'messenger'. It is derived from another Greek word that means 'to lead'. In this regard, the Greek word is consistent with the prophet Daniel's definition of the stars of God. He declared, 'Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those *who lead* the many to righteousness, *like the stars* forever and ever.' Dan 12:3.

There are many instances in the New Testament when the Greek word *aggelos* is used to refer to the angelic administration. However, there are also many times when this word does not refer to angelic beings, and is used to describe people who are messengers. Jesus used the word *aggelos*

to describe the work and ministry of John the Baptist. He said, 'This is the one about whom it is written, "Behold, I send My messenger (*aggelos*) ahead of You, who will prepare Your way before You.' Mat 11:10. In a similar way, Luke applied the word *aggelos* to the disciples of John the Baptist who were sent as messengers to inquire about Jesus. Luk 7:24. He also used the word *aggelos* to describe the disciples of Jesus who were sent as messengers to make practical arrangements for Him in each new town. Luk 9:52.

This raises an important question. When Jesus spoke of the angels of the seven churches, was He referring to the angelic administration or to human messengers within the body of Christ? The answer to this question is self-evident when we consider *the content of His admonition* to the angel of each lampstand church. For example, Jesus said to the angel in Smyrna, 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.' Rev 2:10. Jesus was evidently talking to messengers who would suffer imprisonment, and were subject to the constraints of mortality. He promised that these messengers would receive the crown of life, which is the capacity to manifest His resurrection life in their mortal bodies.

It is also apparent that Jesus was speaking to *a group of leaders* who comprise the messenger of each lampstand church. He was not referring to the *aggelos* as a single individual. Referring again to His admonition to the leaders in Smyrna, we note that Jesus said, 'The devil is about to cast *some of you* into prison.' Rev 2:10. Similarly, He said to the leaders in Pergamum, 'You have there *some who hold* the teaching of Balaam ... *so you also have some* who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.' Rev 2:14-15. Having identified that some of the leaders in Thyatira held the doctrine of Jezebel, Jesus continued, 'I say to you, *the rest who are in Thyatira*.' Rev 2:24. These references to 'some of you' and 'the rest' clearly show that Jesus was not addressing a single leader. He was not speaking to a single bishop in a denominational structure or to a single pastor of an independent local church. Jesus was addressing a *group of leaders* within a presbytery that governed each lampstand church.

Even though Jesus was speaking to a group of leaders in each place, He still addressed them as a *single angel* who had oversight of each lampstand church. Rev 2:1. This is because the leaders in each church were members of a presbytery. The apostle Paul introduced the term

'presbytery' in his letter to Timothy. He encouraged him by saying, 'Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by *the presbytery*.' 1Ti 4:14. A presbytery is a fellowship of overseers, elders and deacons, along with those who have received specific ministry grace from Christ as part of an apostolic administration. Regardless of the grace that a leader has received from Christ, every individual within a presbytery must be a 'firstfruits' Christian. In this regard, we are reminded of the words of Paul, 'If a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?' 1Ti 3:5.

In our day, there are many and various modes of leadership within religious Christian communities. Some are hierarchical in structure and others are democratic in nature. A presbytery is firstly a group of brethren who have committed themselves to relate together in a fellowship of 'first love'. Rev 2:4. The government of a presbytery is exercised through offering, and is facilitated by each presbyter as they function, in faith, by expressing the initiative of their own unique sanctification and name. A presbytery cannot remain viable if it adopts an hierarchical structure or a democratic mode. How can many leaders function as *one presbytery* without relying on a hierarchy or the consensus of opinions? Jesus referred to the operation of a presbytery as a 'mystery' because it functions by offering, and can only be understood by illumination. Rev 1:20. It is the same 'mystery of offering' that reveals how the three Persons of the Godhead function in the one fellowship of Yahweh.

A presbytery that functions in the same mode of offering as the fellowship of Yahweh is a star in the right hand of Christ. Dan 12:3. The symbolism of a star is important, because it signifies that a presbytery is a *light-bearer* in the heavenly places. In our previous chapter, we considered that every element of Christ's priesthood is revealed from His face that shines like the sun in its strength. Rev 1:16. It is the *same light* that is proclaimed by the stars in His right hand. The prophet Habakkuk declared, 'His radiance is like the sunlight; He has rays flashing from His hand, and there is the hiding of His power.' Hab 3:4. Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father. However, He is still speaking from heaven and directing the affairs of His church through the apostolic administration in His right hand. Christ is restoring presbyteries so that they can minister the authority and power of all seven elements of His priesthood, in weakness, among His lampstand churches.

We have established that Jesus was not addressing the angelic administration when He admonished *the angel* of each lampstand church. However, His use of the term 'angel' does draw our attention to the mandate that belongs to the angelic administration. This is an important consideration because it helps us to understand the *new mandate* that belongs to an apostolic administration, as part of a presbytery, in the right hand of Christ. The stars in the right hand of Christ have been raised far above all angelic principalities and powers. The manifold wisdom of God is proclaimed through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. Eph 3:10.

The angelic administration

The Scriptures teach us that God created an angelic administration in the heavens, and that they have an integral role to play in His plan and purpose on the earth. Psa 33:6. Psa 103:19-22. We observe in the book of Revelation that the church and the angels will be united in one administration to fulfil the purpose of God in the time of the end. However, this does not mean that men and angels have the same predestination or mandate. We must understand and honour the lines of sanctification that exist between men and angels. The Scriptures teach us a lot about the angels, and it is important for us to appreciate their role in Christ's administration and their relationship to us. However, at the same time, it is necessary that we heed Paul's warning against the worship of angels, and against intruding too far into those things that we have not seen. Col 2:18.

An angel is a spirit that has been created by the breath of the Lord. They do not possess a soul or a physical body. The apostle Paul described angels as 'ministering spirits'. Heb 1:14. This means that they can worship and make offering to the Lord. Heb 1:6. In the words of the psalmist, they can '*bless* the Lord'. Psa 103:22. The duty of all angels is to obey the voice of the Lord, to serve Him, and to perform His will. Psa 103:19-22. The angels were created before mankind for the purpose of becoming servants to the heirs of salvation. Heb 1:14. Within their administration, the angelic spirits have also been 'named' by the Lord of hosts. For example, the Bible refers to Michael, Gabriel, Lucifer and Abaddon by name. The name that belongs to an angel contains their mandate. There are distinctions between the mandates that have been given to individual angels.

The angels were created as servants; however, they are also mighty in authority and power. 2Pe 2:11. The Lord has placed His name in individuals among the angelic host. They are designated, by this privilege, as 'the angels of the Lord', and their work is to speak and act on His behalf. When a man interfaces with an angel of the Lord, it is the same as interfacing with the Lord Himself. There are many examples of this in the Scriptures. The Lord declared to the nation of Israel, 'Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; *for My name is in Him.*' Exo 23:20-21.

We recognise the might and power that belongs to the angelic administration, and yet the inheritance that God has predestined for mankind far exceeds the mandate that has been given to the angels. Even though Yahweh has placed His name in them, the angels can never possess the life of Yahweh or join the fellowship of Yahweh. It is only the sons and daughters of men who have been predestined to become sons of God, members of the body of Christ, and priests according to the order of Melchizedek. In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul declared, 'To which of the angels did He ever say, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You"? And again, "I will be a Father to Him and He shall be a Son to Me"?' Heb 1:5.

In contrast to Adam, who was *not complete* in the day of his creation, the angels were *complete* when they were created by the Lord of hosts. The prophet Ezekiel declared, concerning Lucifer, that he had 'the seal of perfection'. Eze 28:12. This means that He was complete and wholly sanctified by the Lord. Ezekiel said, 'You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created.' Eze 28:15. The name of an angel contains a mandate, but it does not contain a predestination. This is one of the major differences between the name that an angel has received, and the name that a person receives from the heavenly Father through new birth. We have been predestined to receive 'a more excellent' name than the angels. Heb 1:4.

An angel is a ministering spirit who has received a name, a mandate, and the capacity to fulfil that mandate. They do not require faith or need to demonstrate initiative to fulfil their mandate. They simply need to obey the voice of the Lord. This defines the nature of their accountability. Because an angel has been given an individual name and mandate, it is possible for an angel to reject the mandate that they have received, by *coveting* the mandate that belongs to another. This was the case for

Lucifer. He coveted the predestination that belongs to mankind. Ezekiel said concerning Lucifer, 'You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, *until iniquity was found in you.*' Eze 28:15.

There are many and various orders of angels that are described as 'principalities and powers'. Eph 3:10. Col 1:16. Col 2:15. Each of these orders carries responsibility within the various spheres of creation. Angels are accountable for their mandate, and obedience is required of them. They are answerable to God for the mandate that they have received from Him. The fallen angels are accountable for their rebellion, and are under judgement, reserved for everlasting punishment. Jude explained that the angels who left their proper abode in the beginning have been reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, for the judgement that will occur at the end of the age. Jud 1:6. Likewise, Peter said, 'God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgement'. 2Pe 2:4. In the first case, the lake of fire has been prepared for the devil and the fallen angels. Mat 25:41.

The four cherubim

We will now consider the angelic administration in more detail. As we have already noted, the Scripture does refer to some angels by name. It also tells us that there are different kinds of angels. Most notably, the Scripture specifically refers to cherubim and seraphim. When the prophet Isaiah saw the Lord of hosts sitting on His throne, he also saw seraphim standing above the throne. Isa 6:1-2. He recorded that each seraph had six wings. They cried out to one another, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.' Isa 6:3. The name 'seraphim' can also be translated 'fiery or burning ones'. It was a seraph who took a coal of fire from the altar of incense in the temple and placed it on the lips of Isaiah. The angel said to him, 'Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.' Isa 6:7.

It has been previously suggested that the seraphim are the chief angels, because the prophet Isaiah saw them *above* the throne of the Lord of hosts. We know that the relationship of the seraphim to the throne of the Son is significant, but it doesn't mean that the seraphim are pre-eminent above the cherubim who are *underneath* the throne. In reality, it is the cherubim who are the chief angels, because they are the messengers of the Son, and carry the primary authority of His throne. In the New Testament, a cherub is called an 'archangel' which means 'chief angel'. Jud 1:9. 1Th 4:16.

The prophet Ezekiel saw that there are four cherubim underneath the throne of the Son. Each cherub has *four faces*, which signify their capacity to facilitate four distinct administrations of the throne. The first face was like a lion. The second face was like an ox. The third face was like a man. And the fourth face was like an eagle. Eze 1:10. Even though each cherub has all four faces, we will suggest that there is a 'priority face' in relation to the mandate that belongs to each of these archangels.

The archangel Michael

Michael is the archangel who primarily reveals the face of the lion in the angelic administration. The face of the lion reveals Christ's kingship. For this reason, the archangel Michael is also called 'the commander' of the angelic host. Joshua met this mighty angel as the commander of the Lord's host just before he led the nation of Israel into the promised land. Michael had his sword drawn, and instructed Joshua to take off his sandals, because he was standing on holy ground. Jos 5:13-15. This was the same angel who spoke to Moses from the midst of the burning bush. Throughout the Scriptures, we observe that Michael has a specific mandate to guard the holy ground of the covenant.

The Lord revealed to the prophet Daniel that Michael and his angels have been disempowered and cast down, and will be trampled for 2300 years because of the corruption of offering among the Lord's people. Dan 8:10-14. This means that the church in our day does not have the same angelic support that the Israelites enjoyed when they took possession of the promised land. However, we see in the book of Revelation that, when the administration of Christ and the fellowship of offering have been restored in the church, Michael and his mighty host of angels will stand up again. Rev 5:2. The church and the angelic host will be united in one administration that is suitable for the time of the end.

When this occurs, it will have a significant impact on world events. However, the most significant part of the mandate that belongs to Michael is to proclaim the word of resurrection at the end of the age. The apostle Paul declared that the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God. 1Th 4:16. The shout is a 'cry of command' to the earth to deliver up the physical bodies of all those who have died in Christ. Jesus said that there is an hour coming when 'all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and will come forth'. Joh 5:28. Paul identified that this command of Christ will be proclaimed through the voice of the archangel.

In keeping with this mandate, the apostle Jude tells us that it was Michael who withstood the devil over the physical body of Moses when he died on top of the mountain. Jud 1:9. He did not allow the devil to take dominion over the body of Moses. Rather, at the command of the Lord through Michael, Moses was resurrected in a mortal body and raised to heaven. This historical event clearly demonstrates the mandate that belongs to Michael in relation to the resurrection. The primary difference between the resurrection of Moses in mortality, and the resurrection at the last day, is that all those who have died in Christ will be raised in *immortality*.

The archangel Gabriel

If Michael is the archangel who reveals the face of the lion, then Gabriel is the archangel who reveals the face of the man in the angelic administration. The name 'Gabriel' means 'man of God'. When the prophet Daniel sought to understand the vision of the 2300 years, he saw an angel who looked like a man standing before him. He heard the voice of a man saying, 'Gabriel, give this man an understanding of the vision.' Dan 8:16. This is the mandate that the Lord of hosts has given to Gabriel. He is the angel who brings revelation and illumination. On another occasion, Daniel testified that Gabriel came to him and said, 'O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding.' Dan 9:22.

We know that it was Gabriel who visited Zacharias to deliver the good news that he and his wife would have a son named John. Luk 1:11-20. It was also Gabriel who visited Mary to tell her that she would become the mother of the Son of God, in the flesh. Luk 1:26-38. We note that Gabriel's mandate includes the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Son of Man. His mandate culminated with the revelation of the administration of the glorified Son of Man. The revelation of Jesus Christ was sent and signified by His angel to the apostle John on the island of Patmos. Rev 1:1. Jesus referred to Gabriel as 'My angel'. He said, 'I, Jesus, have sent *My angel* to testify to you these things for the churches.' Rev 22:16.

The angel whose name is secret

The cherub who reveals the face of the eagle in the angelic administration is not nominated by name in the Scriptures. It is likely that this was the angel of the Lord who appeared to Manoah and his wife to speak to them about the birth of Samson. When Manoah asked to know his name, the angel of the Lord replied to him, 'Why do you ask My name, for it is secret?' Jdg 13:18. He did not reveal his name, because he did not want

to receive any honour; but he did reveal that the nature of his name was 'absolutely and supremely wonderful'.

The mandate that belonged to Lucifer

When the Lord of hosts created the heavenly host in the beginning, the cherub who had the mandate of revealing the face of the ox in the angelic administration was Lucifer. His mandate to be the prophetic-priest of the angelic administration was signified by his name, which means 'morning star', or 'light-bearer'. Isa 14:12. In his lamentation over the king of Tyre, the prophet Ezekiel described the mandate that belonged to Lucifer. He spoke of the king of Tyre as a type of Lucifer, who was full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty, until he was corrupted and fell from his place in the angelic administration. Eze 28:12.

Ezekiel identified that Lucifer carried nine precious stones in his ephod as he performed his priestly ministry in the angelic temple. Eze 28:13. The nine stones in Lucifer's ephod may have represented nine tribes in the angelic administration. We recall that the twelve precious stones in the ephod of Aaron, the high priest, represented the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. A significant part of Lucifer's priestly mandate was to lead the angelic worship of the Lord of hosts in heaven. For this purpose, he was created with amazing instruments of worship, as part of his angelic capacity. Eze 28:13.

The cherubim who cover the mercy seat

Perhaps the most significant description of Lucifer's original mandate is that he was an 'anointed cherub who covers'. Eze 28:14. This description immediately draws our attention to the symbolism of the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle of Moses. It is important to remember that the tabernacle of Moses, with all its furniture, was built on the desert floor as a copy and a shadow of the angelic administration in the heavenly places. Heb 8:5. For this reason, the symbolism of the ark of the covenant gives us some helpful insights into the angelic administration in heaven, particularly the role and mandate of the cherubim.

The Lord instructed Moses to make a mercy seat of pure gold for the top of the ark of the covenant. Exo 25:17-20. From the same piece of pure gold, he made two cherubim, whose wings covered the mercy seat. The wings of the cherubim were above the mercy seat and their faces looked toward the mercy seat. The mercy seat and the cherubim, as a symbol, portrayed that God would communicate with Israel through the ministry

of the cherubim. The mercy seat was the place where atonement for the nation of Israel was made once a year. It was the place of fellowship where the covenant purpose of God was transacted, through offering transfer, between God and Israel. The focus of the cherubim toward the mercy seat is consistent with their mandate as servants to the heirs of salvation.

The Shekinah glory of the Lord of hosts shone from where the Lord was enshrined upon His throne above the cherubim. From there, the Lord promised Moses that He would speak to him *from between the two cherubim*. Exo 25:22. This was a continuation of the order of communication that the Lord had previously established with Moses. Stephen explained that it was an angel of the Lord who spoke to Moses from the burning bush. It was also an angel of the Lord who spoke to him on top of Mount Sinai. Through this order of administration, the Law and all its ordinances were delivered to the nation of Israel. The apostle Paul bore witness to this. He said that the Law was ordained through the angels. Gal 3:19.

The fall of Lucifer

The symbolism of the ark of the covenant highlights the mandate that belonged to the cherubim as the messengers of the Lord of hosts. This was evidently part of Lucifer's mandate before he was corrupted, and cast as profane from the angelic temple. He was one of the chief angels who were also called 'the stars of God'. Lucifer did not covet the mandate that belonged to one of the other angels. Rather, he was cast as profane from the angelic temple in heaven because he coveted the predestination that belongs to man, which is far above the stars of God in the angelic administration. The prophet Isaiah declared, 'How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north".' Isa 14:12-13.

When the angels were created in the beginning, the 'sides of the north' was a vacant location in heavenly places. Even before the creation of man, the sides of the north had been reserved by God to become the dwelling place of the son-priests of God. The psalmist proclaimed, 'Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, *the city* of the great King.' Psa 48:2. The city of the great King is the heavenly Jerusalem. This city is now populated with a great multitude

of sons and priests. In his letter to the Hebrews, Paul declared that we have come to 'Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem'. Heb 12:22. Interestingly, this city is also now populated with 'an innumerable company of angels'. These angels are servants to the heirs of salvation, supporting them as they take possession of their inheritance.

When Lucifer was corrupted, he lost his name, and forfeited his mandate to reveal the face of the ox in the angelic administration. He is still a cherub, but his name is now Satan, and he manifests only *the face of a serpent*.

We observe the corruption of his original mandate in three major ways. *First*, Lucifer was created to be a star of God, as a messenger of the Lord of hosts. However, instead of obediently and faithfully communicating the word of the Lord, Satan now speaks from the basis of his own initiative, and distorts the words of the Lord. We recall that he undermined and twisted God's word when he spoke to Eve in the garden of Eden. He is a deceiver. Jesus said that Satan 'does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.' Joh 8:44.

Second, Lucifer was created to have his face toward Michael as they both served the Lord of hosts in the administration of His throne. However, instead of supporting and standing with Michael as a servant to the Lord of hosts, Satan now stands in opposition to him. There is now conflict and warfare between these two angels. We have already considered that Michael and Satan argued over the body of Moses. In a similar way, they stood in opposition to one another over Joshua the high priest. In both of these cases, Michael was able to invoke the name of the Lord to rebuke Satan. Zec 3:2. We observe that it will be Michael and his angels who will cast Satan and his angels out of heaven in the time of the end. Rev 12:7-9.

Third, Lucifer was created to have his face toward the mercy seat. He should have been an angel who rejoiced to see the coming of the Son of God into the flesh of mankind. We recall that there was a great multitude of angels who rejoiced in the heavens and praised God when Jesus was born into the world. Luk 2:13. Furthermore, Lucifer should have rejoiced to see Christ share His life with mankind by offering. However, instead of bearing witness to the offering of Christ, Satan became the father of lies by proposing that we can be the source of our own name, and can find life *apart from the fellowship of Christ's offering*. This deception

has become the foundation of the spirit of antichrist in the world. The spirit of antichrist denies the offering of the Father and the Son that was fully revealed from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. 1Jn 2:22. It denies that Christ has shared His life with us by offering, so that His resurrection life can be revealed in our mortal bodies. The apostle John said that the spirit of antichrist denies the coming of Christ in the flesh. 2Jn 1:7.

Far above all principalities and powers

When Jesus Christ became the Son of Man, by incarnation, He was made *lower than the angels*. Jesus was made lower than the angels by receiving a mortal body of human flesh. This was the physical body that God the Father had prepared for Him. Jesus testified that He had received this body so that He could fulfil the will of God. Heb 10:7-8. The will of God was fully revealed by the offering of Christ from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. In his letter to the Hebrews, Paul explained that Jesus was made lower than the angels with a mortal body so that He could, by the grace of God, taste death for every person. Heb 2:9. He also explained, 'Since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that *through death* He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through the fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.' Heb 2:14-15.

Speaking of the deliverance that we have received through the death of Christ, Paul declared, 'Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.' Col 2:15. We have considered this verse in relation to Satan and the fallen angels. It is true that Christ has disarmed Satan by removing the Law from his hands. Furthermore, when Christ was lifted up on the cross, He made a public spectacle of Satan by lifting him up to judge and destroy him forever. However, it is important that we do not limit the application of this verse to the *fallen angels*. It is also relevant to the angelic host who have remained loyal as servants to Christ. He has removed the Law from the agency of the entire angelic administration. The angelic administration no longer functions as an intermediary between God and man in relation to the Law of God. Gal 3:19.

When Christ ascended on high, He was raised far above all principalities and powers. In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul declared that we have a great High Priest who has passed *through the heavens*. Heb 4:14. He *realigned the angelic administration* from the cross, and

then passed through their ranks to take His seat at the right hand of the Father. He has been raised 'far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come'. Eph 1:21.

In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul explained that when Christ ascended on high, 'He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men'. Eph 4:8. He was quoting the prophetic words of King David, the psalmist. The 'host of captives' is a reference to the sons of men who were previously held in bondage by the devil because of the fear of death. Heb 2:14-15. By the offering of Christ, we have been set free from our slavery to sin and the devil. However, much more than this, we have been purchased by Him to become His bondslaves. Paul declared, 'You are not your own, for you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.' 1Co 6:19-20. In this way, Christ has *taken captive*, or purchased, a host of captives.

He gave gifts to men

The *first gift* that Christ gave to His slaves, once He had been glorified at the Father's right hand, was the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, Peter declared, concerning Christ, 'Having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.' Act 2:33. The power of the sevenfold Spirit of God is given to us by the Holy Spirit so that we can be active participants in the administration of Christ.

The *second gift* that Christ gave to some of His slaves was the four ministry graces. Paul proclaimed, 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men ... He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.' Eph 4:8,11. Christ gave ministry grace to individual slaves, and then gave these individuals *as gifts* to the body of Christ. Those who have received apostolic, prophetic, teaching and evangelistic grace from Christ belong to an apostolic administration in His right hand. When we use the term 'apostolic administration', we are not referring to a group of apostles. It is true that an ascension gift apostle can function in any of the ministry graces. However, for an apostolic administration to be fully functional, it requires apostles, prophets, teachers and evangelists to pastor and shepherd the flock of Christ as elders who belong to a presbytery.

The apostle Paul was an ascension gift apostle. However, his ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles was unique. His writings are part of the Scriptures, and his work was to establish the church in the Gentile world. 2Pe 3:15-16. Rom 11:13. Gal 2:8. In his letter to the Corinthians, he testified that he was a wise master builder, who laid the foundation of the administration of Jesus Christ in every place. 1Co 3:10. This was a specific mandate. Since that time, the work of all those with ascension gift grace has been to build on the foundation that has already been laid by Paul. This is an important point. The apostolic administration that is being restored in the church in our day must not presume to take Paul's place.

Jesus Christ will sovereignly lay hold of some of His slaves to be an apostolic administration in every generation of the church. These slaves are called to receive the instruction of the apostle Paul, and to walk in the stead of men such as Timothy and Titus. Php 3:17. In his letters to Timothy and Titus, we find Paul's instructions on how an apostolic administration should function for the church age. The mandate of an apostolic administration is to proclaim the word of present truth, and to minister the grace of God to every member of the body of Christ. Paul declared that Christ has given apostles, prophets, teachers and evangelists to the church for the pastoral work of 'equipping the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ'. Eph 4:12.

The four living creatures

In Chapter four of the book of Revelation, John recorded that he was caught up in the Spirit to behold the apostolic administration of Christ in the heavenly places. He saw the throne of God and of the Lamb standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. Rev 4:2. Rev 22:1. In the midst of this throne, John saw four living creatures. In contrast to the angelic administration that was under the throne, the living creatures are in the midst of the throne and around the throne. Rev 4:6. Rev 5:6. The apostle Paul taught that every member of the body of Christ has been raised to sit with Christ in the heavenly places. Eph 2:6. As we have already noted, this is far above the principalities and powers of the angelic realm. Eph 1:21. The four living creatures represent the apostolic administration of Christ that is part of the many-membered body of Christ in the heavenly places.

John said that each living creature was full of eyes 'in front and behind' and 'around and within'. Rev 4:6. Rev 4:8. The 'multitude' of eyes conveys the reality that the four living creatures do not represent four individuals. They represent *a multitude of slaves* who have received apostolic,

prophetic, teaching and evangelistic grace from Christ as part of an apostolic administration. The symbolism of the many eyes also signifies that these slaves have received spiritual insight and illumination into the mystery of Christ. Speaking as an ascension gift apostle who belonged to this order of Christ's throne, Paul said, 'By revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand *my insight* into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.' Eph 3:3-5. Daniel prophesied, 'Those who have *insight* among the people will give understanding to the many.' Dan 11:33.

John also said that each living creature had 'six wings'. We recall that, in the angelic administration, the cherubim had four wings, and the seraphim had six wings. Eze 1:6. Isa 6:2. As we have already considered, the cherubim were the messengers of the Lord of hosts and the chief administrators of His throne. We know that this mandate now belongs to the apostolic administration of Christ. The four living creatures, which represent the apostolic administration of Christ, have 'six wings' to signify that they have also received the mandate that previously belonged to the seraphim. It was the seraphim who revealed the sanctification of the Lord of host's administration among the angels and the nation of Israel. The prophet Isaiah heard them saying to one another, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.' Isa 6:3. The apostolic administration of Christ has received *an upgraded mandate*. They proclaim the sanctification of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the fellowship of Yahweh, which is fully revealed by Jesus Christ as the One who is seated upon the throne. The four living creatures do not cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.' Rev 4:8.

The four faces of the living creatures

Most importantly, John recorded that each living creature had a specific face. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like a calf, the third like a man, and the fourth like a flying eagle. Rev 4:7. These four faces reveal the four dimensions of grace that are ministered from the face of Jesus Christ. As we have already identified, the four living creatures represent the four ministry graces that Jesus Christ gave to the body of Christ when He ascended on high. Paul explained, 'He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.' Eph 4:8,11.

The face of the lion

The living creature that is *like a lion* represents the ministry of ascension gift apostles. Apostles carry the authority of Christ's kingship to proclaim the word of present truth, and to shepherd the church of God. Those with apostolic grace have received *a revelatory capacity* from Christ to reveal, from the Scriptures, what the Spirit is saying to the church in every generation. They will teach this word of present truth in the fellowship of a presbytery, and then proclaim it to every individual as a member of the church. Apostles have also received an authority from Christ to establish and oversee the various administrations within the body of Christ. They will initiate many administrations within the church, and then commit the primary oversight of these administrations to others within a presbytery. However, apostles will personally retain the oversight of the administration of the word of present truth, the administration of church finance and government, and the general oversight of the fellowship of the presbytery.

The face of the ox

The living one that is *like a calf* represents the ministry of ascension gift prophets. Ascension gift prophets will illuminate the word of present truth in the fellowship of the presbytery, and as a lamp to the feet of every son of God. They will beseech every believer to present their body as a living sacrifice, so that they can prove the will of God by offering. Rom 12:1. The ministry of those with prophetic grace will motivate and equip all believers in the work of their priesthood, so that they can effectively pray, worship, function with spiritual gifts, and make offering to the Lord. They will also equip and train an administration of elders and deacons who are responsible for ordering the spiritual worship of a congregation. 1Co 14:26,40.

The face of the man

The living one that is *like a man* represents ascension gift teachers. Ascension gift teachers will articulate the word of present truth in the fellowship of the presbytery and in the church. They will call all believers to submit to the lordship of Christ and to become His disciples. Jesus said, 'If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.' Joh 8:31. Furthermore, ascension gift teachers will train and equip disciples in the word of Christ to teach and disciple others. The fruit of their ministry will be those who have the ear of a disciple, who then become teachers with the tongue of a disciple. Isa 50:4. Even though

Timothy was an ascension gift apostle, Paul commended him to this work when he said, 'The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.' 2Ti 2:2.

The face of the eagle

The living one with the face like a flying *eagle* represents the ministry of ascension gift evangelists. Ascension gift evangelists are motivated by the love of God to proclaim the gospel of sonship. They may proclaim the gospel in large public gatherings. However, their primary work in the fellowship of a presbytery is to nurture and oversee an administration of elders who can fully establish every household in the gospel of sonship. Along with apostles and evangelists, elders have been given the ministry of fatherhood, which is able to encourage families as they nurture and train their children, who have received the divine nature as the result of their parents' faith. Eph 6:4. Testifying to this dimension of Christ's ministry, Paul said to the Corinthian church, 'For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.' 1Co 4:15. Further to this, ascension gift evangelists will equip, train and mobilise evangelistic households to proclaim the gospel of sonship to their friends, families, neighbours and work colleagues.

The work of shepherding

Using the words of Paul to the Ephesians, some biblical commentators have suggested that there are five ministry graces of Christ. Eph 4:11. However, John's vision of the four living creatures clearly identifies that there are only four ministry graces. This conclusion is supported by the truth that there are four dimensions of the grace of God that belong to Jesus Christ. The four dimensions of grace that belong to Christ are fully revealed by the four faces of His administration. The reality that there are four ministry graces is also supported by Paul's language in his letter to the Ephesians. He did not intend for 'pastors and teachers' to be read as separate ministry graces. He was referring to a pastoring teacher, or a teaching pastor.

The work of pastoring, or shepherding, is not a separate ministry grace. However, it is still a vital and integral element of the grace that belongs to an apostolic administration. 1Pe 5:1-4. Act 20:28. There is a feeding and tending work that is associated with each ministry grace. In this regard, an apostle is a shepherd with authority from Christ to lead and

direct the whole congregation; a prophet is a priesting pastor; a teacher is a discipling pastor; and an evangelist is a nurturing pastor. The work of a nurturing pastor is to establish an administration of eldership that promotes and fosters house to house fellowship.

An order of priority

The apostle John described the four living creatures in a specific order. Rev 4:7. He did this to signify that there is an order of initiative when it comes to how these ministry graces operate and proceed from the throne of the Son in a lampstand administration. This order of authority and initiative is particularly relevant when it comes to how the word of Christ is ministered in the fellowship of a presbytery, and proclaimed to every household within a church. An apostle has the authority and grace to reveal, from the Scriptures, what Christ is saying to the church as the word of present truth. A prophet has grace to illuminate all the implications of the word of present truth for a kingdom of priests. A teacher has grace to articulate the word of present truth so that every household can 'continue in the word' as disciples of Christ. An evangelist has grace to proclaim the word and to exhort as a father, so that the life of Christ is formed in a multitude of sons of God.

Notably, the apostle Paul nominated the *same specific order* when he outlined the administration that God has established in the body of Christ. He said, 'Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: *first* apostles, *second* prophets, *third* teachers, *after that* miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.' 1Co 12:27-28. We note that miracles and gifts of healing are associated with the grace of the evangelist. The ministry of an evangelist will often be accompanied by miraculous physical healings and deliverances from various oppressions and addictions. However, it is important to recognise that the greatest miracle of all is the new birth of a son of God. This is the primary focus of all evangelism.

In the throne

John observed that the living ones were 'in and around' the throne. Rev 4:6. This signifies the *dynamic nature* of the administration of Christ. It cannot be understood from a static perspective. In the first case, the four living ones belong to Jesus Christ, who is the Lamb of God, in the throne. Rev 5:6. The living ones are in the throne because they are in the right hand of Christ. Christ Himself speaks through apostles,

prophets, evangelists and teachers. He continues to speak from heaven and to address His church through the four ministry graces that He has given to the body of Christ. The light that shines from the face of Christ is 'proclaimed as light' by the apostolic administration in His right hand. John beheld the four living ones in the throne, but also saw them proceeding from the throne like flashes of lightning. Rev 4:5. In this regard, we are reminded of the prophecy of Moses, '[From] His right hand there was flashing lightning'. Deu 33:2.

The first work of an apostolic administration is to preach and teach the word of Christ in the fellowship of a presbytery. Each man with ministry grace will need to speak according to the authority and grace that he has received from Christ. We are reminded of the words of Paul, 'I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you'. Rom 12:3. Those with ministry grace are joining the offering of Christ when they speak in this way. Christ has *given* them to the body of Christ for this purpose. Eph 4:11. When Christ speaks through those with ministry grace, the word of Christ establishes the ground of fellowship in a presbytery. This word is also an *invitation* to join in fellowship with those who are bringing the word. Speaking as part of an apostolic administration, John declared, 'That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.' 1Jn 1:3.

Around the throne

We have considered what it means for an apostolic administration to be *in the throne*, but what does it mean for an apostolic administration to be *around the throne*? This question is answered once we identify what John saw *around the throne*. John said, '*Around the throne* were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.' Rev 4:4. The twenty-four thrones represent the twenty-four courses of a world-wide presbytery that will oversee and shepherd the church in the time of the end. As we will consider in Chapter 10, Christ will restore the administration of the throne of David, with its twenty-four courses, to establish His kingdom on the earth. The prophet Amos declared that the tabernacle of David will be restored. Amo 9:11. Act 15:16. The twenty-four thrones are 'the thrones of the house of David'. Psa 122:5.

In our present day, Christ is not yet establishing His kingdom on the earth through a world-wide presbytery with twenty-four courses. He is walking among His lampstand churches, as our great High Priest, to restore the presbyteries to His right hand. A presbytery in the right

hand of Christ will be walking with Christ, and participating in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. They will be trampled by the spirit of antichrist in the world as they bear witness to the resurrection life of Christ among the Gentile nations. The trampling of the star administration of Christ, which governs His church among the Gentile nations, will continue until the 2300-year prophecy is completed. Dan 8:13-14. The administration of the throne that the apostle John saw in the heavenly places has not yet been restored. However, *the pattern of administration* that John saw on a world-wide scale is *the same pattern of administration* that Christ is restoring within the presbytery of each lampstand church. John's vision reveals how an apostolic administration must function within every presbytery in our day.

A true apostolic administration will function with the authority of Christ's throne *as part of a presbytery* that is around the throne. The authority and power of Christ's throne is revealed when He sovereignly speaks through His apostolic administration. However, every leader who has received ascension gift grace from Christ needs to minister, *in weakness*, as part of a presbytery that is connected to a lampstand church. It is through their ministry that revelation and understanding are given to the many members of the body of Christ. Even though Christ spoke through Paul, who was an ascension gift apostle, Paul ministered as a firstfruits believer who was 'speaking in Christ' when he was among the churches. In his letter to the Corinthians, he explained his mode of ministry by saying, 'We speak before God in Christ for your edification.' 2Co 12:19. The apostle Paul was speaking in the fellowship of Christ's offering as a living epistle of Christ. 2Co 3:2.

When we consider the example of Paul's ministry, it highlights another important distinction between the apostolic administration of Christ, and the angelic administration. There are many examples in the Scriptures where the Lord spoke sovereignly through one of the cherubim. We recall that the Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, I send [My angel] before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him.' Exo 23:20-21. An angel could proclaim the Law of God, but had no capacity to minister the life of God. Saying this another way, it is possible for Christ to speak in an angelic being, but it is not possible for an angel to 'speak in Christ'. The capacity to minister the life and grace of God, in the fellowship of Christ's offering, belongs exclusively to a presbytery in the right hand of Christ. This is the mandate that belongs to the seven angels in the right hand of Christ.

Chapter 5

The four horns of the synagogue of Satan

Jesus used the term 'the synagogue of Satan' when He addressed the presbytery in Smyrna. He was referring to a religious grouping of people with certain doctrines and practices. Rev 2:8-9. The synagogue of Satan could be likened to a false church. Satan is the head of this synagogue. It is his administration and operates under his dominion. When Jesus admonished the presbytery in Pergamum, He said, 'I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is.' Rev 2:13. The throne of Satan has its own leadership, administrations and culture. It has its own apostles, elders and leaders, who have their own doctrines and practices.

The mode of Satan is to establish a copy, or a counterfeit, of the administration of Christ. In this way, we can identify four 'horns' within Satan's administration that oppose the four craftsmen in Christ's administration. We recall that the prophet Zechariah described the activity of four horns during the period when the Jews were rebuilding the temple after their exile in Babylon. Zec 1:19. These horns opposed the administration of God at that time. The outcome of their opposition was that the people were prevented from rebuilding the temple and were

scattered to their own houses. The headship of each man in relation to his own family was disempowered so 'that no-one could lift up his head'. Zec 1:21.

The Lord also showed the prophet Zechariah that the four craftsmen would terrify and cast down the four horns that belong to the synagogue of Satan. The four craftsmen are four ascension gift ministry graces that comprise an apostolic administration within a presbytery that is in the right hand of Christ. Eph 4:11.

The four horns that comprise a counterfeit administration within the synagogue of Satan are those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, the doctrine of Balaam, the doctrine of Jezebel, and the doctrine of the Laodiceans. The synagogue of Satan has its own apostles, prophets, teachers and evangelists who promote these various doctrines. The Scriptures clearly warn us that there will be *false* apostles, false prophets, and false teachers.

A false circumcision

Jesus said that the defining characteristic of the synagogue of Satan is that they 'say they are Jews and are not'. Rev 2:9. Rev 3:9. This does not mean that they falsely claim to belong to the Jewish nation. Jesus was identifying the blasphemy of those who belong to a 'false circumcision'. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul warned us to 'beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the *false circumcision*'. Php 3:2. He continued, 'For we are the *true circumcision* who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh'. Php 3:3. In these verses, Paul clearly identified that there is a *false circumcision* and a *true circumcision*.

The false circumcision consists of those who put their confidence in the flesh. They are self-righteous and, in many cases, they will be religious zealots. Their self-righteous motivations and aspirations show that they are living under the mode of the Old Covenant. The true circumcision consists of those who have joined the circumcision of Christ. In this fellowship, they are enabled by the Spirit of God to worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. They recognise that their propensity to trust in their own flesh is being removed from their heart in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. 2Co 1:9. In this same fellowship, the love of God is being poured into their hearts, and the life of Christ is being given to them to become their life. As they suffer with Christ, their capacity to minister His grace to others, as part of a great kingdom of priests, is

being enlarged. Like the apostle Paul, their *only confidence* is in the cross of Christ.

Throughout the Scriptures, we observe the principle that the *false* persecutes the *true*. Likewise, the *flesh* persecutes that which is of the *Spirit*. In his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul identified the operation of this principle with Ishmael and Isaac in the household of Abraham, and highlighted the reality that this *same principle* continues today. He said, 'As at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.' Gal 4:29. Those who live according to the flesh continue to persecute those who live according to the Spirit. Moreover, those who persist in living according to the flesh are susceptible to being ensnared by Satan. 'The synagogue of Satan' consists of those who have been taken captive by him to do his will. 2Ti 2:26.

In the time of Paul's ministry, the first example of the synagogue of Satan involved the Judaisers, who pursued and persecuted him in every place. This group was motivated by a demonic spirit that was an apostle of Satan sent to buffet and oppose Paul. 2Co 12:7. During his ministry, Paul sought the Lord on three separate occasions for deliverance from this severe persecution. However, the Lord answered him by saying, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' 2Co 12:9. Paul came to understand that he had been granted a unique participation in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. As he suffered with Christ at the hands of these Judaisers, his propensity for pride was being removed from his heart, and the life of Christ was being manifested in his mortal body. Furthermore, those who persecuted him were being *disempowered*, and he was being *empowered* as a priest to minister the grace of Christ to others in the fellowship of His offering.

In the same way, those who are part of an apostolic administration in the presbytery of a lampstand church will experience affliction at the hands of the synagogue of Satan. This is a *necessary participation* in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. Daniel prophesied that the stars of God will be trampled in many ways for the duration of the 2300-year prophecy 'to refine them, purify them, and make them white until the time of the end'. Dan 11:35. As the messengers of Christ *suffer with Him* in this way, they are receiving the capacity to *minister with Him* as priests in His heavenly tabernacle. At the same time, the synagogue of Satan, which perpetrates the affliction, is being disempowered and destroyed. This is how the four horns of the synagogue of Satan will be *overcome* by

the apostolic administration of Christ in His right hand as we approach the time of the end.

The doctrine of the Nicolaitans

The first horn in the synagogue of Satan comprises those who hold the doctrine and the practices of the Nicolaitans. In His address to the Ephesian presbytery, Jesus said that He *hated* the deeds of the Nicolaitans. Rev 2:6. He commended the Ephesians because they also hated the deeds of this group who sought to infiltrate their fellowship. In contrast to this, Jesus rebuked some brethren among the presbytery in Pergamum because they embraced those same doctrines and practices. Considering that Jesus used such strong language to denounce the Nicolaitans, it is imperative that we understand what their teaching and practices involved.

There is little available historical information regarding the Nicolaitans. However, we do not need to venture beyond the Scriptures to understand the principle that Jesus was addressing. In the first case, we know that the *meaning of the name* that Jesus used to describe this group of leaders will be significant. When the Lord uses a person's name, it reveals something of their nature. For example, we recall that Jesus changed the name of Simon to Peter, which means 'stone', to signify that he had been called to become part of the living foundation of the church. Joh 1:42. In a similar way, we would expect that the meaning of 'Nicolaitans' will reveal something of the nature of their doctrine and practices.

The name Nicolaitan means 'ruler of the people'. It is evident that Jesus was referring to a group that presumed to 'lord it over' people in the church. A church leader may justify this mode because of their clergy position, their education and training, or because of the perceived success of their ministry. Others may use the true apostolic administration of Christ as a resource, and become puffed up and empowered because of their proximity to those with ascension gift grace. Leaders with a Nicolaitan profile usually approach the word of God and other leaders as a *resource* for their own ministry.

Nicolaitan leaders will form affiliations with one another as ministry colleagues for the sake of mutual empowerment. We have often referred to this dynamic as 'collegiality'. It is common for a Nicolaitan leader to have a 'collegial' approach among other leaders, and then an 'autocratic' approach when they are among their own congregation. In contrast to

a true overseer, who will proceed from the fellowship of offering in a presbytery to be an example among the flock, a Nicolaitan leader will proceed from an empowered position to 'lord it over' the flock. The apostle Peter instructed those who have been called to the work of overseership to 'shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock'. 1Pe 5:2-3.

Lording it over another's faith

We know that Jesus Christ has appointed certain men to serve as overseers in His church. An overseer is an elder and a deacon who has also received the authority of a ministry grace in Christ's apostolic administration. Jesus said to His disciples, 'Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make *ruler over his household*, to give them their portion of food in due season?' He continued, 'Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.' Luk 12:42-44. A true overseer will exercise the authority of their overseership in the meekness and gentleness of Christ. The apostle Paul demonstrated this mode in his ministry. He admonished each church according to the authority that he had received from Christ, but he never presumed to take dominion over another's faith. 2Co 1:24.

In contrast to this, a leader with a Nicolaitan profile will seek to take dominion over the faith of others. Jesus referred to these leaders as those who abuse their perceived authority, and take the opportunity to beat their fellow slaves. Luk 12:45. The 'stick' in their hands that they use to beat their fellow slaves is the 'Law'. The outcome of the ministry of the Nicolaitans is condemnation. They minister according to the flesh, and oppose the ministry of the Spirit. Further to this, the apostle Paul identified that they are ministers of Satan. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul referred to a large group of Nicolaitan leaders and called them 'messengers of Satan' who had disguised themselves as servants of righteousness. 2Co 11:13-15. This group of Judaisers were persecuting Paul and troubling the churches of Asia by teaching that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised and to observe the law of Moses. Act 15:5. Gal 1:6-9.

We can summarise *the doctrine of the Nicolaitans* as being the promise of God's blessing through the keeping of the Law. These people teach and believe that the righteousness of God can be attained without a believer's

participation in the offering and circumcision of Christ. By implication, they believe that a Christian can circumcise their own heart, and live in a way that is pleasing to God, through self-defined religious pursuits. People who hold to this doctrine view success, prosperity and health as God's blessing upon them because of their own righteousness. They view suffering as the evidence of cursing upon a person because they have, in some way, fallen short of God's righteousness. In the early church, the people who taught such a message were variously identified as Judaisers, 'the circumcision', and 'the sect of the Pharisees'. Gal 2:4. Tit 1:10. Act 15:5.

The practice of the Nicolaitans

As we have already identified, *the practice of the Nicolaitans* is characterised by collegiality on the one hand, and lording it over the flock on the other. A Nicolaitan leader will often view themselves as being superior to the members of the congregation because of their perceived position, education, training, experience, or even the strength of their own personality. Rather than laying down their life as a firstfruits Christian in the place where they live, they will presume to have a pre-eminent position among the congregation.

From a practical perspective, they will often adopt a *middle management approach* to administration. They will be inclined to delegate to others the work that they themselves should be doing as a slave of Christ. At the same time, because of their anxious need to control those around them, they will greatly inhibit others in the congregation from finding their name and work. A leader with a Nicolaitan profile will often feel threatened by the success of those around them, because they perceive this to undermine their own sense of validity and ministry profile.

We observe that Diotrephes is a clear example of a leader with a Nicolaitan profile. The apostle John said, 'I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to first among them, does not accept what we say.' 3Jn 1:9. This does not necessarily mean that he disagreed with the theology of the apostle John or the content of his message. It is possible that Diotrephes took offence at John addressing his message to each household in the church, rather than using him as an intermediary. This undermined his profile among the congregation. Regardless of the exact nature of the offence, we know that Diotrephes sought to impugn the apostle John and the apostolic administration. He did not receive the brethren himself and, further to this, he created a loyalty crisis for all those in the congregation who wanted to do so. He marginalised those

who were committed to fellowship with John and with the rest of the presbytery in the right hand of Christ. 3Jn 1:10.

Leaders with a Nicolaitan profile will also have a carnal approach to pastoral care. Rather than encouraging each believer to receive the word of faith that is proclaimed by an apostolic administration, they presume that it is their role to *interpret* and *apply* the word to the lives of others. They may even define the response to the word that is required by a person, rather than allowing each believer to demonstrate the initiative and accountability of their own faith toward fellowship and offering. The need for a Nicolaitan leader to micro-manage and control those around them is the evidence of their anxiety. It also demonstrates their need to maintain the projection that they have created for themselves to cover their own shame and sense of inferiority. Because of anxiety or inferiority, they may be prone to alienating responses when their advice is not heeded.

Furthermore, a Nicolaitan leader will often have a ministry profile as a 'vicar' of Christ in relation to matters of personal sin, and to relational breaches among those in the congregation. Rather than encouraging a person to confess their sin and to seek reconciliation where the relational breach has occurred, they may presume to *absolve* the person who has fallen into sin, in the context of a confidential pastoral interview. This situation will often involve an *unspoken* agreement. The leader will expect the loyalty and commitment of the one who has sinned, *in exchange for* the promise of confidentiality. In other situations, a Nicolaitan leader may seek to *prescribe* the pathway of repentance for a believer who has fallen into sin, and to reserve the right to be the arbiter of whether their penance is complete. In extreme cases, they may even presume to verbally castigate a person if they don't appear to be making the necessary responses in relation to their repentance.

In all these situations, the Nicolaitan leader uses their own interpretation and application of the Law of God to abuse others. This reveals that their mode is 'after the working of Satan', and demonstrates that they are *an enemy* of the cross of Christ. They seek to hold believers in the bondage of the Old Covenant for the sake of reinforcing the strength and validity of their own ministry positions. The outcome of their practice is that it robs believers of *their faith* for a personal participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and circumcision. In his letter to Titus, the apostle Paul spoke of those with a Nicolaitan profile when he said, 'There are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who *subvert*

whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.' Tit 1:10-11.

Willingly brought into bondage

This raises an important question. Why is it possible for Nicolaitan leaders to subvert whole households within the kingdom of God? That is, why would a believer willingly allow someone else to take dominion over their faith? Paul also identified this dynamic within the Corinthian church. He said, 'For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage [to Law], if one devours you [for dishonest gain], if one takes from you, if one exalts himself [over you], if one strikes you on the face.' 2Co 11:20. The willingness of the Corinthians to allow someone to take dominion over their faith revealed their desire for a spiritual intermediary and benefactor. In other words, they embraced *the mode of the Old Covenant*, because they wanted someone to 'ascend into heaven' to invoke a blessing upon them and to 'descend into the abyss' to deliver them from the curse of suffering. Rom 10:6-7.

To illustrate this point, if a person believes that they will be blessed by obeying the word of God, they will seek a spiritual benefactor to ascend into heaven to bring the word down to them, by interpreting it and applying it to their specific circumstances. With this goal in view, they will embrace a leader who is willing to micro-manage their circumstances. Similarly, if a person believes that their suffering is a consequence of their sin, they will seek a spiritual benefactor to descend into the abyss to prescribe a pathway of penance for them so that they can find deliverance from their suffering. They will embrace a leader who is willing to identify their faults, and perhaps even to castigate them for their failures, because they believe that this is a necessary part of the process.

The apostle Paul refused to entertain the *congregational pressure* to be this kind of intermediary and spiritual benefactor. As part of an apostolic administration, he simply proclaimed the *word of faith* that was able to join every believer to the fellowship of Christ's offering and circumcision. Paul knew that if a believer joins the fellowship of Christ's offering, then the word that is preached to them will be in their heart and in their mouth as a confession of their own faith. Rom 10:8. With this in view, he instructed Titus to *sharply rebuke* all those who presumed to lord it over the faith of others, as well as those who sought this kind of spiritual benefactor. His purpose in rebuking them was so that they would be '*sound in the faith*, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments

of men who turn from the truth'. Tit 1:13-14. A person who is *sound in the faith* has embraced their personal participation in the circumcision of Christ as the 'operation of God' in their lives. Col 2:12.

The doctrine of Balaam

Jesus identified the second horn of the synagogue of Satan as those leaders who believe and teach the doctrine of Balaam. He said to the presbytery in Pergamum, 'You have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.' Rev 2:14. Before we identify the nature of the doctrine of Balaam and its outcome among a congregation, we will consider how a leader comes to hold such a doctrine. It is the leaders who have fallen into *the error of Balaam*, and then followed *the way of Balaam*, who become the promoters of *the doctrine of Balaam*.

The apostle Jude referred to those who have 'rushed headlong into the error of Balaam' for the sake of worldly and monetary gain. Jud 1:11. We recall that Balaam was a man who practised divination in the land of Mesopotamia. This was the region which later became known as Babylon. When the king of Moab requested that Balaam come and curse the nation of Israel, God instructed him not to go, because the Israelites were a nation which had already been blessed. Num 22:12. The *error of Balaam* was his unwillingness to obey God, and his willingness to enter a trading relationship with the religious world. Even though he initially refused to go to Moab, he sought the Lord a second time on the matter because of his desire for financial gain, along with his desire to be a spiritual benefactor to the world.

When Balaam prayed a second time to the Lord, it was a *transgression* that revealed the desire of his heart. The Lord did not change His mind. Rather, He delivered Balaam to his own desire and to the pathway of his own disobedience. The Scriptures recorded that 'God was angry because he was going'. Num 22:22. He sent the angel of the Lord to withstand him on three occasions. However, Balaam had no *spiritual sight* and did not realise that *his way* was contrary to the way of the angel of the Lord. In a final attempt to restrain his madness, the Lord used Balaam's donkey to rebuke him for his transgression. The Lord then opened his eyes to see the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with his sword drawn. The angel of the Lord said to him, 'Behold, I have come out as an adversary, because *your way was contrary to me*.' Num 22:32. It is important that we understand the significance of this statement.

The way of Balaam

The apostle Peter referred to those who had forsaken the right way and gone astray. He said that they had followed *the way of Balaam*. 2Pe 2:15. In the first case, the way of Balaam is the way that is *contrary* to the way of the angel of the Lord. It was, most likely, the archangel Michael who withstood Balaam. He is the one who reveals the kingship of Christ in the angelic administration. The prophet Daniel explained that it was part of Michael's mandate to stand guard over the people of God. Dan 12:1. His mandate also includes guarding and protecting *the holy ground* of the inheritance that God has given to His people. We recall that Joshua met Michael as the Commander of the angelic host immediately before the nation of Israel entered the promised land. Jos 5:13-15.

As we considered in our previous chapter, the mandate that belonged to the cherubim to reveal the four dimensions of grace in the administration of the Son has now been committed to *an apostolic administration*. The angelic administration is now *a servant order* to the apostolic administration of Christ, which includes apostles, prophets, teachers and evangelists. This apostolic administration only functions within a star, or presbytery, that is in the right hand of Christ. Jesus revealed to the apostle John that the stars in His right hand are *the angels* of the lampstand churches. Rev 1:20. It is the apostolic administration within a presbytery that now ministers *the sword of the word of God* which proceeds from the mouth of Jesus Christ. Rev 2:12.

With this in view, we can clearly define the way of Balaam. It is the way of an *independent* leader that is *contrary* to the authority that has been given by Christ to an apostolic administration, and to the fellowship of offering that is found in a presbytery. A leader who is going the way of Balaam will not want to lay down their perceived ministry in the fellowship of a presbytery. Rather than allowing a presbytery to bear witness to their name and grace in a fellowship of offering, they prefer the honour that is bestowed upon them by the religious world. We note that Balaam continually claimed to be a faithful messenger of the Lord, and yet his willingness to enter a trading relationship with the Moabites revealed the nature of his heart and bore witness to his contrary position. The apostle Peter observed that Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness. 2Pe 2:15.

It is helpful to remember that the Moabites were the descendants of Lot. We recall that the *religious perspective* of Lot was not the same as the *spiritual perspective* of Abraham. When they separated from one another,

Lot chose the portion of land that appeared to be well-watered, *like the garden of the Lord*. Gen 13:10. His desire was to find a place in the world that could be likened to the garden of Eden in the beginning. We can equate the perspective of Lot with the pursuit of many religious people in the world today. They endeavour to minimise or to escape their pain and suffering while, at the same time, they pursue their own peace and prosperity. With this goal in view, they seek religious leaders who are willing to be spiritual benefactors to them. They give honour to those leaders who give them religious instruction, and who promise to give them access to the blessings of God. We observe that this was the nature of *the trading relationship* between the Moabites and Balaam.

The prophetic ministry of Balaam

Interestingly, the Lord sovereignly intervened in this situation and repeatedly anointed Balaam to prophesy and bless the nation of Israel. Even though Balaam was a disobedient transgressor who was walking in a corrupt mode, the Lord used him as a messenger to proclaim His word. It is amazing to consider that the prophecies of Balaam have been recorded for us in the written Scriptures as part of the infallible word of God. Speaking of Christ and His apostolic administration, it was Balaam who prophesied that ‘a star shall come forth from Jacob and a sceptre shall rise from Israel’. Num 24:17. In this example, Balaam prophesied the truth concerning the coming administration of Christ while, at the same time, he walked in a manner that was completely antagonistic to that administration.

When Balaam refused to obey the command of the Lord and to heed the admonition of the angel of the Lord on the way to Moab, the Lord resolved to use him as a tool in His hand to bless the nation of Israel. The truth of Balaam’s word and the success of his ministry did not indicate that the Lord was pleased with him and his mode. The Lord had already shown Balaam that he could use a donkey to speak on His behalf if the need arose. As Balaam prophesied under the anointing of the Lord, he was also filling up the cup of his own judgement. This is a sobering point. Jesus warned that there will be many religious people who will follow the way of Balaam, assuming that the apparent success of their ministry is the evidence that they are walking in the way of righteousness. He said, ‘Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness”.’ Mat 7:22-23.

A stumbling block before the Israelites

When Balaam had finished his prophetic discourse on behalf of the Lord, he returned to his place, and the king of Moab also went his way. Num 24:25. It is apparent, however, that this was not the end of Balaam's relationship with the Moabites as their spiritual benefactor. Jesus said that Balaam *kept teaching* Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel. Rev 2:14. Specifically, Moses identified that Balaam did this through *his counsel to the women*; that is, the daughters of Moab. Num 31:15-16. His religious counsel empowered their idolatry. In this regard, we are reminded that Paul said that there will be religious leaders who enter into households and captivate weak women who are weighed down with various sins, and are led by various impulses. 2Ti 3:6.

It appears that Balaam, through his counsel, supported the idolatry of the daughters of Moab and empowered them to a great *evangelistic initiative!* The Scriptures account that they began to invite the Israelites to their religious festivities. Num 25:2. The Israelites responded to these invitations, eating the things sacrificed to idols and bowing down to their gods. Num 25:3. As they joined themselves to these people by participating in their pagan love feasts, they committed a great treachery against the Lord. They became guilty of spiritual harlotry. Num 25:1. This spiritual harlotry also led to various acts of physical immorality.

Jesus said that Balaam taught Balak to put *a stumbling block* before the sons of Israel. This resulted in them eating things sacrificed to idols, and committing acts of immorality. Rev 2:14. We are reminded that the nation of Israel was called 'the church in the wilderness'. It is important that we understand the nature of *the stumbling block* that the doctrine of Balaam places before the church. The doctrine of Balaam is a theology that seeks to *redefine the love of God*. The stumbling block is the proposition that the church, in the name of love and harmony, should embrace the idolatry of the religious world. The other side of this proposition is that the church proves itself to be a bigoted community if it does not tolerate and embrace such aberrant behaviour.

The daughters of Moab were able to ensnare many of the Israelites with this proposition. Furthermore, the Israelites who had joined themselves to the Moabites in the worship of Baal began to impose their spiritual harlotry and physical immorality on the remainder of the congregation of Israel. They did so *openly* because they were testing Moses and the remainder of the congregation. The Scriptures record the example of a man who openly brought his Midianite mistress into the camp to meet

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his family in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel. Num 25:6. We know that there were many Israelites who mourned the impact of this spiritual harlotry upon them. They had gathered to weep at the doorway of the tent of meeting. However, there were many others who had succumbed to the religious pressure to normalise this immorality among them.

The apostle Paul addressed a similar issue among the Corinthian church. He identified the fact that many had become religiously sophisticated, and were embracing immorality among the congregation that would not be tolerated even in the secular world. 1Co 5:1. Paul declared that this form of self-righteousness had become a destructive leaven among them. He rebuked them by saying, 'You have become [puffed up], and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst.' 1Co 5:2. This leaven of self-righteousness that causes believers to normalise and to embrace evil behaviour is the outcome of the doctrine of Balaam. This doctrine, which seeks to redefine the love of God, can easily gain a foothold among a community of believers, and become a pervasive leaven.

The jealous anger of the Lord

When the nation of Israel embraced the idolatry and immorality of the Moabites, it provoked the jealous anger of the Lord. His anger burned among them in the form of a plague that killed twenty-four thousand people. The plague only ceased when Phineas, the grandson of Aaron, stood in the breach by taking a specific initiative to remove the evil behaviour, and to restore the sanctification of the congregation. Num 25:7-9. In a similar way, the apostle Paul instructed the Corinthian congregation to remove the immorality from their midst. Moreover, he instructed them to purge the self-righteous leaven that had caused them to normalise such evil behaviour. 1Co 5:6-7. He warned them that those who eat and drink the communion in a self-righteous manner will come under the judgement of Jesus Christ.

The book of Revelation reveals that Jesus Christ is walking among His lampstand churches as our Judge. When Christ addressed the presbytery in Pergamum, He specifically admonished those who held the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and the doctrine of Balaam. It is incumbent upon an apostolic administration to stand in the breach and to address these matters if they appear within a presbytery or, more broadly, within a lampstand church. Repentance is necessary when these matters have not adequately been addressed, because of the relational damage that

is caused by these pervasive doctrines and practices. Jesus warned the presbytery in Pergamum that if they were not able to address these matters, He would personally come and fight against those who held these doctrines 'with the sword of My mouth'. Rev 2:16.

The doctrine of Jezebel

The third horn of the synagogue of Satan is composed of those who hold the doctrine of Jezebel. Jesus rebuked some within the presbytery of Thyatira because they tolerated the woman Jezebel, who *called herself a prophetess*. Rev 2:20. It is likely that there was a specific woman within the church who had a ministry profile similar to that of Jezebel in the kingdom of Israel. However, the issue that Jesus identified in this church was not limited to the ministry profile of one individual. He was addressing a doctrine and a certain style of ministry that had been embraced by many of the leaders and members of the congregation in Thyatira. It was a mode of ministry that had produced many 'spiritual children'. Rev 2:23.

When Jesus said that Jezebel '*calls herself* a prophetess', He was identifying a ministry profile that is self-defined and self-appointed. Rev 2:20. It is a religious mode that claims authority from the basis of personal initiative and perceived spiritual insight. In some cases, it is a ministry that is based on the misappropriation of spiritual gifts. Jesus continued by saying that Jezebel '*teaches and leads* My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols'. Rev 2:20. The doctrine of Jezebel is called 'the deep things of Satan'. Rev 2:24. It encourages friendship with the world, and produces a harlot administration that is a mixture of the true with the false. It is eclectic in doctrine and practice, which is the definition of spiritual harlotry.

Furthermore, the mode of leadership that is motivated by the spirit of Jezebel will *bless* and *promote* idolatry among its spiritual adherents. Leaders who minister in this way will promise blessing, and will presume to give people direction on behalf of Christ and the church. In doing so, they are blessing the idols that reside within the hearts of those who seek their spiritual wisdom and follow their direction. These leaders are teaching believers to 'eat things sacrificed to idols' by feeding the projections that they have created for themselves. The apostle Paul spoke of this mode of ministry when he said to Timothy, 'The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears

tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires.' 2Ti 4:3.

In this regard, we observe many similarities between Jezebel the prophetess and Balaam the prophet. They both presumed toward a prophetic grace that produced the fruit of idolatry and immorality among the people of God. However, the *cause* of this presumption in Jezebel was different from the cause of this presumption in Balaam. As we have considered, the cause of Balaam's corruption was his disobedience, independence, and love of the honour that is bestowed upon a spiritual benefactor by the religious world. The primary cause of Jezebel's corruption was her idolatry, her inability to submit to the relational order of headship that God has established for every family, and her opposition to the true messengers of Christ.

Taken captive by a religious agenda

We recall that Jezebel was the wife of Ahab, the king of Israel in the days of Elijah the prophet. Ahab was a wicked king, and his deeds were evil in the sight of the Lord. One of his most wicked deeds was coveting the vineyard of Naboth and then taking possession of it after the man had been murdered. In the aftermath of this incident, the prophet Elijah declared, 'Surely there was no-one like Ahab who *sold himself* to do evil in the sight of the Lord, *because Jezebel his wife incited him.*' 1Ki 21:25. Ahab was accountable for his own corruption and disobedience. However, it was Jezebel who had *incited him* toward this wicked behaviour by flattery. 1Ki 21:7. He *sold himself* into bondage by allowing Jezebel to usurp his headship in their marriage *and* his leadership as king of the nation of Israel.

One of the reasons why Jesus referred to the doctrine of Jezebel as 'the deep things of Satan' is because it is the full fruit of the deception of Eve. In the beginning, Satan deceived Eve into becoming the source of her own wisdom. She endeavoured to seize control of her marriage, and to dictate the terms and parameters of their service to God. Gen 3:4-7. When Adam followed her advice and disobeyed God, he lost the capacity to exercise headship in his marriage, as well as the capacity to exercise the authority of his mandate over the natural creation. Furthermore, he sold *all of his children* into the bondage of sin, because he had sold himself into the bondage of Eve's religious perspective.

This was part of the principle that Jesus was addressing among the presbytery in Thyatira. It is likely that there were some men, who should

have been part of the presbytery, who had been taken captive by the religious agendas of their wives. These men were *intimately acquainted* with the principle of Jezebel, because it had become a deep corruption within their own marriages. A woman with a Jezebel mindset will often promote *an image* that she has created for her husband, and then work tirelessly behind the scenes to support and protect this image. She will do this because her husband's ministry profile is a source of empowerment for her own ministry aspirations. Such a woman will not demonstrate godly submission to her husband, and yet she will often presume to function in his name and on his behalf, within the church. We observe that this was the mode of Jezebel in relation to acquiring Naboth's vineyard. 1Ki 21:8.

If a man allows his headship to be usurped by the ministry aspirations of his wife, he will lose all capacity to function as part of a presbytery in the right hand of Christ. His relational mode among his brethren may become *reactive* and *argumentative*, as he is obliged to defend his wife's opinion and perspective. This is one of the ways in which the principle of Jezebel has the capacity to undermine the relational integrity of a presbytery. However, more than this, the principle of Jezebel can produce a powerful subculture of women's ministry that endeavours to take precedence over the authority of the presbytery within the church. It can produce strong-minded women who presume to *give direction* to the church because they believe that they have the authority of a prophetic ministry.

A woman needs her head to be covered

The apostle Paul addressed this significant problem in his letter to the Corinthians. He began by identifying the order of headship - from God the Father to Jesus Christ, to a husband, and then to his wife. 1Co 11:3. Christ is the Head of every man who is a member of His body, the church. If a man prays or prophesies with his head *covered*, then he is dishonouring his Head; that is, Christ. 1Co 11:4. A man's head is covered if he has any relational obligations that hinder, or impede, his submission to Christ. This will include any obligations that he may have to serve the agenda of his wife. In contrast to this, Paul said that every woman who prays or prophesies with her head *uncovered* dishonours her head; that is, her husband. 1Co 11:5. This verse has often been misinterpreted. Paul was not talking about the need for women to wear hats or head scarfs when they come to church. He was referring to a woman's submission to her own husband as her head.

Further to this, Paul likened a religious woman who does not submit to her husband, to a woman who has shaved her head. 1Co 11:6. What did he mean by this? It is helpful to consider the context of Paul's words. Corinth was a significant and busy port city during the first century. It was common for ships to stop in this port to load and unload cargo. The sailors from these ships would often make their way up a hill to a temple that overlooked the city of Corinth and the Mediterranean Sea. This temple had been dedicated to the Greek goddess of love, and contained many religious, or cult, prostitutes. Significantly, in terms of Paul's illustration, it was common for a cult prostitute to have a fully shaven head.

Paul used such a confronting illustration to highlight his point. He was saying that a woman who desires a prophetic ministry in the church, without living in right order with her husband in their home, is the same as a cult prostitute. The power of the cult prostitute was sourced in the belief that she was a mediator with the gods. The same religious dynamic is present when a woman rejects the headship of her husband in the home, and endeavours to usurp the headship of Christ in the church, for the sake of exercising her own ministry. Paul reasoned that if it is disgraceful for a woman to be likened to a cult prostitute, it is equally disgraceful for an unsubmitted woman to exercise a prophetic ministry from the basis of her own spiritual perceptions. 1Co 11:5-6.

The glory of a woman

Paul continued to use the hair of a woman as an illustration by saying, 'If a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her. For her hair is given to her for a covering.' 1Co 11:15. He was not commenting on whether a woman should have long or short hair. Paul was using the hair as a symbol, or *a sign, of glory* and was contrasting this with the dishonour of a shaved head. 'Glory' is the expression and manifestation of the name and identity of a person. The authority to express our name was given to us by Christ when we were born again as a son of God. Jesus referred to this authority as a mina. A man and a woman will both have a mina, which is the right to express the authority of their name and identity, but it needs to be expressed in right order. Using the language of the parable, a man will be hiding his mina in a handkerchief if his head is covered. Luk 19:20. Likewise, a woman will be hiding her mina in a handkerchief if her head is uncovered.

It is important that we understand *the distinction* and *the relationship* between the authority of a man's name and the authority of a woman's

name. Paul highlighted this distinction and relationship by saying, 'For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.' 1Co 11:8-9. When God removed the rib from Adam's side, He fashioned the woman to be a comparable helper to him so that, together, they could be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Gen 2:20-24. Eve was called to be the mother of the entire human race. Gen 3:20. In this way, the woman has the mandate of revealing the glory of all mankind, for both men and women are born through the woman. Paul reinforced this point by saying, 'As the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God.' 1Co 11:12.

Because of the angels

With the glorious mandate of the woman in view, Paul explained that a woman needs to live in right relational order with her husband 'because of the angels'. 1Co 11:10. Why did Paul refer to the angels in this context? This verse has been used as the basis for some particularly eccentric beliefs and practices by some religious groups. Paul referred to the angels because he recognised the relationship that the angels have to the administration of Christ and to every household in the kingdom of God. The angels were created to be servants to the heirs of salvation. Heb 1:14. For this reason, the angels continually seek the face of the heavenly Father to know how they can serve *His sons* and *daughters* who are in His household. Jesus said, 'See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.' Mat 18:10.

If a woman is not living in the relational order that God has established for every family, she will not be able to fulfil the mandate of motherhood that has been given to her by the Lord. Rather than nurturing the divine nature in her children, she will be fostering and promoting a carnal culture that will be antagonistic to the culture of godliness. By implication, she will be *despising* the name and predestination that God the Father has given to her children as *the little ones* who have been committed to her care. This impacts upon the angels, because their mandate is to serve the sons and daughters of God. The angels who are submitted to Christ are functioning in right order. If a woman is not submitted to the headship of her husband in the home, it will confuse and frustrate the angels in their role as servants to the heirs of salvation.

God has given a woman an essential mandate as a mother in her own household. In a similar way, the ministry of *godly motherhood* is essential within the church, which is the household of God. When the apostle Paul said that he did not permit women to speak in church, he was not trying to silence the ministry of godly women who have received grace from Christ to preach and teach. Nor was he saying that a woman is not free to function with the gifts of the Spirit as a member of the body of Christ. A woman may be regularly preaching and teaching, and functioning with spiritual gifts, but this does not give her a mandate of authority over eldership in the church. Paul was silencing the women who presumed to minister *with their head uncovered* because they were not submitted to the headship of their own husbands. 1Co 14:34-35. Likewise, he was silencing those who were undermining and usurping the authority of the presbytery by presuming to give prophetic direction to the church.

Embracing Jezebel's mode of ministry

The apostle Paul recognised that if a presbytery *tolerates* a 'Jezebel' mode of ministry in the church, it will give Satan an advantage among the congregation. We recall that Jesus likened the teaching of Jezebel to 'the deep things of Satan'. Rev 2:24. The doctrine and ministry style of Jezebel can be promoted by leaders and so become an influential mode of ministry in both the public communion service and from house to house. In this way, it is possible for Satan to deceive an entire church, which is likened to a woman, in the same manner that he deceived Eve in the beginning. Speaking as an overseer, the apostle Paul said to the Corinthian church, 'I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.' 2Co 11:3.

We have already considered the truth that if a woman is not submitted to her husband in the home, then it confuses and frustrates the mandate of the angels, who are servants to the heirs of salvation. In a similar way, if the woman, the church, is not submitted to the headship of Christ, as it is expressed through His apostolic administration, it will also impact upon the angelic administration. The angelic administration is a servant to the apostolic administration of Christ within a presbytery that is in the right hand of Christ. The principle of Jezebel, which undermines and usurps the authority of a presbytery, gives Satan an advantage in the heavenly places *and* perpetuates the reason why Michael and the angelic host have been trampled since the beginning of the 2300-year prophecy. Dan 8:10-14.

Jesus addressed the presbytery of Thyatira as the One who has eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished brass. Rev 2:18. He is our great High Priest who judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart as He walks among His lampstand churches. Jesus said that He gave the woman Jezebel time to repent from her spiritual harlotry but, because she did not repent, He will throw her 'into a bed of sickness'. Rev 2:21-22. This sickness is a judgement upon her. It is important to recognise that if a woman is praying and prophesying with her head uncovered, she will be eating and drinking judgement to herself as she receives the communion meal. 1Co 11:27-30.

Furthermore, Jesus warned all those who had committed immorality with her, by embracing her harlotry, that He would cast them into *great tribulation* unless they repented of her deeds. Rev 2:22. As we have considered, the deeds of Jezebel describe an entire mode of ministry. Jesus was particularly speaking to those among the presbytery who should have been guarding the holy ground of the communion gathering and the fellowship of the church from house to house. Having been directly admonished by Christ, if they did not repent of the way in which they had embraced the mode and ministry profile of Jezebel, they would be cast out of the church and judged along with the world. Rev 2:21-23.

Jesus also identified the reality that there are many *spiritual children* of the doctrine of Jezebel in the church. Rev 2:23. The motherhood of Jezebel, when expressed as a mode of ministry, 'blesses' and perpetuates the idolatry that resides in the hearts of many believers. The prophet Ezekiel declared that when a person who has a multitude of idols in their heart looks for a spiritual benefactor to bless their idols, then the Lord will be provoked *to answer the matter Himself*. Eze 14:4,7. He will set His face against them and cut them off from among His people. We note that this principle of judgement extends to the prophet who presumes to bless the idol in the heart of another. Significantly, those who are judged by the Lord Himself in this way become *a sign and a proverb* before the eyes of all. Eze 14:8. Jesus said, concerning Jezebel, 'I will kill her children with pestilence, and *all the churches will know* that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.' Rev 2:23.

The doctrine of the Laodiceans

The fourth horn of the synagogue of Satan comprises those who hold the doctrine of the Laodiceans. The apostle Paul referred to this church

in his letter to the Colossians. It was one of the churches that he did not personally visit, but he still testified that he had travailed in the Spirit to see them established. Col 2:1. Paul asked for his letter to the Colossians to be read in Laodicea. He also referred to a letter that he had written to the Laodiceans. Col 4:16. We do not have a copy of Paul's letter to the Laodiceans in the Scriptures, but it is possible that he admonished this church in a similar manner to the way he admonished the Corinthians. We recall that he said to the Corinthian church, 'Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognise this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you - unless indeed you fail the test?' 2Co 13:5.

In the time of Paul's ministry, we know that there were *some brethren* in Laodicea who had the Spirit of Christ and, therefore, recognised the need for the apostolic administration of Christ to be in their midst. Paul instructed the Colossians to send a greeting to these brethren. Col 4:15. However, when Jesus addressed the presbytery of this church, as recorded in the book of Revelation, it is evident that His administration was no longer welcome among them. Jesus described Himself as being on *the outside* of the Laodicean church. Christ was standing at the door of this church, and knocking, to see if there were any leaders who were willing to hear His voice and open the door of their heart. He said, 'If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.' Rev 3:20.

It is sobering to consider that an apostolic administration had established a lampstand church in Laodicea but that, within thirty years, it had regressed to such a degree that Christ was no longer involved in the affairs of the church! Jesus rebuked those who should have been functioning as part of the presbytery of this church, because they were neither hot nor cold. Rev 3:15. These leaders had become *ambivalent* to the word of Christ. Without the word of present truth from an apostolic administration to give them illumination and direction, their doctrine and practice had become eclectic. It was simply a mixture of various religious views and ministry agendas. Jesus warned this group of leaders that they were at risk of being spewed out of His mouth. Rev 3:16.

The justice of the people

The meaning of the name of this church gives us some insight into the nature of their doctrine and practices. In contrast to the name of the Nicolaitans, which means 'ruler of the people', the name of the

Laodiceans means 'the justice of the people'. It can also be translated as 'the right of the people'. As we have considered, a leader with a Nicolaitan profile will endeavour to 'lord it over' the faith of those within the congregation. A leader with a Laodicean profile will endeavour to meet the needs and *serve the agendas* of the congregation. In this regard, *the congregation is their master*, and has replaced the lordship of Christ that is expressed through an apostolic administration in His right hand.

We could refer to the Laodicean model of church governance as *congregationalism*. It is built upon the same democratic principles that we observe in the world. It promotes the right of every household to express their own religious views and to have their needs met by the church. Factions may form within the congregation when households that have similar views and religious objectives align themselves with one another. 1Co 11:18. The various factions within a church may even be represented by members of a committee that govern the church by *the principle of consensus*. The success of a leader in this kind of a congregation will be dependent upon their ability to gain the approval, and to meet the needs, of the most powerful factions within the church.

The apostle Paul said to Timothy, 'The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires.' 2Ti 4:3. He continued by saying that they 'will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths'. 2Ti 4:4. In a Laodicean congregation, the word of present truth that is proclaimed by an apostolic administration will be replaced by a word that has been crafted by spiritual benefactors to meet the worldly or religious needs of the congregation. This kind of word could be likened to a cleverly devised myth, or fable. It is a false gospel that has no capacity to build up a believer as a son of God; nor can it give them an inheritance among those who are being sanctified as priests in the Father's house. Act 20:32. It may promise the hearer *a form of godliness*, but it will deny them access to the fellowship of Christ's offering and hence the power to live as a son of God. 2Ti 3:5.

A Laodicean church mode will not recognise the need for an apostolic administration and the word of present truth. The essence of their doctrine is contained in the statement, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and *have need of nothing*'. Jesus identified the reality that this belief is the fruit of a great deception. He said, 'You do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.' Rev 3:17.

The apostle Paul identified this same deception within the Corinthian church. It is apparent that there were some within this church who believed that they no longer needed Paul and his ministry. They believed that they were self-sufficient as a congregation. Paul, musingly, said to them, 'You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us.' 1Co 4:8.

The rebellion of Dathan and Abiram

We find a clear example of the Laodicean principle that was operating among the nation of Israel in the wilderness. It occurred when *the heads of houses* joined with 'the rebellion of Korah'. We recall that Korah was a Levite who coveted the work of priesthood that had been given to Aaron and his sons. He was joined by two hundred and fifty other leaders who were men of renown from among the nation of Israel. These men had been chosen by the congregation of Israel to be their representatives. Num 16:2. They said to Moses, 'You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is in their midst, so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?' Num 16:3. This is the premise upon which the doctrine of the Laodiceans is built.

Dathan and Abiram were evidently vocal supporters of this rebellion among the congregation, but they were not among the two hundred and fifty leaders who confronted Moses. When Moses invited them to also come up to the doorway of the tabernacle for the sake of resolving the issue before the Lord, they refused to do so. Num 16:12. Dathan and Abiram refused the invitation of Moses for three reasons. First, they had already *impugned his leadership* because he had failed to meet their religious expectations. Moses had not brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey. He had failed to give them an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Num 16:14. Dathan and Abiram viewed Moses as their *spiritual benefactor*, even though he had never related to them in this manner. They expected to receive an inheritance from him in exchange for their loyalty and submission to him. When this did not eventuate, they accused Moses of leading them astray and causing them loss.

Further to this, Dathan and Abiram accused Moses of wanting to 'lord it over' the congregation. In one sense, they were accusing him of having a Nicolaitan profile. They said, 'Is it not enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, but you would also *lord it over us?*' Num 16:13. They were

inferring that Moses was exploiting the people for his own personal gain. It is evident that Dathan and Abiram had become offended by the need to participate in a fellowship of offering. They believed that Moses was coercing the congregation to make offering against their will. It appeared this way to them because of their *own unwillingness* to make offering. Moses answered their accusation before the Lord when he prayed, 'Do not regard their offering! I have not taken a single donkey from them, nor have I done harm to any of them.' Num 16:15.

Finally, Dathan and Abiram accused Moses of wanting to *remove the eyes* of the leaders who had withstood him at the doorway of the tabernacle. They said to him, 'Would you put out the eyes of these men?' Num 16:14. They believed that *it was legitimate* for every man to communicate his view regarding the direction of the nation from the perspective of his own sight. Furthermore, they believed that *it was necessary* for Moses to receive this reflection and wisdom from others, because he had led the nation astray. It is possible that these men promoted the necessity of *multiple eldership* among the congregation as a means of guarding against corruption. However, it is evident that they did not understand the true work of eldership; nor did they recognise the grace and authority of overseership among them.

Moses called these men to come onto *the holy ground of the fellowship of offering* that the Lord had established. However, rather than responding to this invitation to come to the doorway of the tabernacle, Dathan and Abiram took their stand at the doorway *of their own tents*. Num 16:27. Each man claimed to be standing as the head of his own household. They did not understand that *they had forfeited their own headship* by standing in opposition to the administration that Christ had established for the nation as a multitude of families. In a similar way, a man who stands in opposition to the headship of Christ in the church will not receive the grace that he requires from the fellowship of the communion table to be the head of his own house.

There is little doubt that Moses could have *appeased* Dathan and Abiram, along with the other men who had confronted him, by acknowledging their views and promising to establish a *consensus-based* mode of leadership among the nation. Moses did not do this, because he feared the Lord and understood the work that he had received within the administration which the Lord Himself had established. In contrast to this, it is apparent that the presbytery in Laodicea had accommodated the views and demands of the congregation. In this regard, they had ceased

The four horns of the synagogue of Satan

to function as a presbytery. The fellowship of offering in a presbytery had been replaced by the mode of committees. In this way, the mind of Christ had been replaced with a consensus of opinions. As we have considered, Jesus Christ testified that He no longer had any access to this church.

Chapter 6

An orientation to the seven letters

The apostle Paul spent three years in the city of Ephesus on his third missionary journey. He taught the church publicly and house to house. Act 20:20. He later testified to the presbytery of this church that he declared ‘the whole counsel of God’ to them. Act 20:27. Paul did not personally pioneer the other churches in the Asian region. However, the Scriptures record that *the whole of Asia* heard the word because of the pattern of administration that he established in Ephesus. Act 19:10. Paul established and trained an apostolic administration that included men such as Timothy, Titus and Epaphras. It was the ministry of Paul and this apostolic administration that established the seven lampstand churches in the region of Asia.

Nevertheless, not many years later, Paul wrote in his letter to Timothy that the whole of Asia had turned against him. 2Ti 1:15. There may have been many reasons for this falling away. It is possible that some of the leaders became ashamed of Paul’s imprisonment. He commended one leader by saying, ‘The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus for he often refreshed me and *was not ashamed of my chains.*’ 2Ti 1:16.

The other leaders in Asia may have considered that *Paul's chains* were the evidence that his ministry was ineffective. Perhaps they did not consider imprisonment to be the fruit of a successful ministry. It is likely that this perception undermined their confidence in the gospel that Paul had proclaimed, and in the administration of lampstand churches that he had established among them. They evidently began to embrace other 'gospels' and modes of ministry.

About thirty years after the death of the apostle Paul, Jesus instructed the apostle John to write to the seven churches in the region of Asia. He confirmed that the lampstand administration which Paul established among the Gentile nations is the *only pattern* for the church age. Rev 1:20. Christ initiated this administration when He ascended on high and gave gifts to men, and it will continue until His second coming at the end of the age. Jesus personally admonished the presbytery of each lampstand church in Asia *to restore them to this pattern*. Rev 2-3. Furthermore, Jesus admonished each presbytery to recover them to His right hand so that they could *walk with Him* in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. In this fellowship, they would learn *the same mode of ministry* that the apostle Paul had exemplified for every messenger in the right hand of Christ.

The seven churches

The content of the seven letters was relevant for the lampstand churches in Asia at the turn of the first century. However, the words of Jesus to those churches cannot be confined to an historical interpretation. The seven lampstands of Asia are representative of all lampstand churches. We are reminded that 'seven' is the symbolic number of 'fullness'. Jesus *prophetically* addressed the presbytery of each lampstand church. His message has been relevant for the church age and has specific application for *the period of restoration* that precedes the time of the end. This period of restoration is also called 'the fullness of times'. Eph 1:10. During this time, the first phase of the seventh world kingdom will fully emerge from the sea of the nations. The events that are currently transpiring in the world suggest that we are entering this phase of history. This means that the contents of the seven letters are particularly relevant and applicable for the church in our day.

When we consider the significance of the seven letters, it is helpful to remember that *the whole book of Revelation* was written to *all seven churches*. Referring to the entire revelation, Jesus instructed the apostle John, 'Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to

Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.' Rev 1:11. This is an important point. If the whole book of Revelation is addressed to the seven churches, it highlights the fact that there is no separation between the first three chapters of the book of Revelation and the remainder of the book. It would be an error to suggest that the first three chapters of the book of Revelation should be interpreted *historically*, and that the remainder of the book should be interpreted *prophetically*. We need to view the whole book of Revelation as *one integrated package*.

The seven letters contain *the prophetic admonition* of Christ to the presbytery of every lampstand church, so that each presbytery is restored to the right hand of Christ, and to full participation in the administration that is suitable for the fullness of times. Eph 1:10. Significantly, the administration that is suitable for the fullness of times is *the same administration* that God will use to accomplish His purpose in the heavens and on the earth during the time of the end. In other words, there is a *seamless transition* between the content of the first three chapters of the book of Revelation and the remainder of the book. Jesus highlighted this seamless transition when He said to John, through His angel, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.' Rev 4:1. He was referring to the events of the time of the end that immediately follow the restoration of the presbyteries in His right hand.

The oracle of Christ to each presbytery

The most significant point regarding the seven letters is that they contain *the oracle of Christ* to the presbytery of each lampstand church. An oracle is *a spoken word*. In the same way that the apostles recorded the words of Jesus in their Gospel narratives, John recorded the specific words of Jesus to each presbytery. The seven letters are not John's admonition to the seven churches on Christ's behalf – they are Christ's *personal admonition!* They contain the personal admonition of Christ *to every leader* who has been called to function within a presbytery in the right hand of Christ. The oracles of Christ are *the milk of the word* that every leader must receive as a functional member of His administration. Heb 5:11-14.

Jesus personally addressed the presbytery in each lampstand church. However, when we read the seven letters, we observe that Christ introduced Himself *in a different way* at the beginning of each letter. He introduced Himself in a unique way to each church to draw their

attention to the aspect of His Person or to the element of His priesthood that was most relevant to their situation. When Christ referred to a *specific aspect of His Person*, He revealed how *He was relating* to that presbytery. For example, He introduced Himself to the presbytery in Smyrna as 'the First and the Last, who was dead, and has come to life'. Rev 2:8. This aspect of Christ's Person was particularly relevant to the presbytery in Smyrna, because He invited them to join the fellowship of His sufferings, and called them to be faithful until death. Rev 2:10.

Christ referred to a *specific element of His priesthood* when He invited the presbytery to join the fellowship of a particular wound that He suffered on His journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. We recall that each wound of Christ enabled Him to be glorified with a specific element of His priesthood as our great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Heb 5:10. Heb 2:9.

By way of illustration, Jesus addressed the presbytery of Pergamum as the One who 'has the sharp two-edged sword'. Rev 2:12. In the first chapter of the book of Revelation, the apostle John nominated this as the *sixth element* of Christ's eternal priesthood. This element of Christ's priesthood draws our attention to the *sixth wound* of Christ when He was nailed to the cross at the hands of wicked men, and was mocked by the religious leaders and all who passed by. When Christ did not open His mouth to use the Law to defend Himself, the cross was established as the ground from which the word of faith proceeds from His mouth in every generation. The word of faith is the sword that proceeds from His mouth. Jesus invited the presbytery of Pergamum to join the fellowship of this wound with Him so that they could receive this same capacity of His eternal priesthood.

When we make this point, we are not inferring that only one wound of Christ is relevant to each church. In the same way that every Christian must walk with Christ on the whole journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, each presbytery in the right hand of Christ must also walk with Him and join the fellowship of every wound.

In considering the letters to the seven churches, we notice that the elements of Christ's priesthood are not nominated in the same order as they appear in the first chapter of the book of Revelation. Having been glorified with all seven elements of His eternal priesthood, Christ carries *all seven priestly elements* as He walks among *all seven lampstand churches*. He is our great High Priest according to the order

of Melchizedek, who is ministering every element of His finished work. Heb 5:9-10. This means that He may address *any church* with *any priestly element* at *any time*. It also means that He may be using multiple priestly elements to address a church at any *one* time. For example, Jesus addressed the presbytery of the church in Thyatira as the Son of God who has 'eyes like a flame of fire' *and* 'feet like fine brass'. Rev 2:18.

The eyes of Christ that are like a flame of fire were active toward each presbytery as He walked among the lampstand churches, examining the thoughts and intentions of every heart. Jesus could readily testify to each group of leaders, 'I know your deeds.' Rev 2:2. When He referred to 'the deeds' of each presbytery, these included the fruit of their labour, the nature of their fellowship, and the mode of their ministry. He rebuked some presbyteries by saying, 'I have this against you.' We have often considered His words to the Ephesian presbytery, 'I have this against you, that you have left your first love.' Rev 2:4. It was only the presbyteries in Smyrna and Philadelphia who did not receive some form of rebuke from Christ when He searched their hearts with eyes like a flame of fire.

The restoration of the ministry of the Spirit

When Jesus identified an issue within a presbytery, He also explained to them the pathway of recovery. The pathway always began with the need for repentance. For example, having identified the loss of first love among the Ephesian presbytery, Jesus continued by saying, 'Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works.' Rev 2:5. The call to repent is simply the command to *turn*. Christ called each presbytery to *turn from* their own self-righteous ministry, and to *turn to Him*. The capacity for each presbytery to repent by turning to Him was resident within His command to do so. The call to repent is *a word of faith* that gives the capacity for repentance from dead works, and for faith toward God. Heb 6:1.

The apostle Paul declared, 'When one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.' 2Co 3:16. The veil is the outcome of self-righteousness. A leader will have a veil over their eyes if they believe in the integrity of their own motivations and the veracity of their own ministry initiatives. Christ requires all leaders to repent from these self-sourced ministry activities. They are dead works. Heb 6:1. As each leader turns to the Lord, the veil that covers their eyes is removed so that they can behold Christ as our great High Priest, who is walking among His lampstand churches. A leader who has turned to the Lord in this way will be compelled by the love of Christ to lay down their own ministry initiatives, and to join

the fellowship of a presbytery that is in the right hand of Christ. The evidence that a presbytery is in the right hand of Christ is that they have joined the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings which He experienced from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross.

A presbytery that is in the right hand of Christ, and hence, is walking with Christ in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, will be an effective minister of the Spirit within the fellowship of a lampstand church. The mandate of the presbytery is to be *the messenger of the New Covenant* to the church. 2Co 3:5-6. We know from the prophecy of Malachi that Jesus Christ is called the Messenger of the New Covenant. Mal 3:1. This prophecy was not limited to His earthly ministry. He continues to fulfil this mandate from heaven through the stars that He holds in His right hand. He has committed *the ministry of the Spirit* to the presbytery of each lampstand church.

Jesus concluded the admonition to each presbytery by saying, 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' Rev 2:7,11,17,29. Rev 3:6,13,22. This signifies that His message was relevant to the entire church. However, Jesus admonished the presbytery of each church *first*, because they needed to *be the first* to receive His word, and to find repentance and faith in relation to the matters that He raised with them. As a presbytery learns to *overcome* a certain issue in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, they can call the church to repentance and faith in relation to the same issue. The apostle Paul identified that this is the essence of true Christian leadership. In the fellowship of Christ's offering, Paul could confidently say to all the churches, 'Brethren, join in following my example.' Php 3:17.

To him who overcomes

Even though Jesus addressed *the whole presbytery* of each lampstand church, He also made it clear that *each individual presbyter* needed to respond to His word. Christ addressed individuals within a presbytery when He said, 'To him who overcomes.' Rev 2:7. He invites every individual to *personally respond* to His word by joining the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. As each leader responds in this way, they will bear witness to their own repentance, and to the life of Christ that they have received in the fellowship of His offering. The word of life that they proclaim, as part of a presbytery, will be the fruit of their own testimony as a living epistle of Christ. 2Co 3:2.

In the *first case*, when Jesus spoke of ‘overcoming’, He was referring to our need to overcome all of the issues that spring from our self-righteousness. We know that this is only possible in the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings. As we join the fellowship of each wound that Christ experienced from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, the other law is being circumcised, or cut, from our heart. Rom 2:29. Col 2:11. However, the removal of the other law from our heart does not, of itself, give us the capacity to overcome. The capacity to overcome is given to us because the life of Christ, which is contained in His blood, is transferred to us in the fellowship of each wound. It is the blood of Christ that cleanses our conscience so that we can serve the living God as son-priests in the heavenly places. Heb 9:14.

In the *second case*, when Jesus spoke of ‘overcoming’, He was referring to the need for every presbytery to overcome the opposition that will confront and afflict them. We recall that Christ was confronted by the synagogue of Satan in the house of Caiaphas, the high priest. He then proceeded to be afflicted by Pilate and Herod, who represented the rulers of the world. Finally, He was oppressed by the demonic principalities and powers in the heavenly places when He was lifted up on the cross.

In the same way, a presbytery that is walking with Christ in His right hand will experience the opposition of the synagogue of Satan, the rulers of the world, and demonic principalities and powers. This is not a cause for concern, because Christ has already overcome all opposition by the shedding of His blood. The capacity to overcome with Christ is also given to a presbytery in the fellowship of His wounds. When Satan is cast from the heavenly places following the fulfilment of the great Day of Atonement, a loud voice from heaven will proclaim, ‘They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.’ Rev 12:11.

A summary of the seven promises

One of the most significant elements of the seven letters is *the specific promise* that Christ made to the overcomers in each presbytery. He promised to give each presbytery *His priestly possessions*, so that they could exercise the authority of His priesthood within the administration that is suitable for the fullness of times and the time of the end. We know that the message to all seven churches will be relevant for the presbytery of each lampstand church. When we consider the specific promise that Christ made to each presbytery, we can identify that there is a *progressive attainment* of all Christ’s priestly possessions by all of the

churches. For example, Christ promised to give the crown of life to the presbytery in Smyrna. When He addressed the presbytery in Philadelphia, it is evident that they had already received this same crown, because He encouraged them, saying, 'Hold fast what you have, so that no-one will take your crown.' Rev 3:11.

The specific promise that Jesus made to each presbytery highlights the pathway of restoration for every star. It clearly demonstrates how a star that has fallen from the heavenly places can be restored to be part of the administration of Christ's throne that is revealed in Chapters four and five of the book of Revelation. This pathway of restoration begins for each presbytery by their receiving the fruit of the tree of life, which is a participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. The pathway of restoration concludes for each presbytery when they are seated with Christ as part of the administration of His throne for the time of the end. Rev 3:21. To illustrate this pathway, we will briefly summarise the promise that Jesus made to the presbytery of each lampstand church. We will consider the significance of these promises in more detail in the following four chapters of this book.

First, Jesus said to the presbytery in Ephesus, 'To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.' Rev 2:7. 'The fruit of the tree of life' is the body and blood of Christ. We recall that Jesus said to His disciples, 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves.' Joh 6:53. We eat the bread of the communion in the faith that Christ has granted us a participation in the fellowship of His offering. We drink the cup of the communion in the faith that Christ has granted us a participation in the fellowship of His sufferings. The evidence that leaders within a presbytery have received the fruit of the tree of life will be the recovery of first love and the fellowship of offering among them as brethren.

Second, Jesus said to the presbytery in Smyrna, 'I will give you the crown of life ... He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.' Rev 2:10-11. 'The crown of life' is the authority of Christ's Melchizedek priesthood. It is the capacity to reign in life by manifesting the resurrection life of Christ in our mortal bodies. 2Co 4:10-11. Furthermore, the crown of life is the outcome of ministering in the weakness of the cross of Christ. In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul testified that this was the mode of his ministry. 2Co 13:4. He testified that the fruit of his ministry among the Philippian and the Thessalonians was the evidence that he had received the crown of life. Php 4:1. 1Th 2:19. In the same way, the evidence that leaders within a presbytery have received the

crown of life will be their capacity to minister in weakness, and to direct the power of God toward a lampstand church.

Third, Jesus said to the presbytery in Pergamum, 'To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone and a new name written on the stone which no-one knows but he who receives it.' Rev 2:17. 'The hidden manna' is the bread of life that comes down from above as the word of present truth. The apostle Paul referred to the hidden manna as 'the hidden wisdom' of God. It is the manifold wisdom of God that reveals the necessity for every believer to participate in the fellowship of Christ's offering. The apostle Paul declared, 'We speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory.' 1Co 2:7.

In every generation, the hidden wisdom of God is proclaimed by apostles, prophets, teachers and evangelists, who comprise an apostolic administration in the right hand of Christ. Each leader who has received ministry grace from Christ needs to speak in a presbytery and in the church, according to the sanctification of their own name. 'The white stone' with the new name is the authority for each minister of Christ 'to priest the gospel of God' according to their own name as part of an apostolic administration. Rom 15:16. The evidence that leaders have received some of the hidden manna and the white stone will be their capacity to proclaim the word of present truth as part of a presbytery that is *the oracle of Christ* to the church.

Fourth, Jesus made two promises to the presbytery in Thyatira. He began by saying, 'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations. He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessel.' Rev 2:26-27. 'The rod of iron' is the authority that Christ gives to a presbytery to shepherd the church of God. It is also the authority to judge the nations of the world. However, Jesus promised the rod of iron to those who keep His deeds *until the end*, because the church will not exercise authority over the nations of the world until *the time of the end*. In the time of the end, the messengers of Christ will receive the authority to judge and destroy the seventh and eighth world kingdoms.

Jesus continued, saying to the presbytery in Thyatira, 'And I will give him the morning star.' Rev 2:28. 'The morning star' is generally considered to be the planet Venus, which is visible in the east just before sunrise. It signifies that the dawn of a new day is near. John the Baptist possessed the mandate of the morning star to herald the coming of Christ to the

nation of Israel. Joh 1:7-9. The prophet Malachi declared that Christ is 'the Sun of Righteousness'. Mal 4:2. He is 'the Light of the world'. Joh 8:12. Joh 9:5. In a similar way to John the Baptist, Jesus promised to give to the presbytery in Thyatira the mandate to herald His coming to His church. Specifically, the morning star is the mandate to proclaim the coming day of the Lord. The evidence that leaders within a presbytery have received these two promises will be revealed in the shepherding authority of the rod of iron, and in the evangelistic capacity of the morning star that is necessary for the fullness of times.

Fifth, Jesus said to the presbytery in Sardis, 'He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.' Rev 3:5. 'The white garments' are the *working garments* of our great High Priest as He ministers among His lampstand churches in heavenly places. Jesus promised the overcomers in Sardis that they would be clothed in white garments, and that they would *walk with Him in white*. Rev 3:4. This is a significant statement. We know that Christ walks among all His lampstand churches. The evidence that leaders within a presbytery have received the privilege of *walking with Christ* in white will be their integration with other presbyteries in the right hand of Christ, as part of an administration that oversees multiple lampstands.

Sixth, Jesus addressed the presbytery in Philadelphia as the One 'who possesses *the key of David*'. Rev 3:7. He said to the leaders of this church, 'Behold, I have put before you an open door which no-one can shut.' Rev 3:8. In the first case, this signifies that the presbytery will have an open door to proclaim the mystery of Christ among the nations, and that the church will enjoy a season of effective evangelism. Col 4:3. We know that the church will enter a period of effective evangelism in the years ahead, because the book of Revelation reveals that there will be at least two hundred million believers gathered around the throne at the beginning of the time of the end. Rev 5:11.

'The key of David' is the authority that belongs to Christ, as the Son of David, to establish the administration of the throne of David for the time of the end. Christ invited the overcomers within the presbytery in Philadelphia to join this administration. He said to them, 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and I will write on him My new name.' Rev 3:12. This threefold name is the seal of the living God. In the first case, it is the

seal that will be given to the 144 000 as the messengers of Christ who will possess the mandate to judge the eighth world kingdom. Rev 7:2-4. Rev 14:1-5.

Finally, Jesus identified the culmination of all the promises to each presbytery when He said to the Laodiceans, 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.' Rev 3:21. We know that, having finished His one offering for all time, Jesus Christ has taken His seat with God the Father on His throne. As the Son of Man, He has also taken His seat upon His father David's throne. This is the fulfilment of the promise to David that he would never lack a man to sit upon his throne. Jer 33:17. The pattern of administration that David established over the whole kingdom of Israel was a shadow of the administration that Christ will establish from His throne in the heavenly places. This administration will gather both Jews and Gentiles into the kingdom of God in the time of the end.

In summary, the presbyters who have overcome to inherit the promises of Christ during the priesthood phase of His throne will become part of the twenty-four courses of eldership in the kingship phase of His throne, for the time of the end. Supporting this point, John identified that the twenty-four courses of elders will be clothed in white garments, and have golden crowns on their heads. We recall that Jesus said to the overcomers in the presbytery of the church in Sardis that they would be clothed in white garments. Rev 3:5. We also recall that Christ promised the overcomers in the presbytery of the church in Smyrna that they would receive the crown of life. Rev 2:10.

Chapter 7

The message to the presbytery in Ephesus

Jesus addressed the Ephesian presbytery as the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. Rev 2:1. This introduction highlights the relational integration that exists between all seven stars and all seven lampstands. We know that all seven letters are relevant for the presbytery of each lampstand church. However, it is necessary to consider the message to the Ephesian presbytery *first*, because it is the *foundational message* to every presbytery that has fallen from the right hand of Christ. The pathway of recovery for every fallen star begins by receiving the admonition of Christ to the presbytery in Ephesus.

Their commendable deeds

Jesus began by acknowledging that the Ephesian leaders could not endure *evil men*. Rev 2:2. It appears that they had given due attention to the warning that they received from the apostle Paul at Miletus. Paul had warned them by saying, 'I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your

own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.' Act 20:29-30. When he spoke of 'savage wolves', Paul was referring to the danger of leaders who were trying to join the presbytery, in hypocrisy, for the sake of their own personal gain. In his letter to Timothy, Paul also referred to these leaders as *imposters* who proceed from bad to worse. 2Ti 3:13. In many cases, these leaders will begin to devour the faith and resources of the flock that belong to the Lord. It is the responsibility of overseers within a presbytery to guard the flock from this wolfish behaviour.

Paul also referred to the danger of leaders who grow up within the fellowship of a lampstand church, and emerge with *an independent mode of ministry*. All leaders should be receiving the word of present truth from an apostolic administration, within a presbytery, and then proclaiming the word of life that has become an expression of their own testimony as a living epistle of Christ. 1Jn 1:1. In contrast to this, some leaders approach the word from their own fallen perspective, and then teach their own interpretation of the word. This becomes a corruption, or a perversion, of the word. Paul was referring to this corruption when he said that they will 'speak perverse things'. Further to this, rather than joining the fellowship of offering within a presbytery, these leaders will be inclined to pursue their own independent ministry initiatives. In some cases, they will 'draw away disciples after themselves' to serve and facilitate their own initiatives. Act 20:30.

The Ephesian presbytery did not tolerate evil men, and they also had become skilled in *testing false apostles*. Jesus said, 'You put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false.' Rev 2:2. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul referred to false apostles as *deceitful workers* who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. 2Co 11:13. The evidence of true apostolic grace is the capacity to shed light on the written Scriptures to reveal what the Spirit is saying to the church *as a word of present truth*. 2Pe 1:19. In contrast to this, a false apostle will claim to speak on behalf of Christ, but their word will be *adding* or *subtracting* from the message that is contained in the written Scriptures. Rev 22:18-19. Furthermore, the evidence of true apostolic grace is the capacity to establish the ground of fellowship within a presbytery. A false apostle will not lay down their life within a presbytery. Rather, they will be preoccupied with their own ministry profile and the success of their own ministry initiatives. Paul identified these leaders as being apostles of Satan who are his servants. 2Co 11:13-15.

The overseers and elders in Ephesus had the capacity to test false apostles and, presumably, they also had the capacity to identify *the four horns* that comprise *a false apostolic administration*. Specifically, Jesus commended them because they did not embrace or tolerate the deeds of the Nicolaitans. He said, by way of commendation, ‘This you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.’ Rev 2:6. As we considered in Chapter 5, the mode of the Nicolaitans is to ‘lord it over the flock’. A leader with a Nicolaitan profile may have an autocratic approach to the work of ministry within their own congregation, but they will have a *collegial approach* among other leaders. They consider other leaders to be their ministry colleagues, and will associate with them for the sake of mutual benefit and empowerment. Jesus hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans because this mode of ministry is one of the most pervasive and destructive enemies of the fellowship of first love within a presbytery.

The Ephesian presbytery had remained ‘on the alert’ to guard their own fellowship from evil men and from a false apostolic administration. Act 20:31. Furthermore, it seems that they had faithfully endeavoured to shepherd the church of God among whom the Holy Spirit had made them overseers. Act 20:28. Jesus said to them, ‘I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance.’ Rev 2:2. He continued, ‘You have perseverance and have endured *for My name’s sake*, and have not grown weary.’ Rev 2:3. Clearly, there were those among the Ephesian presbytery who were loyal and committed servants of Christ. They considered that their ministry was for the sake of Christ and the furtherance of the gospel of Christ. It is possible that Jesus addressed these leaders during a season of high ministry activity and church growth. Remarkably, Jesus said that they had ‘not grown weary’ in doing all this good. Rev 2:3. 2Th 3:13. They were men of prayer who were devoted to the work of the ministry.

The expression of their self-righteousness

However, when Jesus addressed this presbytery, *He did not come* to commend them for their loyal devotion and faithful service. He came to rebuke them because of the nature of their fellowship as a presbytery, and the mode of their ministry. Jesus said to them, ‘I have this against you, that you have left your first love.’ Rev 2:4. He addressed the Ephesian presbytery as *a fallen star*. They had fallen from His right hand, and from heavenly places. They had ceased to walk by the Spirit and had reverted to walking by the flesh. Having fallen from the right hand of Christ, the Ephesian presbytery was no longer found in Christ. Php 3:9.

They were no longer walking with Him and ministering as a star in His right hand in the heavenly places of the true temple. Everything that appeared to be commendable in relation to their ministry – including their toil, perseverance and endurance for the name of Christ – had become an expression of their *self-righteousness*.

In his letter to the Philippians, the apostle Paul reflected on his ministry by saying, ‘I count *all things* to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.’ Php 3:8-9. When Paul said that he counted all things to be loss for the sake of gaining Christ, he was not only referring to his life before his conversion when he was a persecutor of the church. He was also referring to all the elements of his ministry *after his conversion*. Paul counted *all things to be loss* because he had fully joined the fellowship of Christ’s death. He reckoned himself to be *dead* in Christ. Furthermore, he reckoned his self-righteous motivations, and the fruit of any self-righteous ministry, to be refuse. The Greek word that Paul used in this verse is literally translated as ‘dung’. He used such strong language to emphasise his point.

Paul’s language in this verse also draws our attention to the separation of the sin offering. We recall that, on the Day of Atonement, the blood of the sin offering was sprinkled on the mercy seat, in the holy place, and on the altar of sacrifice. Lev 16:15-20. The remainder of the sin offering – including the hide, the flesh, *and the refuse* – was taken outside the camp to be burned. Lev 16:27. Heb 13:11. It was *the sprinkling of the blood* of the sin offering that made atonement for the priests of old and the whole nation of Israel. The dead body and refuse of the sin offering had no value and served no purpose. We know that, as the Lamb of God, Christ is the fulfilment of the burnt offering, the sin offering, and the peace offering. When we ‘count all things to be loss’ by joining the fellowship of His death, the *separating work* that occurs within the fellowship of His sin offering becomes active in our lives.

In the fellowship of His sufferings, the blood of Christ is cleansing our conscience from dead works, and is equipping us to serve the Father as sons and priests. Heb 9:14. It is the life of God, in the blood of Christ, that gives us the capacity to be ministers of the New Covenant under the leadership and direction of the Holy Spirit. 2Co 3:5-6. It is only the

ministry of the Spirit that is effective in the kingdom of God. All other forms of ministry are an expression of our self-righteousness, and have *no value*. They are 'dead works' that have been motivated by the other law that resides within our heart. Heb 6:1. Heb 9:14. As we have said, Paul considered the fruit of all self-righteous ministry to be 'dung' that must be removed from our lives and from the community of the church. As we participate in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, the other law is being removed from our heart, and our 'dead works' are, figuratively, burned outside the camp.

The prophet Malachi declared that Jesus Christ comes as the Messenger of the New Covenant to purify and refine all those who serve in the household of God. Mal 3:1-3. In the first case, He comes to confront and rebuke us concerning our self-righteousness. Christ's rebuke gives us the grace to turn in repentance, so that we can receive the help of the Holy Spirit to be joined to the fellowship of His offering. However, as Malachi prophesied, if we do not repent when we are rebuked by Him, the dung of our self-righteousness will be spread upon our face. Mal 2:2-3. We will be humiliated by the presumption that we have the capacity in the flesh to serve God in an acceptable manner. Furthermore, if we do not allow the dung of our self-righteousness to be removed from us in the fellowship of His sin offering, then, as Malachi proclaimed, we will be removed and taken out with it. Rather than being purged and refined in the fellowship of His offering, we will be condemned along with the world.

The need for repentance

When we understand the Lord's judgement concerning our self-righteousness, it helps us to appreciate the way that Christ confronted the Ephesian presbytery. Christ warned them that if they did not remember from where they had fallen, and repent, He would come and *remove their lampstand church* from its place. Rev 2:5. It would no longer be part of His administration in the heavenly places. This kind of rebuke and warning from Christ would have been a great shock to the Ephesian presbytery. They believed that they were walking faithfully in the mandate that had been delivered to them by the apostle Paul. The Ephesian leaders were not aware that they had fallen from the heavenly places, and that all their toil and perseverance in the work of the ministry was an expression of their self-righteousness. They were not aware of this because their self-righteousness had become a veil that covered their eyes. It was preventing them from seeing the priestly disposition of Christ toward them as He walked among His lampstand churches.

When Christ calls us to repent, His word gives us the grace that is necessary for us to believe His word, and to turn to Him. When we turn to Christ, the veil that has covered our eyes is removed so that we can behold the glory of God that shines from His face. In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul said that whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 2Co 3:16. When we look into the face of Christ, we meet Him 'eye to eye' and 'heart to heart'. In this relational encounter, His eyes, which are like a flame of fire, illuminate the iniquity that resides within our heart. We know that all things are open and laid bare before the eyes of Christ to whom we must give an account. Heb 4:12-13. This illumination enables us to comprehend *how far we have fallen* from heavenly places so that we can identify, and renounce, the fallen modes of ministry that were previously hidden from us. 2Co 4:2.

Further to this, when the veil is removed from our eyes, it enables us to see Christ walking among His lampstand churches. When we are illuminated, by the Spirit, to see the administration of Christ in the heavenly places, we remember *from where we have fallen*. It is important to understand that the scriptural meaning of 'remembrance' is not limited to what we have seen, heard or previously experienced. We are being illuminated to remember the things that God has prepared for us from before the foundation of the world. The apostle Paul declared that we have not seen with our eyes, heard with our ears, or understood in our heart all that God has prepared for those who love Him. 1Co 2:9. However, when these things are revealed to us, we will know that they have always been true; and, in the fellowship of the Spirit, it will seem as though we have always known them.

In the fellowship of the Spirit, the most significant thing that we are called to 'remember' is our participation *in the one offering of Christ*. The apostle Paul quoted the words of Jesus from the last supper to explain the significance of the communion meal to the Corinthians. Jesus said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in *remembrance* of Me.' 1Co 11:24. Likewise, He said, 'This cup is the New Covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it in *remembrance* of Me.' 1Co 11:25. Jesus wasn't simply asking the disciples to remember the historical event of the cross. He was inviting them to understand, in the Spirit, *their personal and ongoing participation* in His one offering. Earlier in this same letter to the Corinthians, Paul declared, 'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of [lit. our participation in] the blood

of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of [lit. our participation in] the body of Christ?' 1Co 10:16.

When Jesus said to the Ephesian presbytery, 'Remember *from where you have fallen*', He was drawing their attention to the fact that they had fallen from heavenly places. However, more specifically, He was confronting them with the reality that they had drawn back from their participation in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. Having begun in the Spirit, they had reverted to walking after the flesh. If we have joined the death of Christ, by baptism, the Father has raised us and seated us with Christ in the heavenly places. Eph 2:6. The reality of being seated with Christ in heavenly places is demonstrated as we live and walk 'in the Spirit'. Gal 5:25. Walking in the Spirit means that we allow the Holy Spirit to lead and direct our daily participation in the fellowship of the offering of Christ. If we draw back from this fellowship, we are no longer walking in the Spirit, and we have fallen from heavenly places.

The fellowship of Christ's offering

Jesus rebuked the Ephesian presbytery for reverting to the flesh, so that they would repent and return to the faith of walking with Him in the fellowship of His offering. He was asking them to join, by the Spirit, the fellowship of *all of His wounds* received on His journey from Gethsemane to the cross. In the first case, they needed to join the prayer meeting of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the garden of Gethsemane. Instead of praying that God would renew their strength and support their self-righteous ministry initiatives, they needed to acknowledge that they did not know how to pray as they should. The Holy Spirit needed to join them to the fellowship of Christ's prayer so that they could pray with Christ, 'Not my will, but Yours, be done'. Luk 22:42.

Beginning with the prayer of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, the Ephesian presbytery needed to join the fellowship of all Christ's wounds. However, we know that *the fifth wound* of Christ was particularly relevant for them, because Jesus addressed them as 'the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand'. Rev 2:1. We recall that this element of Christ's priesthood was activated when the crown of thorns was placed upon His head and He was beaten around the head with the mock sceptre. As the rulers of this world mocked His kingship, the Father glorified Him to exercise the priestly authority of His kingship in the church, and in the world, through seven stars in His right hand. The seven stars that Christ now carries in His right hand are the true 'sceptre of His kingdom'. Heb 1:8.

The Ephesian leaders needed to join the fellowship of Christ's fifth wound to deal with *the pride* that resided within their hearts. It is likely that many of the Ephesian leaders were motivated by pride to pursue their own ministry initiatives, and were proud of the fruit that their labour had produced. They did not realise that their self-righteous labour had produced *thorns and thistles* that were worthless, and close to being cursed by God. Heb 6:8. For some of the Ephesian leaders, the perceived success of their ministry may have been the impediment that hindered them from responding to the command of Christ. Christ was calling them to return to first love by laying down their own ministry initiatives within the fellowship of the presbytery.

As we have already said, the Ephesian presbytery needed to count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ. Php 3:8. They were in danger of becoming like the many believers who confess that Christ is Lord, and yet they do not know Him, nor recognise the way in which He is coming to His church. Jesus said that many self-righteous believers will say to Him on the day of judgement, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness". Mat 7:22-23. Jesus made it clear that there are many self-righteous deeds that are performed in His name. However, rather than bringing glory to the name of Christ, all these self-righteous deeds have caused His name to be profaned among the Gentiles. Eze 36:20.

The fifth wound of Christ reveals to us that the thorns and thistles, which have been produced by our self-righteous deeds, have been used by the Gentiles to mock the kingship of Christ. This was a significant part of the humiliation that Christ experienced when the crown of thorns was placed upon His head. We have already considered that our self-righteous deeds are 'dung' that need to be removed in the fellowship of Christ's sin offering, otherwise our self-righteousness will be spread like dung on our face. Mal 2:3. In fully identifying with the humiliation of our self-righteous behaviour, it was as though the dung of our self-righteousness was spread across the face of Christ when the crown of thorns was placed upon His head. We observe that this principle has continued throughout the church age. The self-righteous, and often eccentric, behaviour of religious zealots has not revealed the name of Christ to the world. It has caused the holiness of His name to be profaned before the nations. Eze 36:23.

The Lord declared through the prophet Ezekiel, 'I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord ... when *I am hallowed in you* before their eyes.' Eze 36:23. The Lord is coming to purge and to refine all those who minister in His name, to ensure that His name is hallowed within His lampstand churches and, therefore, sanctified among the nations of the world. Every Christian leader must be found among those who fear the Lord, and must greatly esteem His name. Mal 3:16. The prophet Malachi declared that those who fear the Lord *will speak to one another*, and the Lord will give attention to their discussion and hear their testimony. Mal 3:16. A leader who fears the Lord will have the same testimony as expressed by the apostle Paul. He counted all things to be loss so that he could be 'found in Christ'. He qualified this by saying, 'Not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.' Php 3:9.

In practical terms, a presbyter who has *this testimony* will lay down all of their personal perceptions and ministry aspirations, and will begin to *speak in faith* within the fellowship of a presbytery. 2Co 4:13. This means that the work of their ministry can be crafted by overseers in a fellowship of offering. A leader who is submitted to this fellowship of first love will be able to proceed in faith, by the Spirit, to do the work of their ministry. The work of their ministry will be according to the sanctification of their own name. However, it will not be a demonstration of their own righteousness. It will be a demonstration of the righteousness of God, which they have received, by faith, in the fellowship of offering that exists within a presbytery. Php 3:9. Jesus exhorted the Ephesian presbytery to this mode of ministry when He said, 'Remember ... from where you have fallen, and repent, and do *the first works*.' Rev 2:5.

A thorn in the flesh

A presbytery that has returned to first love, and is committed to doing the first works, will not be *labouring in the flesh* to bring forth thorns and thistles. Heb 6:8. That is, they will not be preoccupied with their own self-righteous ministry initiatives. They will be *labouring in the Spirit* to produce enduring fruit in a multitude of sons of God. However, those who minister in the Spirit will still be afflicted by thorns and thistles in the fellowship of the fifth wounding of Christ. In this case, the thorns and thistles represent the antagonistic behaviour of those who have become enemies of the cross. Php 3:18. The Lord will use this affliction

to circumcise the propensity for pride that resides within the heart of each leader. We are reminded that the Lord gave the apostle Paul a thorn in the flesh to deal with this propensity in his heart. Paul testified, 'Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me - to keep me from exalting myself!' 2Co 12:7.

In Paul's situation, the thorn in the flesh was a group of Jewish zealots who followed him from place to place to stir up opposition to his word and ministry. Paul petitioned the Lord three times in prayer to remove this unrelenting persecution from him. The Lord replied, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' 2Co 12:9. The Lord was using this persecution to deal with Paul's propensity for pride. However, more significantly, as Paul participated in the fellowship of the fifth wound of Christ, he was receiving the grace to be an effective minister of the Spirit, as part of a star in the right hand of Christ. As he learned to minister in the weakness of Christ, the power of God's life was directed toward those who received his ministry. 2Co 13:4. The same principle is applicable for every presbytery that has been recovered to the right hand of Christ.

Recovered to the right hand of Christ

In summary, the Ephesian presbytery had fallen from the right hand of Christ. Jesus came to recover them to His right hand so that they could walk with Him in the fellowship of His offering. He knew that the Father had committed the whole presbytery into His right hand so that they could minister with Him among His lampstand churches. In this regard, we are reminded of the words of John regarding *the reason* why Jesus girded Himself with a towel to wash the feet of His disciples at the last supper. John recorded that 'Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things *into His hands*, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself'. Joh 13:3-4. He washed the feet of the disciples to sanctify each leader for their unique participation in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings.

As our great High Priest, with eyes like a flame of fire, Jesus came to confront and rebuke the Ephesian presbytery. However, He also came to, metaphorically, *wash their feet*, and to sanctify them to a process of restoration so that they could be recovered as a star in His right hand. He promised each leader who was willing to receive His priestly initiative

toward them, that He would give them the fruit of the tree of life which is in the middle of the paradise of God. Rev 2:7. Christ was fully revealed as *the fruit* of the tree of life when He was lifted up and nailed to the cross. He has given us the fruit of the tree of life by granting us a participation in His body and His blood. Joh 6:53-54. We eat and drink at the communion table in the faith that Christ has granted us this participation and, hence, we are partaking of the fruit of the tree of life.

Jesus promised to give the Ephesian presbytery a participation in His offering and sufferings. However, more than this, He declared that their participation in His offering would be in the context of 'the paradise of God'. Rev 2:7. 'The paradise of God' describes the fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is the fellowship of first love. It is important to recognise that Jesus was not asking the Ephesian presbytery to recover their first love so that they could partake of the fruit of the tree of life. Rather, He was inviting them *to join the fellowship* of first love between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit by granting them a participation in His offering and sufferings. In the primary case, first love is not something that we need to find or recover; it is a fellowship of offering that we need to join.

As we participate in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, as sons of God, our capacity to participate in the fellowship of first love is being enlarged. This occurs as the other law is removed from our heart, and the love of God is poured into our heart through the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. Rom 5:5. In the same way, as a presbytery walks with Christ in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, its capacity to minister in the Spirit and to invite a lampstand church to join *this same fellowship of first love* is also being enlarged. Speaking as part of a presbytery that was walking with Christ, the apostle John said, 'What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.' 1Jn 1:3.

Chapter 8

The message to the presbytery in Smyrna

Jesus admonished the presbytery in Smyrna as ‘the First and the Last, who was dead, and has come to life’. Rev 2:8. As the First and the Last, He is the author and perfecter of our faith, and the pioneer of our salvation. Heb 12:2. Jesus introduced Himself in this way because He wanted the presbytery in Smyrna to know that the suffering that they were experiencing, and would soon experience, was a *fellowship in His sufferings*. He was coming to give them *the faith* that was necessary for them to continue to walk with Him in the season that was ahead of them. He was the pioneer of their salvation, and had authored a way of escape for them, through a fellowship in His sufferings, so that they would not be hurt by the second death. He promised the overcomers within this presbytery, who laid hold of this way of escape by faith, that they would be conformed to His death and would receive the crown of life. Rev 2:10.

We know that Jesus is the possessor of the crown of life. He is the One ‘who was dead and has come to life’. Rev 2:8. In the garden of Gethsemane, Christ offered Himself to the Father to be made our sin offering. He died the death of our sin, and yet, by the power of Eternal Spirit, He continued to offer Himself to God. Heb 9:14. As He suffered six

wounding events from Gethsemane to the cross, His blood was sprinkled upon His physical body for our sake. The life of God that was resident in His blood sustained His mortal life, and brought Him back from the death of our sin. He came back from the death of our sin, and brought *every son of God who joins the fellowship of His death* back from the death of sin, with Him. When Jesus Christ declared, 'It is finished!', from the cross, He was fully revealed as the Firstborn, *among many brethren*, from the death of sin. Rom 8:29.

In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul declared, 'Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.' Heb 5:8-9. Christ had been made perfect as the firstborn from the death of our sin when He declared, 'It is finished!' He had learned *the unique obedience* that is necessary for every son of God to fulfil the will of God while still in a mortal body. Having completed this work, Christ yielded His Spirit into the hands of the Father as a pure and undefiled offering. Heb 9:14. When the soldier pierced His side with a spear, and blood and water flowed from His heart, it signified that a new and living way had been opened for every son of God to join the fellowship of His offering. He had become the source of eternal salvation as our great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Heb 5:10.

I know your tribulation and poverty

Jesus began His admonition to the presbytery in Smyrna by saying, 'I know your tribulation.' Rev 2:9. The church in Smyrna had evidently suffered tribulation because of the word that they had received through the apostolic administration that Paul had established in the region of Asia. In this respect, there is a strong similarity between the church in Smyrna and the churches that Paul established in the region of Macedonia - in Thessalonica and in Philippi. Paul said to the Thessalonians, 'You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word *in much tribulation* with the joy of the Holy Spirit.' 1Th 1:6.

We will know the joy of the Holy Spirit if we allow Him to join us to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. In this fellowship, the word of present truth that has been proclaimed to us by an apostolic administration will become the testimony of our own faith. The word of faith that we have received will become the word that is in our heart and in our mouth. Rom 10:8. Conversely, Jesus likened those who become offended by the need to join the offering and sufferings of Christ, to 'stony ground'. Mar 4:16-17. A 'stony ground' believer will not have a

testimony of faith, because it is only possible to receive this testimony in the fellowship of Christ's offering. This lack of testimony is the clear indication that the word has not been able to take root in their heart. The presbytery in Smyrna did not have a stony ground problem. They had apprehended a testimony of faith, because they had resolved the issue of their self-righteousness. Jesus continued by acknowledging their 'poverty'. Rev 2:9. It is possible that this presbytery did not have many material resources to facilitate the work of the ministry in their region.

However, it is more likely that Jesus was commending them because they were a group of leaders who were 'poor in spirit'. Mat 5:3. Unlike the presbytery in Ephesus, the leaders in Smyrna were not preoccupied with their own self-righteous initiatives and local administrations. They had joined the faith of the apostle Paul, and had counted 'all things to be loss' in view of the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ. Rather than looking for a righteousness of their own, the presbytery in Smyrna wanted to be 'found in Christ' and to possess 'the righteousness of God by faith'. Php 3:9. They did possess this righteousness because Jesus testified that they were 'rich'. Rev 2:9.

Do not fear what you are about to suffer

As the author and finisher of their faith, Jesus said to them, 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold the devil is about to cast some of you into prison.' Rev 2:10. He was referring to the persecution that this presbytery was about to suffer at the hands of 'the synagogue of Satan'. As we considered in Chapter 5, Satan is the head of *a false apostolic administration* that has its own leaders, doctrines and practices. Those who belong to the synagogue of Satan may profess to be followers of Christ. Some may even profess to believe the word of an apostolic administration, and seek to join themselves to a presbytery with flattery. Dan 11:34. However, they are enemies of the cross of Christ, and stand in opposition to His apostolic administration. In many cases, it is the synagogue of Satan that initiates the persecution of those who belong to the apostolic administration of Christ.

The presbytery in Smyrna had already experienced persecution at the hands of the synagogue of Satan. They may have experienced various forms of persecution for many years. Jesus did not come to deliver them from this affliction. He came to warn them that this participation in His sufferings was about to dramatically increase! Specifically, He said that some of their leaders would be cast into prison. We know that this had relevance for the presbytery in Smyrna during the reign of the Roman

empire. However, it is important to remember that this warning is also relevant for presbyteries of lampstand churches, in our current day, as we approach 'the fullness of times'. Jesus was referring to this period of history when He said, 'At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.' Mat 24:10.

When Jesus said to the leaders in Smyrna, 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer', He was giving them *a specific word of faith* for the season ahead. This is true whenever the Lord commands us not to fear. We recall that the Lord said to Abraham, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield.' He was saying to him, 'Do not fear. *I am your faith.*' Gen 15:1.

Significantly, the word of faith that Jesus gave to the presbytery in Smyrna included an assurance that He had set *a time limit* on their suffering. He said that they would be tested in the fellowship of His sufferings for *a symbolic* ten days - no more and no less. In this regard, Jesus was both the author *and the finisher* of their faith for the specific portion of His sufferings that God had apportioned to them. Jesus acknowledged that the leaders in Smyrna would be tested during this time. However, having received this word from Him, they could embrace the coming season in faith. There was no reason for any of these leaders to succumb to the temptation of drawing back in unbelief. Heb 10:38.

It is unlikely that Jesus was referring to a literal 'ten-day period' when He said, 'You will have tribulation for ten days.' Rev 2:10. He was using this number symbolically. The number 'ten' is often used in the Scriptures to represent trial or affliction. For example, we recall that Laban changed the wages of Jacob ten times. It is likely that Jesus was applying the same 'day for a year' formula that is applicable to the 2300-year prophecy that is contained in the book of Daniel. Dan 8:13-14.

Regardless of the exact length of the ten days of tribulation, we know that it is *part of the trampling* that has been experienced by the messengers of Christ since the commencement of the 2300-year prophecy. As we considered in Chapter 3, Daniel was given prophetic illumination regarding the plight of the messengers of God in the world. He proclaimed that the messengers of the covenant that God is making with mankind will be trampled by the spirit of antichrist for a period of 2300 years. The book of Daniel reveals that this trampling began during the reign of the Greek empire, and will continue until the time of the end. Dan 8:8-10,17.

Referring to this period of 2300 years, the prophet Daniel explained, 'Those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many; yet *they will fall* by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder for many days.' Dan 11:33. When we consider the fulfilment of this prophecy, it is important that we recognise that there are two distinct elements of a fallen star – one is the *cause* and the other is the *outcome*. It is the loss of first love and the corruption of offering among the leaders of God's people that *has caused* the trampling of the messengers of Christ.

Significantly, Christ *has joined the plight of every fallen star*, and has been trampled with them. His experience of this trampling reached a climax when He was flung on His back and nailed to the cross by the hands of wicked men, and then lifted up to be ridiculed and mocked by all who passed by. Christ has converted the judgement of trampling, that is experienced by the messengers of God, to a fellowship in His sufferings in which first love is restored.

We observe the two elements of a fallen star when we consider the difference between the presbytery in Ephesus and the presbytery in Smyrna. The presbytery in Ephesus appeared to be successful, and yet they had left their first love and reverted to the pursuit of their own self-righteousness. Rev 2:4. They were *a fallen star* because they had fallen from the right hand of Christ.

In contrast to this, the presbytery in Smyrna did not appear to be successful. And Jesus warned them that they would soon appear to be *even less successful* when some of their leaders were imprisoned! However, the members of the presbytery in Smyrna were poor in spirit, and rich in relation to the righteousness of God. Rev 2:9. They had not fallen from the right hand of Christ. They *were a fallen star* because they were being trampled with Christ and His messengers, in fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy. The trampling that they were experiencing was the outcome of the persecution that had been initiated by the synagogue of Satan. However, they could embrace this trampling in faith, because it was part of the refining, purifying and perfecting process that Christ had authored for them as a presbytery in His right hand. Dan 11:35.

The trampling of a star

Jesus warned the presbytery in Smyrna that they were about to experience a unique form of trampling that had been nominated by the prophet Daniel; that is, captivity. We are not suggesting that every

presbytery will experience each form of trampling. However, every presbytery will experience *some form of trampling* until the 2300-year prophecy is complete.

We will consider that the prophet Daniel identified *six unique forms* of trampling that the messengers of Christ and the people of God may experience. He began by referring to the sword, flame, captivity and plunder. In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul identified these same four forms of trampling. He exhorted the believers to 'remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings [experienced trampling], partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches [sword] and tribulations [flame], and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners [captivity] and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property [plunder], knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.' Heb 10:32-34.

By sword

We will briefly comment on these four forms of trampling. What does it mean for a presbytery to fall and be 'trampled by a sword'? It is unlikely that the interpretation of this verse will be limited to the use of an ancient weapon. In the Scriptures, a sword is often used as a symbol for the word that proceeds from a person's mouth. A presbytery is being 'trampled by a sword' when they are subjected to false public accusation. This kind of accusation will often be defamatory and derogatory in nature. Paul referred to being made a public spectacle through reproaches. Heb 10:33. King David likened the word that proceeds from a mouth that speaks deceit, to an 'evil sword'. Psa 144:10-11. In another psalm, he said, 'My soul is among lions; I must lie among those who breathe forth fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and *their tongue a sharp sword.*' Psa 57:4. Recognising this to be the case, David also prayed, 'Hide me from the secret counsel of evildoers, from the tumult of those who do iniquity, who have *sharpened their tongue like a sword.*' Psa 64:2-3.

By flame

The *second form of trampling* that a presbytery may experience is by 'flame'. A presbytery is trampled by flame when they are subject to severe persecution at the hands of other religious groups or secular authorities. This will be the experience of many Christian leaders, particularly in nations of the world that are aligned with the ruling

principles of Gog and Magog in the seventh world kingdom. The prophet Joel described the impact of the Gog and Magog army by saying, 'A fire consumes before them and behind them *a flame burns ... with a noise as of chariots they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire* consuming the stubble, like a mighty people arranged for battle.' Joe 2:3,5. This persecution of the church will reach a climax between the opening of the second seal and the sixth seal during the time of the end.

By captivity

The *third form of trampling* that a presbytery may experience is by 'captivity'. As we have identified, this was the most applicable form of trampling for the presbytery in Smyrna. Jesus specifically warned them that the devil was going to cast some of them into prison. We recall that the apostle Paul was also subjected to this form of trampling on multiple occasions. During the latter years of his ministry, Paul spent a significant amount of time in prison. In his letter to the Ephesians, he referred to himself as 'an ambassador in chains'. Eph 6:20.

As a messenger of Christ, Paul suffered much hardship for the sake of the gospel, which included being 'imprisoned as a criminal'. However, in the middle of all these circumstances, he boldly declared to Timothy that 'the word of God is not imprisoned'. 2Ti 2:9. This is a significant point. If the messengers of Christ have joined the fellowship of His sufferings, the trampling that they experience with Him will increase their effectiveness as ministers of the Spirit in His right hand. Daniel proclaimed that 'those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many' while they are being trampled. Dan 11:33.

By plunder

The *fourth form of trampling* that a presbytery may experience is by 'plunder'. The word 'plunder' could also be translated as 'seizure'. We are reminded that the believers in the early church gladly accepted the seizure of their property. Heb 10:34. It is likely that this form of trampling will become more prevalent in the days ahead of us. As the first phase of the seventh world kingdom continues to emerge, there is increasing antagonism toward the Christian faith in many nations around the world. In the western nations of the world, this antagonism has been caused by the increasing influence of the spirit of antichrist within our secular society. The plunder of the resources that belong to a lampstand church may be caused by any number of different things. It may be

the outcome of lawsuits – many of which will be based on spurious accusation. It may be the outcome of legislation changes that make it increasingly difficult to finance the work of the ministry. In some cases, it may even be the outcome of direct governmental intervention. In any case, it is a unique form of trampling that may be experienced by stars in the right hand of Christ.

Two further forms of trampling

Having identified these four forms of trampling, the prophet Daniel continued by identifying *two further ways* that a presbytery may fall and be trampled until the 2300-year prophecy is complete. These two further forms of trampling are *less overt* than the four we have already considered, and yet, in some instances, they have the potential to have a greater impact upon a presbytery, and to cause more relational damage for a lampstand church.

Many will join with them in hypocrisy

Daniel identified the first one by saying, ‘And many will join with them in hypocrisy.’ Dan 11:34. The biblical definition of a hypocrite notes that they are more than a person who says one thing and then does another thing. This behaviour will only ever be *the symptom* of the problem. A hypocrite could be likened to an ‘actor’. They have created an image of themselves, which they present to others in the hope that they believe that it is true and real. In many cases, the person will be so personally invested in their own image that they themselves will believe that it is true.

Daniel identified the reality that there will be many leaders who will employ this mode to deceptively cleave to a presbytery that is in the right hand of Christ. They will have no desire to join the fellowship of offering that exists within a presbytery. Rather, they will use the word that is proclaimed by an apostolic administration *as a resource*. And they will *become empowered* by their association with the presbytery to be a minister of condemnation among the congregation in the place where they live or function. Such a leader does not belong to the presbytery – they belong to the synagogue of Satan. However, they will presume to function ‘in the name’ of the presbytery or ‘in the name’ of those whom they perceive to have grace and authority within a presbytery.

The implication of this mode is that the damage caused by their aberrant behaviour is often attributed to the presbytery. In turn, those who belong to the synagogue of Satan use the damage that has been caused among the congregation to impugn the presbytery and to justify its trampling. The apostle Paul referred to the outcome of this aberrant behaviour by saying, 'Because of them the way of the truth will be maligned.' 2Pe 2:2.

Some of those with insight will fall

Further to this, Daniel identified that 'some of those with insight will fall'. In this instance, he was not referring to those who cleave to a presbytery in hypocrisy. He was referring to leaders who have received grace from Christ to be part of an apostolic administration in His right hand. However, these leaders fall into sin and disrepute because they do not maintain a relational submission to the fellowship of a presbytery; nor do they give proper attention to *their own personal sanctification* as a son of God. In some cases, the leader may believe that their ministry grace is able to compensate for a lack of personal sanctification.

In his pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus, the apostle Paul was clear that every leader, regardless of the grace that they have received from Christ, needs to be a *firstfruits Christian*. The fruit of the life of God must be evident in their own lives, marriages and families. Tit 3:8. Every leader needs to be a living epistle of Christ. Paul reasoned that if a man does not know how to look after his own household, then he will not know how to oversee the household of God. 1Ti 3:5.

Documented church history records that many successful Christian leaders have fallen into sin, and so, have disqualified themselves from continuing in the work of ministry. When this kind of failure occurs within a presbytery, it creates a significant crisis. The crisis is greatest for those who rely on spiritual leaders without taking personal accountability for their own Christian lives. The only way that a person can avoid this kind of crisis is to hear the word of God that is proclaimed by a presbytery, and to apply it to their lives so that it becomes the testimony of their own faith. Rom 10:8. If a person replaces the need for their own testimony with *loyalty to a leader*, they will eventually become disillusioned and spiritually destitute. 1Co 1:12-13. This may not become apparent for some time. However, when the leader whom the person looks up to as a spiritual benefactor fails or falls in some way, the person will become upset and angry. Their trauma and offence are the symptoms of their lack of personal faith.

There are many different responses that people will make in this kind of situation. Some will fall away in an offended position because they perceive themselves to be the victim of another's failure. Others will look for another leader whom they believe to be more suitably qualified to meet their needs. Some may look to the presbytery itself to become their new spiritual benefactor. They will test the presbytery to see whether it will meet their expectations and respond to their demands. It will be criticised and discredited when it does not 'pass the test' that has been placed upon it. The accusations of those who have become offended in this way will become another form of trampling that the Lord uses to refine, purge and purify those who belong to a presbytery.

A little help

In all these situations, the prophet Daniel declared that the messengers of Christ who are being trampled for 2300 years will receive 'a little help'. Dan 11:34. In the first case, this is the help that they receive because Christ has joined them as part of the fallen star. Paul declared that Christ does not give help to angels, but that He does give help to the descendants of Abraham, who are as numerous as the stars of heaven. Heb 2:16.

By joining every fallen star, Christ has converted the judgement of trampling to a refining, purifying and perfecting process for every star in His right hand. The prophet Daniel proclaimed that the messengers of Christ will fall and be trampled 'to refine them, purify them, and make them white until the time of the end, because it is still for the appointed time'. Dan 11:35. Even though it is the synagogue of Satan, the little horn, and the nations of the world who trample the messengers of Christ, it *is Christ Himself* who initiates and sovereignly controls this perfecting process.

The prophet Malachi proclaimed that Christ 'will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness'. Mal 3:3. It is only possible for those who serve in the household of God 'to offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness', because the Father and Christ have given us the Holy Spirit. Joh 14:26. Joh 16:7. He has been given to us to be the full expression of the righteousness of God in us. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to be ministers of the New Covenant. We learn to fully submit to the leadership and direction of the Holy Spirit in our lives as we are conformed to Christ's death. The apostle Paul desired to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, within the fellowship

of His sufferings, so that He could be progressively *conformed to the death of Christ*. Php 3:10. Paul was content for God to use 'any necessary means' to conform him to Christ's death so that He could manifest the life and righteousness of Christ in his mortal body. Php 3:11.

The crown of life

Jesus exhorted the presbytery in Smyrna to embrace this same faith. He said to them, 'Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.' Rev 2:10. A crown is a symbol of authority. 'The crown of life' designates the authority and power that resurrection life has over the power of death. We are delivered from the power of death when the blood of Christ is sprinkled upon our hearts. Heb 13:20. The crown of life is being received by all believers who are being conformed to the death of Christ in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings.

The apostle James declared, 'Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved [conformed to Christ's death], he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.' Jas 1:12. The apostle Paul described the crown of life as the capacity to 'reign in life' because of the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness that we receive in Him. Rom 5:17. He was referring to our capacity to reign in life when he said, 'We who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.' 2Co 4:11.

As individual leaders within the presbytery of Smyrna were conformed to the death of Christ in the fellowship of His sufferings, they were receiving the crown of life. Furthermore, the presbytery itself - as a fellowship of overseers, elders, and deacons - was receiving the crown of life as the authority of Christ's Melchizedek priesthood. When a presbytery is receiving this crown, they are receiving the *kingly authority* of Christ to build a lampstand church, and the *priestly capacity* to minister the life of God within a lampstand church. The crown of life is the prophetic fulfilment of the ornate crown that was made in the days of Zechariah.

In the days when the Jewish remnant returned from Babylon to rebuild the temple, the Lord asked the prophet Zechariah to take an offering of silver and gold from the exiles, and to make an ornate crown. Zec 6:11. He told him to place this ornate crown upon the head of Joshua the high priest. Further to this, the Lord instructed Zechariah to proclaim, 'Behold a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the Lord.' Zec 6:12. Joshua was a

symbol of Christ, who is our great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. The ornate crown was placed on the head of Joshua, and then kept in the temple as a memorial to all the people to whom Christ would come as both King and Priest. Zec 6:14. Zechariah prophesied, 'Behold, your King is coming to you; His is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' Zec 9:9.

This prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey in the week leading up to His offering, travail and suffering for our sake. However, the priests of that day did not retrieve the ornate crown from the temple to place it upon the head of Christ. They did not recognise His kingship or His priesthood. Rather, the religious leaders of the Jews delivered Christ to the Gentiles, who placed 'a crown of thorns' upon His head. The Jews *rejected* His kingship, and the Gentiles *mocked* His kingship. This was the case because *His mode of kingship* was a stumbling block to the Jews, and it was foolishness to the Gentiles. 1Co 1:23.

Significantly, as Christ suffered at the hands of the synagogue of Satan and the rulers of the world, He was brought back from the death of our sin to become the possessor of *the crown of life*. The Father crowned Him with glory and honour as our great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Heb 2:9. The order of Melchizedek is the priestly order that ministers endless resurrection life. Heb 7:16.

Having completed His priestly work, Christ has taken His seat upon His throne at the right hand of the Father. Zechariah prophesied, 'Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and He who will bear the honour and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices [of kingship and priesthood].' Zec 6:13. Christ reaches out from the place of His throne to build His lampstand churches through the seven stars that He holds in His right hand. Zec 6:12. He has promised to give the crown of life to each presbytery that joins the fellowship of His offering and sufferings.

In the first case, this is the capacity of Christ's priesthood to minister the life of God within a lampstand church. A presbytery will receive this priestly capacity as they learn *the mode of Christ's ministry*. Paul described the mode of Christ's ministry to the Corinthians by saying, 'He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God.' 2Co 13:4. The apostle Paul had learnt to minister in this same way. He testified, 'We also are weak in Him, yet we live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you.' 2Co 13:4.

The evidence that a presbytery has received this priestly capacity from Christ will be seen *at the communion table* of each congregation within the lampstand church. That is, if a presbytery has learned to embrace the weakness of Christ as their only mode of ministry, they will be able to *equip* the believers in every place for the work of their ministry. Furthermore, they will be able to call every believer to *follow their faith*, and to embrace the mode of Christ which ministers in weakness. Heb 13:7. This will enable the Spirit to minister in power through the members of the body of Christ, at the communion table of each congregation.

The apostle Paul declared his testimony to the believers in Philippi, and then exhorted them, 'Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.' Php 3:17. Paul had a testimony that he was personally receiving the crown of life. However, the evidence that he was receiving the crown of life as part of an apostolic administration was seen within the Philippian congregation. Paul declared that the Philippian congregation was his 'joy and crown'. Php 4:1.

Further to this capacity of priesthood, the authority of Christ's kingship will be expressed by an apostolic administration, in a presbytery, as the capacity *to build the administrations* that are necessary for a lampstand church to grow. 1Co 3:10. This is an important element of the crown of life. Christ is restoring this authority to a presbytery for the building of administrations within a lampstand church, as part of the administration that is suitable for the fullness of times. He promised to give this capacity to the presbytery in Smyrna.

In His admonition to the presbytery in Philadelphia, Christ recognised that they had already received this capacity from Him. He said to them, 'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no-one will *take your crown*.' Rev 3:11. The crown of life that belongs to the twenty-four courses of one, world-wide presbytery for the time of end is the *same crown* that Christ promised to the presbytery in Smyrna. Rev 4:4. However, Christ will give further dimensions of His authority to the twenty-four courses of His presbytery in the time of the end. Most significantly, He will give them the authority to gather Jew and Gentile into the kingdom of God for the fulfilment of the great Day of Atonement.

Chapter 9

The promises to Pergamum and Thyatira

In our previous two chapters, we considered the letters to the presbyteries in Ephesus and Smyrna. Jesus promised to give ‘the fruit of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God’ to the overcomers within the presbytery in Ephesus. Rev 2:7. The fruit of the tree of life is the bread and wine of the communion meal. It is our participation in the fellowship of Christ’s offering and sufferings.

Jesus promised to give ‘the crown of life’ to the overcomers within the presbytery in Smyrna. Rev 2:10. The crown of life is the authority of Christ’s Melchizedek priesthood. When a presbytery is receiving the crown of life, it includes the *kingly authority* of Christ to build the administrations of a lampstand church, and the *priestly capacity* to minister the life of God within a lampstand church. In this chapter, we will consider the promises that Christ made to the overcomers within the presbytery in Pergamum and the presbytery in Thyatira.

The hidden manna

Jesus promised the overcomers within the presbytery in Pergamum that He would give them *two things*. The first was 'some of the hidden manna' and the second was 'a white stone'. Rev 2:17. We recall that the nation of Israel ate manna in the wilderness for forty years. Moses said to the Israelites, 'It is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat.' Exo 16:15. The Israelites gathered the manna from around the camp early each day after the morning dew had evaporated. Any manna that had not been gathered by the time the sun grew hot in the day, melted on the ground. Conversely, if an Israelite kept any manna overnight in his tent, it bred worms and became foul. Exo 16:19-21. This signifies that the manna was a miraculous *daily provision* from the Lord.

The Lord ceased to provide manna for the nation of Israel on the day that they entered the promised land. Jos 5:12. However, the Lord instructed Moses to keep an omer of manna; that is, the portion *for one person for one day*, in a jar in the most holy place. Exo 16:16,33. Unlike the manna that had melted under the sun or perished overnight, this manna was miraculously preserved by the Lord in the secret place of the tabernacle. It was kept as a memorial for subsequent generations, to remind them of the Lord's daily provision of bread in the wilderness. More than this, however, it bore witness to *a bread to come* that would not perish, and would endure to eternal life. Joh 6:27. Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.' Joh 6:48-51.

In the first case, Jesus declared that His physical body is the bread of God. Joh 6:33. He also referred to His flesh as 'the true bread from heaven', 'the living bread', and 'the bread of life'. Joh 6:23. Joh 6:35. Joh 6:48. The bread of God is the physical body that the Father prepared for Him, in which He fulfilled the will of God. In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul explained that Christ testified to the Father, 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire [according to the Law], but a body you have prepared for Me.' Heb 10:5. He also declared, 'Behold, I have come - in the volume of the book it is written of Me - to do Your will, O God.' Heb 10:7. Christ revealed and fulfilled the will of God when He offered Himself to the Father on His pathway from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross.

The significant point is that Christ has given us the bread of life by granting us a participation in the fellowship of His offering. At the last supper, He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to His disciples and said, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' Luk 22:19. We eat the bread of the communion in the faith that Christ has granted us participation in His offering. The word of life that is ministered at the communion table gives us the faith to pray each day, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' Mat 6:11. In other words, we are praying, 'Give us this day, our daily participation in the fellowship of Your offering.' In the same way that the manna in the wilderness was new each morning, our participation in Christ's offering is new each day. It is a miraculous daily provision for every believer.

The hidden wisdom of God

In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul referred to the hidden manna as 'the hidden wisdom of God'. He said, 'We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the *hidden wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory.' 1Co 2:7. The offering of Christ was ordained before the foundation of the world as the way in which God will bring forth many sons to glory. The wisdom of God *was fully revealed* by Christ, in time, on His journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. However, we know that there was only a small number of people who witnessed this event in history. A significant element of the wisdom of God is that this event in history is only revealed to us, by the Spirit, when the word of Christ is preached to us. Paul declared, 'For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.' 1Co 1:21.

Jesus Christ has committed the mandate to proclaim *the hidden wisdom of God* to an apostolic administration in His right hand. The apostle Paul testified to the Corinthians, 'I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.' 1Co 2:1-2. Paul expanded on this statement in his letter to the Philippians. He said, 'I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord ... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.' Php 3:8,10. Paul did not simply preach about the offering of Christ. Rather, as *a living epistle* of Christ, he *proclaimed* the mystery of the cross and *revealed* the hidden wisdom of

God. His message and the mode of his ministry were a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks. 1Co 1:23. However, Paul's public proclamation of the hidden wisdom of God, by the Spirit, enabled Christ to be publicly portrayed as crucified before the eyes of all who were willing to receive his word. Gal 3:1.

Jesus promised to give the hidden manna to the presbytery in Pergamum by giving them *insight* into the mystery of the cross, and *grace* to proclaim the hidden wisdom of God. Significantly, He promised to give them this insight and grace as they overcame the pervasive influence of those who held the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Rev 2:14-15. As we have considered, those who hold these doctrines belong to the synagogue of Satan. They are among those who 'act wickedly toward the covenant'. The prophet Daniel declared that the spirit of antichrist will cause many to act wickedly toward the New Covenant as we approach the time of the end. However, he also prophesied that 'the people who know their God will display strength and take action'. Dan 11:32. The messengers of Christ who know their God have the same testimony as the apostle Paul. That is, they have counted all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus their Lord.

The manifold wisdom of God

The Scriptures focus on, and testify in detail about, each wound that Christ suffered. The Scriptures are specific in testimony so that the word of the cross can be understood and applied to our lives. Paul spoke of the word of the cross as being 'the wisdom and power of God'. 1Co 1:18,23-24. In his letter to the Ephesians, he referred to it as 'the manifold wisdom of God'. Eph 3:10. It includes the testimony of God concerning *all seven wounds* that Jesus, as the Pioneer of our salvation, experienced during the hours when He proceeded from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross.

The manifold wisdom of the cross is revealed through the demonstration of the capacity of offering. Offering is the means by which the power of God delivers us from the power of Satan and of sin. Furthermore, it is the means by which the life of God is given to us as our eternal possession, enabling us to be sons of God forever. For this reason, we need to understand and participate in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and wounds. The book of Proverbs likens the word of the cross concerning the seven wounds of Christ to the 'seven pillars' of wisdom. We read in

the book of Proverbs, 'Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out *her seven pillars*. She has prepared her food; she has mixed her wine; she has also *set her table*'. Pro 9:1. The manifold wisdom of God is revealed to those who eat and drink the communion in the faith that Christ has granted them a unique participation in His offering.

The prophet Daniel declared that 'those who have insight [into the hidden wisdom of God] among the people will give understanding to the many'. Dan 11:33. The messengers of Christ will proclaim the manifold wisdom of God, both publicly and from house to house. The wisdom of God that they proclaim will reveal the offering of Christ, and will give, to those who receive their word, the faith that is necessary for them to join the offering of Christ. For this reason, the writer of the book of Proverbs declared that 'wisdom is the principal thing'. Pro 4:7. A believer gets wisdom by receiving the word of present truth and by joining the fellowship of the offering of Christ.

The wise man continued, 'In all your getting (of wisdom), get understanding'. Pro 4:7. A believer gains understanding concerning their unique participation in the sufferings of Christ as they watch and pray with Him in the Spirit. They gain further understanding as they speak to their fellow believers concerning the word of present truth that they have received, as well as about their personal experience in the fellowship of His offering.

The white stone with the new name

Jesus also promised to give the overcomers within the presbytery of Pergamum *a white stone*. Rev 2:17. In the Old Covenant, the breastplate of judgement that was worn by the high priest contained twelve precious stones. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel were inscribed on these stones - one name on each stone. Exo 28:15-21. In this way, the high priest carried the names of the whole nation of Israel over his heart when he ministered before the Lord in the holy place. Exo 28:29. These stones represented the authority of the high priest to minister in the holy place on behalf of the nation. Furthermore, the name of each tribe was carried by the high priest as a 'continual memorial' before the Lord. Jesus Christ fulfilled this priestly ministry when He carried the name of every person before the Father. Our names were inscribed upon His heart. When He offered Himself to the Father, for our sake, He caused our names to be *remembered by God*.

When we join the fellowship of Christ's offering, the sprinkling of His blood cleanses our conscience from dead works, and equips us to serve the living God. Heb 9:14. Jesus has made us to be a kingdom of priests to His God and Father. Rev 1:6. The white stone represents the authority that He has given us to be priests in the true temple. Unlike Old Covenant practice, our name is not carried by a priest on our behalf. Rather, we must draw near to God, with our heart sprinkled by the blood of Christ, to minister according to the sanctification of *our own name*. Jesus said to the overcomers in the presbytery in Pergamum, 'I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no-one knows except him who receives it.' Rev 2:17.

The secret of the Lord

The 'new name which no-one knows except him who receives it' is also called 'the secret of the Lord'. The psalmist declared that 'the secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him and He will make them know His covenant'. Psa 25:14. The apostle Paul testified that he had learned the secret. Php 4:12. He was content in every circumstance, because he knew that his entire life was a package that had been tailor-made for him by God as a unique participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Furthermore, Paul had learned the secret of his own name that had been written in the Lamb's book of life from before the foundation of the world. Rev 13:8. He did not need to commend himself; or to compare himself with others. Paul knew his own sanctification in the secret place of prayer before the Father, in the fellowship of Christ's offering, and in fellowship with his brethren in Christ.

The apostle Paul ministered as someone who had received a white stone, with the secret of his own name inscribed upon it. He was a minister of the life and grace of the New Covenant, by the Spirit, according to his own sanctification. 2Co 3:6. Paul was confident to minister according to the authority of the name that he had received. He regularly introduced himself as a slave and an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul knew his name, which meant that he was not preoccupied with *finding* his name; nor did he have any need or inclination to *reveal* his own name. In fact, the evidence that he had received the secret of his own name was his preoccupation with revealing the name of Christ, and the name of his brethren in Christ. This was the evidence that the Holy Spirit had inscribed the sanctification of Paul's own name and the love of God upon the fleshly tablet of his heart. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul explained that the only 'letter of commendation' that he required was

the fruit that his ministry had produced in the churches, by the Spirit.
2Co 3:2.

Speaking in faith within a presbytery

Leaders who are receiving insight into the hidden wisdom of God, and the authority of a white stone with the secret of their own name inscribed upon it, will be compelled by the faith of Christ to make offering within the fellowship of a presbytery. The presbytery is the first place where the hidden wisdom of God is declared by those with ministry grace, according to the measure of faith and authority that they have received from Christ. For an apostolic administration to be fully functional in a presbytery, the word of Christ needs to be in the mouth of those with apostolic grace, prophetic grace, teaching grace and evangelistic grace. Eph 4:11. When the hidden wisdom of God is proclaimed by those who are part of the apostolic administration of Christ, it establishes the ground of fellowship for the word of life to be heard, seen and handled by all leaders in the presbytery. 1Jn 1:1.

All leaders who have been called to be part of a star in the right hand of Christ must know the secret of their own name, and must bring their sanctification to join the fellowship of the presbytery. They do this when they come to speak 'in faith' and 'according to the grace' that they have received from Christ. 2Co 4:13. Rom 12:3. They will come to 'speak in faith' among their brethren so that their offering can be crafted by others to be acceptable to God. Paul declared, 'Having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed therefore I spoke", we also believe, therefore we also speak.' 2Co 4:13. The word of faith in the mouth of each presbyter is the means by which they present themselves to make offering. A person comes to presbytery to join the offering of Christ with their brethren, and to make offering by presenting themselves as a living and holy sacrifice. Rom 12:1.

It is most important that when leaders come to the fellowship of a presbytery, they come in sanctification and faith to offer themselves according to their name. They do not come with a non-accountable attitude, waiting to be scripted to a work or a position so that they can be empowered over others. This type of empowerment will lead to functioning in a non-accountable way on behalf of another person or on behalf of presbytery as an institution. Paul was clear that the spirit of faith in a son of God does not speak in this way. Rom 10:6-7. A person must not come to presbytery in unbelief, asking someone else to ascend into heaven to 'bring Christ down for them' or to descend into the abyss

to 'bring Christ up from the dead'. In other words, they are not looking for someone to empower them toward their own ministry initiatives or to deliver them from their accountability as a minister of Christ.

The fellowship of offering in a presbytery is never an empowering exercise. There needs to be a proper priestly ordering of a leader's offering by others, to ensure that the offering is fully examined and acceptable to God. The offering is arranged upon the fire of the altar by others, so that it ascends as a sweet-smelling aroma before the Lord. Lev 1:4-9. Rom 15:16. In this way, a person who presents themselves to make offering must be sanctified and given to the works of their name by their brethren. It is this fellowship of offering that ensures that their name is remembered as a memorial before God, and that their work as a minister of the New Covenant is effective. The apostle Paul called this process of ordering the offering of every presbyter so that it is sanctified and acceptable to God, 'the laying on of hands of the presbytery'. Paul admonished Timothy, 'Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.' 1Ti 4:14.

The work of craftsmen

Having been sanctified in the fellowship of the presbytery, and given to the work of ministry by their brethren, a presbyter needs to do the works that have been given to them to do as an overseer, elder or deacon among the flock. Overseers, elders and deacons who have received grace from Christ in the four administrations of His grace must proceed from the fellowship of the presbytery to be the 'lamp' that gives direction and light in the communion of each local congregation. Each local congregation should be an assembly of firstfruits Christians that can be likened to the 'flower' on the branch of a lampstand church. The members of each local congregation are the 'petals' of the flower. They reflect and focus the light of the manifold wisdom of God that comes from Christ and is ministered by the Holy Spirit. Rev 1:20.

Leaders who are receiving the hidden manna and the white stone within the fellowship of a presbytery will have the insight and authority that is necessary to function as craftsmen within a lampstand church. The four craftsmen represent those who have been given apostolic, prophetic, teaching and evangelistic grace from Christ in a presbytery. Eph 4:11. Zec 1:20. It is the work of craftsmen to proclaim the word of present truth, and to equip the believers who gather at every communion table in a lampstand church for the work of their own ministry. Eph 4:12.

A member of the body of Christ will come from their personal prayer closet to the communion, to lay down their life and to allow others to order their offering in the same way that a man comes from his prayer closet to the fellowship of the presbytery. It is the work of craftsmen to order the offering of every member of the body so that it is effective in building up the body of Christ in love. Eph 4:16.

The work of craftsmen does not inhibit the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. Rather, it enables every member to be properly sanctified so that the expression of the Holy Spirit becomes effective in them, as they become a gift and blessing to the body. If the body ministry functions in the same way as in the secret place of every person's prayer closet or in the same way as in the intimacies of the travail of the corporate prayer meetings, then our ministry at the communion table will be inappropriate. It will be dysfunctional, and will cause offence to unbelievers and the unlearned, because those who are in attendance will not be edified. Paul instructed the Corinthians that, when we gather together for communion, everything needs to be done properly and in order. 1Co 14:40. The work of craftsmen to host the communion gathering will facilitate the ministry of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit through the many members of the body of Christ, as they function with spiritual gifts. 1Co 12:7-11. This ministry of the Spirit will enable a clear proclamation of the wisdom of God to be heard and received by all those who have gathered to the communion table. 1Co 14:6-9.

The rod of iron

Jesus promised the overcomers in the presbytery in Thyatira that He would give them 'a rod of iron' and 'the morning star'. He said, 'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations - he shall rule them with *a rod of iron*; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels - as I also have received from My Father.' Rev 2:26-27.

The rod of iron is an element of Christ's kingship as our great Shepherd. It represents the authority that He has received from the Father to shepherd and to judge the nations of the world. The Greek word that is translated 'rule' in this verse is *poimaino*, which means to 'shepherd' and to 'feed'. It is the same word that Jesus used when He instructed Peter to 'feed My sheep'. Likewise, it is the word that Paul used when He instructed the Ephesian presbytery to 'shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood'. Act 20:28. Peter also used this word

when he exhorted his fellow elders to 'shepherd the flock of God among you'. 1Pe 5:2.

When considering the meaning of the rod of iron, it is helpful to begin from the perspective that it is a *shepherding* rod. The symbolism of 'iron' signifies that it cannot be broken. In fact, as we will consider, it becomes the ruling principle for the new heavens and new earth. The rod of iron is a ruling principle that is *completely different* from every form of rulership that we observe in the nations of the world. It is not a democratic form of rulership that relies on consensus; nor is it an autocratic form of rulership that relies on compliance. The rod of iron does not manipulate, manage or suppress the fleshly motivations of mankind in any way. It is a rule of life that belongs exclusively to the new creation. In this regard, we are reminded of the words of Paul, 'For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a *new creation*. And those who will *walk by this rule (lit. rod)*, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.' Gal 6:15-16.

The rod that belongs to our Shepherd-King

In the first case, the rod of iron belongs to Christ, who is our Shepherd-King. He received the rod of iron from the Father during His journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. In Gethsemane, Christ was smitten as our Shepherd when the Father made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us. He died the death of our sin. Mat 26:31. However, through the shedding of His blood, He also came back from the death of our sin as the great Shepherd of the sheep. Heb 13:20. On this journey, He abolished the law covenant, destroyed sin in His physical body, and established a process for the removal of carnality from the heart of every person. Furthermore, He established a completely new *rule of life*, or mode of living. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul called this 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus'. Rom 8:2. In contrast to the strength of sin, which is the law covenant, the strength of the rod of iron is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

We observe the first expression of the rod of iron in the garden of Gethsemane when Christ prayed, 'Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours, be done.' Luk 22:42. This prayer demonstrated that Christ was overcoming the *disobedient wills* of all mankind that had been laid upon Him as our sin offering. As He was strengthened by Eternal Spirit to pray even more earnestly, He began to sweat great drops of blood. This was the first of seven sprinklings of His

blood and signified that He was receiving the first element of authority from the Father, as our great Shepherd.

The first element of the rod of iron is authority over the carnality of man. Let us say again that this is not a worldly form of authority that works by suppression. In his letter to the Romans, Paul was clear that the suppression of carnality is not possible, and that any attempt to do so only leads to the bondage of the law of sin and death. Christ has authority over the carnality of man, because He has pioneered *a completely new mode of living*, by the Spirit, in obedience to the Father's will.

Jesus proceeded from the garden of Gethsemane, with authority over the carnality of man, to also receive authority over the Jewish priesthood and the nations of the world. He did not take this authority by force. Rather, it was *given* to Him by the *Father*, as those who presumed to have authority over Him disqualified and disempowered themselves. For example, as the priests, scribes and Pharisees used false accusation to condemn Him according to the Law, they rendered themselves to be illegitimate custodians of the Law.

As we have previously considered, the high priest of the day should have recognised that Christ was their King and High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. The high priest should have placed the gold and silver crown upon Christ's head. The priests, however, rejected the kingship and priesthood of Christ in an endeavour to preserve their own validity and, in doing so, they disqualified themselves by making themselves redundant as leaders of the nation. We recall that Caiaphas, the high priest, confronted Christ by saying, 'I put You under oath by the living God: tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!' Mat 26:63. When Jesus responded in the affirmative, Caiaphas accused him of blasphemy and, in a state of extreme exasperation, tore his own priestly garments. Mat 26:65. In this action, he disqualified himself from holding the office of the high priest.

Authority over the nations

We observe the same dynamic of disempowerment and judgement in relation to the kingdoms of the world, when Christ suffered at the hands of Pontius Pilate and Herod. The prophetic psalm that refers to Christ's possession of the rod of iron begins with the question, 'Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers counsel together against the

Lord and against His anointed.’ Psa 2:1-2. As the governor of the region, Pilate was the representative of the ruler of the Roman empire. We know that the Roman empire was the sixth world kingdom, and was the dominant political, economic and military power over the nations of the earth at that time. Having interrogated Christ, Pilate sent Him to Herod, who was the king in Galilee. Herod and his soldiers treated Christ with contempt, mocked Him, dressed Him in a purple robe and then sent Him back to Pilate. Luk 23:11.

Luke is the only Gospel writer who recorded this interplay between Pilate and Herod. Interestingly, he also recorded that ‘Herod and Pilate became friends with one another *that very day*, for before they had been enemies with each other’. Luk 23:12. Their desire to protect their respective dominions had formerly made them enemies. However, it now united them in a common purpose. The common ground upon which these two rulers stood was their opposition to Christ. The two leaders had a common mind toward the treatment of Christ as Pilate delivered Him to his soldiers to be scourged, and to have the crown of thorns beaten into His head with the mock sceptre. As the soldiers ridiculed and humiliated Christ, they could not shake His resolute faith and trust in His Father. He had set His face like flint to fulfil the Father’s will. Isa 50:7. Through the prophet Isaiah, He testified, ‘I gave My back to those who strike Me, and My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting.’ Isa 50:6.

The significant point is that, as Christ suffered at the hands of the representatives of the Roman empire, which was the sixth world kingdom, He received authority from the Father over all the nations of the world. Furthermore, with every blow that was inflicted upon Him by the Roman soldiers, the Gentile kingdoms of this world were brought under the process of being disempowered and destroyed. Their authority was shattered like an earthenware vessel. This judgement was proclaimed upon the nations of the world as Christ became the Firstborn from the death of our sin. The Son testified, through the psalmist, that the Father had said to Him, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will surely give you the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.’ Psa 2:7-9.

The rod of iron given to the presbytery

When we understand how and when Christ received the rod of iron, it helps us to understand how a presbytery in the right hand of Christ

also receives the rod of iron and authority over the nations. Jesus promised that the presbytery in Thyatira would receive authority over the nations *in the same way* that He received authority over the nations from the Father. Rev 2:27. A presbytery in the right hand of Christ receives authority over the nations in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. Specifically, a presbytery will receive the authority of a rod of iron from Christ as they suffer with Him when persecuted by the world. We recall the words of Jesus to His disciples, 'You will be hated by all nations because of My name'. Mat 24:9. He also encouraged His disciples, 'If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.' Joh 15:18-19.

As we have already considered, the prophet Daniel declared that the messengers of Christ will be trampled by the spirit of antichrist in the world for 2300 years. Dan 8:10-14. This trampling began during the reign of the Greek empire. Christ suffered under the hands of Pontius Pilate, who was the representative of the Roman empire. Christ's sufferings were also a part of the fulfilment of this prophecy. We know that the trampling of the messengers of Christ has continued among the nations, and continues to our present day.

However, the prophetic Scriptures warn us that this persecution will dramatically increase during the first phase of the seventh world kingdom. During this phase, all the nations of the world will be organised into ten economic and political blocks. Dan 7:24. A world leader, whom the prophet Daniel likened to 'a little horn', will rise by deceit to become the prominent ruler in three of these economic and political blocks. Dan 7:8. This leader will be empowered by Satan from the heavenly places. During this time, the little horn will be the personification of the working of Satan among the nations. 2Th 2:9. Satan will motivate this leader with his own spirit of antichrist to persecute the messengers of Christ and the church.

At this same time, the rulership of Gog and Magog will be in conflict with the little horn. Eze 38:2. We are reminded that the first phase of the seventh world kingdom is likened to the mixture of iron and clay. It was revealed to the prophet Daniel that it will be a 'divided kingdom'. Dan 2:41. The only commonality between Gog and Magog, and the little horn, will be their opposition to the church. This will result in the persecution of the church in all ten blocks of the seventh world kingdom, although it will be particularly severe in those nations that are aligned

with Gog and Magog. Whether the persecution is caused by the little horn or by Gog and Magog, the presbyteries in the right hand of Christ will overcome these worldly powers because the authority of the rod of iron has been given to them by Christ.

During the first phase of the seventh world kingdom, which occurs before the time of the end, the shepherding authority of the rod of iron will be demonstrated within the relational sphere of lampstand churches. It will not be exercised as authority over the nations until the time of the end. Jesus explained this to the presbytery in Pergamum by saying, 'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds *until the end* [i.e. until the time of the end], to him I will give authority over the nations.' Rev 2:26.

The rod of iron in the time of the end

In the time of the end, the shepherding authority of the rod of iron will be exercised by a world-wide presbytery, with twenty-four courses, to gather Jew and Gentile into the kingdom of God for the fulfilment of the great Day of Atonement. Further to this, during the opening of the second seal, until the opening of the sixth seal, the church will experience a time of great persecution from the world under the leadership of Gog and Magog. Mat 24:21. Jesus said that this period of tribulation will be so severe that if He did not personally intervene, none of the elect would survive it. Mat 24:22. The prophet Ezekiel described the way in which Christ will personally intervene to judge the Gog and Magog army, and the nations of the world, during the opening of the sixth seal. Eze 38:18-23. In that day, the Scripture will be fulfilled concerning Christ and the nations, 'You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware'. Psa 2:9.

Furthermore, the earlier part of this prophetic psalm will also be fulfilled. 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession.' Psa 2:8. The Lord revealed to the apostle John that there will be a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and tongue who will be gathered for the fulfilment of this great Day. Rev 7:9. The administration of the Lamb, in the midst of the throne, will be their shepherd, and will lead this great multitude, from all nations, to the springs of the water of life. Rev 7:17. We observe that this *same shepherding authority* of the rod of iron will be given to the mature sons of God who will be produced from the spiritual union of Christ and His church on the Day of Atonement. Rev 12:5. This multitude will be the firstfruits of *the new heavens and new earth*.

The operation of the rod of iron in the new heavens and new earth will not need to be used for judgement, because there will be no enemies in the age to come. Rebellion and sin will never again trouble the kingdom of God. The virtues of Christ, which are ministered through His Melchizedek priesthood, will eternally multiply the conquering grace, wisdom and power of God to all who are in His kingdom. Heb 7:16-17. 1Pe 3:13. The wisdom and power of the cross is the rod of iron, and it is the sceptre of His righteousness in His kingdom forever. Psalms 45:6.

The morning star

Jesus made two promises to the overcomers within the presbytery in Thyatira. As we have considered, the first promise was the shepherding authority of the rod of iron. The second promise was the evangelistic capacity of 'the morning star'. Rev 2:28. In terms of the physical universe, 'the morning star' is a term that is often applied to the planet Venus because it appears in the east just before the dawn of a new day. The morning star is the harbinger of the coming day.

From a scriptural perspective, the morning star is a symbol that refers to the authority and capacity which is given to a presbytery to shine as a light and to herald the coming of Christ and the Day of the Lord. The prophet Malachi declared, 'Behold, the Day of the Lord is coming, burning like a furnace ... but as for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.' Mal 4:1-2. 'The Sun of righteousness' is Jesus Christ. He is the full revelation of the righteousness of God. We recall that His face shines like the sun in all its strength. Rev 1:16.

John the Baptist was a messenger who possessed the mandate to be a morning star. The angel of the Lord said to Zacharias, concerning his son, 'He will go before Him [Christ] in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to *make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*' Luk 1:17. John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord by preparing the hearts of the people for His coming. Jesus described him as 'a burning and shining lamp'. Joh 5:35. John the Baptist was a 'lamp' who bore witness to Christ, who is the Light of the world. John was 'not *the Light*, but he came to testify about the Light. There was the true Light [Christ] which, coming into the world, enlightens every man'. Joh 1:8-9.

On multiple occasions during His earthly ministry, Jesus testified that He is the Light of the world. He said, 'I am the Light of the world; he who

follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.' Joh 8:12. Likewise, He said, 'While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world.' Joh 9:5. When Christ was lifted up on the cross, He was raised up to be the Light of the world before the eyes of all mankind. Jesus declared, 'If I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to Myself.' Joh 12:32. This prophetic statement was fulfilled when the soldier thrust the spear into His side, causing blood and water to flow from His heart. At this time, the spirit of grace and supplication was poured out upon all mankind to enable us to look upon Him whom we have pierced. Jesus was fully revealed to be the Light of the world as the firstborn from the death of our sin on the cross. Paul declared that it was 'by reason of His resurrection from the dead' that Christ was 'the first to proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles'. Act 26:23.

Following His physical resurrection, and shortly before His ascension into heaven, the disciples asked Jesus, 'Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?' Act 1:6. Jesus replied by saying, 'It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and *you shall be My witnesses* both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.' Act 1:7-8. Jesus was asking the disciples *to join the fellowship of His offering* so that they could receive and manifest His life in their mortal bodies, as living witnesses of His resurrection from the death of sin. The apostle Paul declared, 'For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.' 2Co 4:11.

The evangelistic ministry of the church

Jesus Christ has given the mandate to His lampstand churches, to be His living witness in the world. He explained to His disciples that no-one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but on a lampstand. When the light of a presbytery, which is likened to a lamp, is reflected and focused by the members of Christ within a lampstand church, every son of God can walk confidently in that light. Jesus said that the light of the lamp on a lampstand gives light 'to all who are in the house'. Mat 5:15. Further to this, this same light is reflected and focused by the members of Christ into the world. The apostle Paul explained that the ministry of the Spirit at the communion table of a lampstand church is an effective evangelistic ministry. Speaking of the communion service, he said, 'But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted

by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.' 1Co 14:24-25.

When we consider the promises that Jesus made to the presbyteries in Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum, we observe that the fulfilment of those promises will be primarily evident within the relational sphere of a lampstand church. For example, the evidence that a presbytery is receiving the fruit of the tree of life will be seen in their participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, and in their ability to invite a lampstand church to join them in this same fellowship. The evidence that a presbytery is receiving the crown of life will be seen in their ability to direct the power of God for salvation to a lampstand church, as they minister in the weakness of Christ. The evidence that a presbytery is receiving the hidden manna and the white stone will be seen in their ability to reveal the hidden wisdom of God, and to give insight to a lampstand church as each presbyter ministers according to the sanctification of their own name.

In contrast to this, when a presbytery receives *the morning star* from Christ, it will have a significant impact *beyond* the community of a lampstand church. In the same way that John the Baptist came as a shining light to herald His coming to the nation of Israel, Jesus promised to give the presbytery in Thyatira the mandate to herald His coming to the church.

In the first case, when this prophetic mandate is received by the presbyteries in Christ's right hand, it will have a major impact upon the nominal Christian community in the world. We recall that the primary mandate of John the Baptist was to call the religious community within the Jewish nation to repentance. His central message was 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'. Mat 3:2. He was calling them to turn so that they could *see* Christ. In a similar way, a presbytery with the morning star will have the authority to call all believers to turn, so that the veil of their self-righteousness can be removed, and so that they are made ready for the coming of Christ. 2Co 3:16.

As we have considered, the messengers of Christ have possessed the evangelistic mandate to be His witnesses since the Day of Pentecost. However, the specific mandate that belongs to *the morning star* is not given to the messengers of Christ until the period of restoration that precedes the time of the end. This is because the morning star is the authority to announce the coming Day of the Lord. The Lord declared

through the prophet Malachi, 'I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of *the great and terrible Day of the Lord.*' Mal 4:5. We know that John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah to announce the coming of Christ. Luk 1:17. However, Malachi was also prophesying that Christ will give the spirit and power of Elijah to the presbyteries in His right hand as a *specific prophetic mandate* in the fullness of times.

'The Day of the Lord' is an extensive scriptural theme. From the world's perspective, 'the great and terrible Day of the Lord' is also called 'a day of vengeance'. Isa 34:8. Isa 61:2. It is a day of wrath that comes as judgement upon the nations of the world. The prophet Joel declared, 'Alas for the day! For the Day of the Lord is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty.' Joe 1:15. Likewise, he proclaimed, 'The Lord utters His voice before His army; surely His camp is very great, for strong is he who carries out His word. The Day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome, *and who can endure it?*' Joe 2:11. The judgement of the Day of the Lord will commence with the opening of the sixth seal in the time of the end. When the sixth seal is opened, the wrath of the Lamb will be revealed against the ungodly nations of the world. Rev 6:16-17.

When Christ gives His presbyteries the morning star, they will receive the mandate to announce the coming judgement of the great and terrible Day of the Lord. However, they will also receive the mandate to herald the coming of the great Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement is the time when the glory of the Lord will be fully revealed in a great multitude of sons of God. Rev 7:13-17. This multitude will have come out of the great tribulation that will be experienced by the church during the second phase of the seventh world kingdom. This is the phase when Gog and Magog will be the predominant governing power over the nations of the world. The church will be miraculously delivered from this persecution when the Lord sovereignly destroys the armies of Gog and Magog at the opening of the sixth seal. Eze 39:1-7.

The prophet Isaiah declared, concerning the Day of Atonement, 'The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven days, *on the day the Lord binds up the fracture of His people* and heals the bruise He has inflicted.' Isa 30:26. On this day, there will be no fracture between Judah, Israel, and the church, for, together, they will be the kingdom of God among the nations. The church will go on to be perfected in unity, and presented to Christ to become His bride. Eph 5:25-27.

The morning star in the time of the end

The morning star will be given to the presbyteries in Christ's right hand before the time of the end. When this occurs, it will initiate a new phase in the evangelistic ministry of the church. When the first seal is opened in the time of the end, the full light and authority of the morning star will be expressed by the messengers of Christ. Speaking as a messenger of Christ, Isaiah prophetically declared, 'Listen to Me, O islands, and pay attention, you peoples from afar. The Lord called Me from the womb; from the body of My mother He named Me. He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of His [right] hand He has concealed Me; and He has also made Me *a select arrow*, He has hidden Me in His quiver.' Isa 49:1-2.

When the first seal is opened in the time of the end, the messengers of Christ will be likened to the 'arrows' in the bow that He holds in His right hand. Isaiah continued to proclaim on behalf of the Lord, 'It is *too small a thing* that You should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; *I will also make You a light of the nations* so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.' Isa 49:6.

The prophet Isaiah spoke of the time when the morning star will be given to the church when he said, 'Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the Lord will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes round about and see. They all gather together, they come to you. Your sons will come from afar, and your daughters will be carried in the arms. Then you will see and be radiant, and your heart will thrill and rejoice; because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, the wealth of the nations will come to you.' Isa 60:1-5. In the time of the end, the authority of the morning star will be expressed by the messengers of Christ, as arrows in His hand, to gather a great multitude from all the nations of the world for the fulfilment of the great Day of Atonement. Rev 7:9.

Chapter 10

The promises to Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea

In our previous chapters, we considered the promises that Jesus made to the presbyteries in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum and Thyatira. In this chapter, we will consider the promises to the presbyteries in Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Jesus said to the overcomers in Laodicea, 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.' Rev 3:21. The fulfilment of this final promise will enable the presbyteries in Christ's hand to be seated with Him in 'the thrones of the house of David'. Psa 122:5. When this occurs, there will be *a major transition* in the administration of Christ's throne from *priesthood* to *kingship*. The presbyters who have inherited the promises of Christ during the *priesthood phase* of His throne will be seated with Him for the *kingship phase* of His throne in the time of the end.

Walking with Christ in white

Jesus addressed the presbytery in Sardis in the same way that He addressed the presbytery in Ephesus. He admonished them as the One

who holds *all seven stars* in His right hand. Rev 3:1. This is significant, because it means that the letter to Sardis will be particularly relevant for *every presbytery*, in the same way that the letter to Ephesus is relevant for every presbytery. If the letter to Ephesus is a 'first admonition' to every presbytery concerning the need to walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh, then the letter to Sardis is a 'second admonition'. The essence of Christ's rebuke to the presbytery in Sardis was that they were not *watching*. Rev 3:2. In relation to their oversight of the church, they were not obeying the word, nor fulfilling the mandate that they had already received from Christ.

We recall that Jesus asked the presbytery in Ephesus to remember from where they had fallen. Rev 2:5. They had fallen from the right hand of Christ, as well as from heavenly places. The presbytery in Ephesus needed to repent, because they were clothed in the filthy garments of their own self-righteousness. The presbytery in Sardis had already received this admonition, because they had been clothed in the white robes that represent the righteousness of Christ. The white garments are the *working garments* of Christ as our great High Priest, as He ministers among His lampstand churches in heavenly places. The issue for the presbytery in Sardis was that many of them had allowed their white garments to become soiled. They had become garments spotted by the flesh. Rev 3:4. In other words, having begun walking in the Spirit, they had reverted to walking after the flesh. Gal 3:3.

Jesus did not need to compel the presbytery in Sardis to remember the heights from where they had fallen. He simply asked them to remember what they had *already received and heard* from Him. Rev 3:3. Christ had already given to this presbytery the authority to oversee their lampstand church. They needed to repent, because they had failed to exercise this mandate properly. It is possible that they had allowed 'savage wolves' to come among the flock or had allowed men to arise from within the church to draw away disciples after themselves. Act 20:29-30. We know that Jesus warned them that if they did not wake up and oversee the church properly, He would come to them in judgement like a thief in the night. Rev 3:3. He did not need to tell them what He would take away from them. It was the same warning that the presbytery in Ephesus had already received. If they did not repent, He would come to remove their lampstand. Rev 2:5.

A further phase of ministry

The Lord came to rebuke the presbytery in Sardis for their lack of oversight, but He was also coming to equip them for *a further phase of ministry*. He declared to them, 'I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.' Rev 3:2. Specifically, there was a further phase of ministry for some of the presbyters who belonged to this presbytery. Through their ministry, the grace of Christ would extend beyond their own lampstand. Jesus said, 'You have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will *walk with Me* in white, for they are worthy.' Rev 3:4. We know that Jesus Christ walks among all seven lampstand churches. When He said, 'They will *walk with Me*', He was referring to a sphere of ministry that extended to other lampstand churches. This promise to Sardis is significant for lampstand churches in our day, as presbyteries in the hand of Christ are progressively restored to become one, world-wide presbytery before the time of the end.

Jesus continued to say to the presbytery in Sardis, 'He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.' Rev 3:5. We recall that Jesus said to His disciples, 'Everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.' Mat 10:32.

However, Jesus added *a further element* to this promise when He addressed the presbytery in Sardis. He also promised to confess their names before *the angels*. This reference to the angels should not be limited to the angelic host of heaven. Jesus was also referring to the *other stars* in His right hand, which were part of the apostolic administration that had been given to Him by the Father. In practical terms, an apostolic administration within a presbytery should have a ministry focus that extends beyond their own lampstand. Christ is *walking* among all His lampstand churches, and He invites the presbyteries in His right hand to *walk with Him* as part of one integrated administration.

The open door

Jesus began by explaining to the presbytery in Philadelphia that He had set before them an open door. Rev 3:7. When we consider the meaning of this door, we are reminded of the words of the apostle Paul to the Colossians. He asked the church to pray 'that God will open up to us *a door for the word*, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned'. Col 4:3. In a similar way, he testified

about his ministry in Ephesus by saying, 'A *wide door for effective service* has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.' 1Co 16:9. 'A wide door for effective service' had also been opened for the presbytery in Philadelphia but, unlike the apostle Paul, they were no longer afflicted by many adversaries. They had overcome the spirit of antichrist in their midst, and no longer suffered opposition from the synagogue of Satan. Jesus had said that, because of this, He would cause the synagogue of Satan to bow down at their feet. Rev 3:9.

As the presbyteries in Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum responded to the admonition of Christ, the grace and blessing that belonged to the fulfilment of Christ's promises became evident within the life and fellowship of their churches. Furthermore, as the presbyteries in Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia responded to the admonition of Christ, the blessing of Christ's promises became evident within their churches; *and also overflowed* as an authority and grace for evangelism into the world. This was a further development in the administration of Christ, which has significant implications for lampstand churches in our day. Jesus Christ is restoring presbyteries that are in His right hand, and there is *a progressive attainment* of authority and grace for each presbytery as they inherit Christ's promises. Php 3:16.

Significantly, the evangelistic ministry of the church will become increasingly effective in the world when presbyteries receive the authority of *the morning star* and *walk with Christ* as part of one integrated administration. Rev 2:28. Rev 3:4. The evangelism of lampstand churches will reach a climax when Christ sets before the church *an open door* for the word and for effective service. Rev 3:8. This will be a door which no man can shut. We know that the gospel of sonship must be proclaimed to every nation before the time of the end. Jesus declared to His disciples that the gospel of the kingdom, which is the gospel of sonship, 'shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, *and then the end will come*'. Mat 24:14.

We observe the outcome of this evangelistic ministry in Chapters four and five of the book of Revelation. The apostle John recorded that he saw 'myriads of myriads' and 'thousands of thousands' of believers who had been purchased from 'every tribe and tongue and people and nation' to be a kingdom of priests to God. Rev 5:9-11. We know that a myriad is ten thousand. The New King James version translates 'myriads of myriads' to be 'ten thousand times ten thousand'. That would be one hundred million. However, if the outcome of the equation is 'plural', as

the language suggests, it would be at least two hundred million people, and could easily be a far greater number. For example, twenty thousand times twenty thousand is four hundred million. Regardless of the exact number of believers, the Scriptures are clear that there will be a sizeable *remnant church* gathered around the throne of the Son for the beginning of the time of the end. In the time of the end, we know that the kingdom of God will continue to grow, and will become a great multitude that no man can number, as the church approaches the fulfilment of the Day of Atonement. Rev 7:9.

Further to this, Jesus had set before the Philadelphian presbytery *the same door* that the apostle John saw standing open in heaven. Rev 4:1. This signifies that Jesus was establishing among the Philadelphian presbytery the firstfruits of the administration that John saw in the heavenly places *for the time of the end*. We recall that He addressed the presbytery in Philadelphia as the One 'who has the key of David'. Rev 3:7. The key of David represents the authority that God gave to King David to establish the administration of his throne with twenty-four administrative courses, through which he reigned over the whole kingdom of Israel. As the Son of David, Christ has the authority to establish the administration of the throne of David in the kingdom of God, for the time of end. Jesus was inviting the presbytery in Philadelphia to join Him in establishing this administration.

The seal of the living God

Jesus said to the Philadelphian presbytery, 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.' Rev 3:12. This threefold name is the seal of the living God. Rev 7:2. The presbyteries of lampstand churches receive the seal of God as the firstfruits of the great multitude who will be sealed and protected on the Day of Atonement. Earlier in this same letter, Jesus wrote, 'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth'. Rev 3:10. This promise of protection will be fulfilled on the Day of Atonement, when Christ spreads His tabernacle over the church so that it is nourished and protected from the judgement that is pronounced on the world by the seven angelic messengers. Rev 7:15-17.

More specifically, when Jesus promised to write the name of the Father and His new name upon the overcomers within the presbytery in Philadelphia, He was making this promise available to the presbyteries of lampstand churches in the fullness of times. He was promising to give to presbyteries the same grace that the 144 000 will possess to minister in the time of the end. When the sixth seal is opened, the Lord will gather together 'His elect' from the four winds of heaven. Rev 7:1-3. The 144 000 are messengers of Christ who will be gathered together from the four winds of heaven, as the 'firstfruits' of the great multitude of the Lord's elect, which no man can number. At this time, the 144 000 will be *sealed* for their work of judging the eighth world kingdom. Once the eighth world kingdom has emerged, these messengers will be revealed standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion, ready to fulfil their mandate. They will have the name of the Lamb and the name of the Father written on their foreheads. Rev 14:1-5.

The message of the 144 000 will be spoken from heaven, and it will be like the sound of many waters. It will be the voice of many messengers. Rev 14:2. It will also be like the sound of loud thunder. The word of the 144 000 will carry the authority of Christ's kingship to judge the eighth world kingdom. Further to this, their voice will be like the sound of harpists, and they will sing a 'new song' before the throne, and before the apostolic administration of Christ and the twenty-four courses of the presbytery. No-one else will be able to learn the song apart from the 144 000. Rev 14:2-3. It will be a unique song that only they will know, because it will express their unique mandate to judge the eighth world kingdom. In the same way that the judgement of the seventh world kingdom will be initiated by the song of the twenty-four courses of the presbytery at the beginning of the time of the end, the judgement of the eighth world kingdom will be initiated by the song of the 144 000.

A final invitation

Jesus addressed the presbytery in Laodicea as 'the Amen, the faithful and true Witness and the Beginning of the creation of God'. Rev 3:14. He rebuked the presbytery in Laodicea because they were neither hot nor cold. He said that, because they were lukewarm, He would spit them out of His mouth. Rev 3:16. The presbytery in Laodicea believed that they were rich, wealthy, and in need of nothing. In reality, these presbyters were wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. Rev 3:17. As we have already considered, the Laodicean presbytery was no longer submitted to the lordship of Christ. They had regressed to being a congregational

model of church governance to such a degree that Christ no longer had any access to their church. He addressed them as One who was on the outside of their church, and knocking on the door of the heart of each individual presbyter.

The judgement of God was upon the presbytery in Laodicea because they were not eating and drinking the communion in a worthy manner. 1Co 11:27-29. They were not rightly judging themselves, nor their connection to the body of Christ. Jesus encouraged them, 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent.' Rev 3:19. Jesus was seeking a *heart to heart* fellowship with each presbyter. He said, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.' Rev 3:20. For those who responded to His admonition, and repented, the chastening would become effective in their lives to recover them to the pathway of their sanctification. Those who refused to repent would be assigned a portion with the hypocrites, to be condemned along with the world. Mat 24:51.

It is significant that Jesus promised to 'dine' with each individual presbyter in Laodicea. Rev 3:20. We note that this is *the same promise* that He made to the overcomers within the presbytery in Ephesus. In His love and mercy, Christ was giving these leaders *a final invitation* to join the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, in the same way that He promised to give the Ephesian presbytery the fruit of the tree of life in the paradise of God. Rev 2:7. The individual presbyters in the Laodicean presbytery, who received this personal invitation from Christ to walk with Him from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, would then be able to inherit all the promises that He made to the other presbyteries.

The throne of God and of the Lamb

Jesus concluded His promises to the seven churches by saying to the presbytery in Laodicea, 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.' Rev 3:21. When Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives, He was raised far above all principalities and powers, to be seated at the right hand of the Father. We recall that King David prophesied, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for your feet".' Psa 110:1. Mar 12:36. Act 2:34. This is the most quoted prophetic Scripture in the New Testament.

Nevertheless, in his letter to the Hebrews, Paul explained that *we do not yet see* all things in subjection under His feet. Heb 2:8. Christ has not yet been revealed as the Ruler of the kings of the earth. We presently see Him as our great High Priest, who has been crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering that He experienced on His journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. Heb 2:9. However, once the presbyteries that are in His right hand have been fully restored, through a participation in His sufferings, we will *also see* Christ seated at the right hand of God. The time will come for Christ to establish His kingdom on the earth. When this happens, the *second component* of King David's prophecy will be fulfilled, 'The Lord will stretch forth Your strong sceptre from Zion, saying "Rule in the midst of Your enemies".' Psa 110:2.

Following the vision of Jesus Christ walking in the middle of the seven lampstands with seven stars in His right hand, the apostle John saw an open door in heaven. He heard the voice of Christ, through His angel, saying to him, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.' Rev 4:1. When the Lord said, 'after these things', He was referring to the outcome of the restoration of the presbyteries that are in His right hand. Having heard this voice, John was immediately in the Spirit. He beheld a throne standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. In the book of Revelation, the throne is called 'the throne of God and of the Lamb'. Rev 22:1,3. The throne of God is the throne of the Ancient of Days. Dan 7:9,13,22. In the first case, it is the throne of the Father.

Jesus Christ has taken His seat with the Father in His throne, and He reveals the Father and the Holy Spirit from this throne. The four living creatures, which represent the apostolic administration of Christ, continually proclaim, 'Holy, Holy, Holy', because the throne of God is the revelation of the authority and power of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Rev 4:8. The authority and power of this throne will be fully revealed by Jesus Christ, and by His administration of kingship and priesthood, when He stands as the Lamb in the midst of the throne. When the Lamb stands in the midst of the throne, the throne of the Ancient of Days will also become the *throne of the Lamb*. As we have already noted, it is called 'the throne of God *and of the Lamb*'. Rev 22:1,3.

Jesus Christ initiated the administration of seven stars in His right hand when He ascended on high, and reached out His hand from His throne to give gifts to men. Eph 4:8. The prophet Isaiah tells us that Christ will reach out His hand *a second time* to gather the remnant of His people from all the nations of the earth. Isa 11:11. When Christ takes

this initiative, as the Lamb in the midst of the throne, it will activate a *significant transition* in His administration. The major orientation of the administration that proceeds from His throne will shift from priesthood to kingship. The most holy place of the true temple in heaven will become a court that sits for judgement. Dan 7:26.

The kingdom phase of the throne will begin when the twenty-four thrones are set in heaven. The psalmist proclaimed, 'The thrones were set for judgement, the thrones of the house of David.' Psa 122:5. Speaking of this time, Daniel prophesied, 'Judgement was passed in favour of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom.' Dan 7:22. In the time of the end, the kingdom of God will become a great mountain that fills the whole earth. Dan 2:35. In this phase of the kingdom, judgement will also be pronounced upon the seventh and eighth world kingdoms. This will include the judgement of the little horn, Gog and Magog, Satan, and the final antichrist kingdom. Dan 7:26.

The throne of David

This raises an important question. What will the administration of the throne of God and of the Lamb 'look like' in the time of the end? We know that the apostle John saw this administration in the heavenly places. Having described the One sitting on the throne, John continued, 'Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads'. Rev 4:4. We note that the twenty-four thrones were *the first element* that John identified in the administration of the throne of God and of the Lamb. With this in view, it is imperative that we 'rightly divide the word of truth' in understanding the meaning of these twenty-four thrones. 2Ti 2:15. One of the first interpretative keys is to recognise that these thrones are called 'the thrones of the house of David'. Psa 122:5.

The administration that John saw in the heavenly places for the time of the end is the fulfilment of the sure mercies of David. Isa 55:3. The sure mercies of David include the *many prophetic promises* that God made concerning the throne, house and kingdom of David. The prophet Isaiah declared, concerning Christ, 'A child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders ... there will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on *the throne of David* and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of

hosts will accomplish this.' Isa 9:6-7. Applying this prophecy to Christ, the angel Gabriel declared to Mary, 'You will conceive in your womb and bear a son ... He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him *the throne of His father David*; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.' Luk 1:31-33.

The Lord promised David that his Son would sit upon his throne forever. The prophet Nathan said to David, 'It shall be, when your days are fulfilled, when you must go to be with your fathers, that I will set up your seed after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever.' 1Ch 17:11-12. Following the death of David, Solomon sat upon his father's throne and reigned over the whole nation of Israel for a period of forty years. He was the one who built and inaugurated the temple. However, we know that the promise to David was not fulfilled in Solomon. He did not reign forever, and the kingdom of Israel was divided in the days of his son. In the same way that Isaac was a type of Christ with respect to the promise made to Abraham, Solomon was a type of Christ with respect to the promise made to David.

Jesus Christ is the Seed of Abraham and the Seed of David. We know that Nathan's prophecy concerning the Seed of David refers to the Son of God, because it continues, 'I will be his Father and he shall be My son'. 1Ch 17:13. In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul quoted this passage and applied it directly to Christ, who is the only begotten Son of the Father. Heb 1:5. The prophet Nathan continued to speak on behalf of the Father by saying, 'I will not take *My mercy* away from him ... and I will establish him in My house and in My kingdom forever; and his throne shall be established forever.' 1Ch 17:14. God made this promise to David as an everlasting covenant. This everlasting covenant is called 'the sure mercies of David'. Isa 55:3.

The psalmist Ethan rejoiced over this covenant, saying, 'I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever.' He declared, 'Mercy shall be built up forever; Your faithfulness You shall establish *in the very heavens*.' Psa 89:1-2. He rejoiced in this way because the Lord said, 'I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: "Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations".' Psa 89:3-4. And, further to this, 'I will make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. My mercy I will keep for him forever, and My covenant shall stand firm with him. His seed also I will make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven ... My covenant I will not break, nor alter the

word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me.' Psa 89:27-29,34-36.

We read in another psalm, 'The Lord has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it: "I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body".' Psa 132:11. Jesus Christ was born as a descendant of David, according to the flesh, and then declared to be the Son of God with power when He was resurrected from the dead. Rom 1:3-4. He was given the sure mercies of David when He ascended, as the Son of Man, and was enthroned on high at the right hand of God. He took His seat as the Son of Man in the throne of God, and elevated the throne of David to the heavenly places. In this way, the prophecy of Jeremiah has been fulfilled, 'David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel'. Jer 33:17.

The twenty-four thrones

This brings us to a significant point. The pattern of administration that David established over the whole kingdom of Israel was a shadow of the administration that Christ will establish from His throne in the time of the end. This administration will be suitable to gather Jew and Gentile into the kingdom of God. Significantly, David established the administration of his throne over the nation of Israel, according to the order of twenty-four. For example, he appointed twenty-four courses of priests. 1Ch 24. Similarly, he appointed twenty-four courses of singers and musicians. 1Ch 25. We note also that there were 24 000 officers who served the king in all the affairs of the nation each month. 1Ch 27. And, further to this, David appointed 24 000 Levites to oversee the work of the house of the Lord. 1Ch 23:4.

The Lord declared, through the prophet Amos, that He will rebuild the tabernacle of David. Amo 9:11. In the time of the end, He will re-establish the administration of David over the whole house of spiritual Israel. James quoted from this passage at the Jerusalem Council. Act 15:16-17. Jeremiah also prophesied of this time in history, when he said, 'Behold days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfil the good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of David.' Jer 33:14. Specifically, the Lord promised to take rulers from the descendants of David to oversee the descendants of Abraham. Jer 33:25-26. It is these ruling overseers and shepherds who will be seated upon the thrones of the house of David for the time of the end.

In fulfilment of all these prophecies concerning the sure mercies of David, John saw elders seated upon twenty-four thrones, around the throne of God and of the Lamb. Rev 4:4. It has often been assumed that these elders refer to twenty-four individuals. Some have proposed that these elders are the twelve patriarchs of Israel, along with the twelve apostles of the Lamb. In more recent times, it has been proposed that the elders are the twelve apostles of the Lamb and twelve last-day apostles. However, there is no need to combine twelve apostles from the beginning of the church age with twelve apostles from the end of the church age to arrive at the number twenty-four. All of the elements of the administration of the throne will be present among those who are *alive on the earth*, and who abide in the heavenly places, just before the commencement of the time of the end.

Furthermore, there is no reason to limit the administration of the twenty-four thrones to twenty-four *individual* elders. As we considered in Chapter 4, the four living creatures do not represent four individual ascension gift ministers. The four living creatures represent apostles, prophets, teachers and evangelists, who comprise an apostolic administration that belongs to the whole body of Christ. In a similar way, there are twenty-four *courses of elders* who will sit upon the twenty-four thrones. In the time of the end, there will be one, world-wide presbytery, as *one lamp*, that will have twenty-four courses of administration. This is the fulfilment of the prophecy, 'I will cause the horn of David to spring forth; I have prepared *a lamp* for Mine anointed'. Psa 132:17.

This presbytery, with twenty-four courses, will be the 'one shepherd' for the whole body of Christ. At that time, the prophecies of Ezekiel will also be fulfilled. The Lord declared, through Ezekiel, 'I will set over them *one shepherd*, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd ... My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have *one shepherd*; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them.' Eze 34:23. Eze 37:24. Of course, Jesus Christ is the great Shepherd in the lineage of King David. However, in the time of the end, He will shepherd the whole kingdom of God through His presbytery with twenty-four courses. We read in the book of Jeremiah, 'Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding'. Jer 3:15.

Conclusion

The apostle John identified that the twenty-four courses of elders will possess thrones, crowns and white robes. Rev 4:4. Rev 5:8. As we have

already discussed, these elders have, evidently, *inherited the promises* that Jesus made to the presbyteries that are in His right hand, during the priesthood phase of His throne. Jesus promised the overcomers within the presbytery in Sardis that they would be clothed in ‘white garments’. Rev 3:5. He promised to give ‘the crown of life’ to the overcomers within the presbytery in Smyrna. Rev 2:10. Jesus warned the presbytery in Philadelphia to hold fast what they had attained so that they would not lose *this same crown*. Rev 3:11. And, finally, He promised the overcomers within the presbytery in Laodicea that they would be seated with Him in His throne. Rev 3:21. He was referring to the administration of the throne of David.

When the Lamb stands in the midst of the throne, and opens the sealed book which contains the prophetic plan of God for the time of the end, the twenty-four courses of elders will fall down before Him in worship. John identified that they will possess harps and golden bowls full of incense. The harps are instruments of worship, and the golden bowls of incense are the prayers of the saints. Rev 5:8. At this time, the world-wide presbytery will lead the whole body of Christ, as a kingdom of priests, in prayer and worship to God and to the Lamb. All twenty-four courses of the presbytery will proclaim the authority and power of the Lamb by offering the incense of prayer and worship. Rev 4:10-11.

John heard the worship of the apostolic administration of Christ and the world-wide presbytery as a *new song*. He testified, ‘And they sang a new song, saying: “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; *and they will reign upon the earth*”.’ Rev 5:9-10. Concerning this time, we read in the book of Daniel, ‘The saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever’. Dan 7:18. As the apostolic administration of Christ and the presbytery sing in the Spirit, they will be joined by at least two hundred million worshippers before the throne. Rev 5:11. This great kingdom of priests will ascribe power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and blessing to the Lamb. Rev 5:12.

As this worship ascends before the throne of God and of the Lamb, the command that initiates the time of the end will be given from heaven. The Lamb will proceed to open the seven seals, and the purpose of God will be fully accomplished on the earth. The dominion of the little horn will be removed, and judgement will be passed on the seventh and eighth world kingdoms. However, more significantly, the kingdom of God will

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grow into a great mountain which fills the whole earth. Dan 2:35. This is the mountain of the house of the Lord. The prophet Isaiah declared, 'In the last days the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream into it.' Isa 2:2. The nations will stream into it for the fulfilment of the great Day of Atonement.