

# *The Overcoming Church*

Through sanctification by the Spirit

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WITH PETER HAY AND DAVID BAKER

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# Preface

## Watch and pray

In this season, the Lord is asking us to watch and pray with Him. Mat 26:41. Luk 21:36. Mar 13:33. The capacity to *watch* is the outcome of hearing the word of present truth and receiving *illumination* from the Holy Spirit in relation to what He is saying to us. We are reminded that Jesus said to all seven lampstand churches, 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' Rev 2:7. After the Holy Spirit has illuminated our spirit, He then helps our weakness by strengthening us with the capacity of Eternal Spirit so that we can *pray with Christ*. Rom 8:26. We pray with Christ when we join, by the Holy Spirit, the fellowship of Christ's intercession and travail!

Speaking about how we join the fellowship of His prayer, Jesus said to the disciples, 'When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.' Mat 6:6. We know that the secret place is not simply a private place like a room or a closet, because Jesus said that the Father dwells *in* the secret place. That is, it is the house of God. In this season, we have been rejoicing as we consider the *secret place of the ladder* that connects heaven and earth. When Jacob saw this ladder in his prophetic dream, he proclaimed, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!' Gen 28:17.

## THE OVERCOMING CHURCH

The ladder that connects heaven and earth is the corporate body of the Son of Man. In this regard, there is only *one secret place*. However, we know that Jesus also instructed us to go into our own *inner room* which is inside the secret place. This is an important point. Jesus said to the disciples, 'In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.' Joh 14:2. On His offering journey, Jesus Christ prepared a unique place for every son of God in the fellowship of His body, which is the Father's house. He did this in obedience to the Father's will. After we have been born as a son of God, the Father places us in the body of Christ where He has chosen. 1Co 12:18. This is our inner room in the secret place.

Notably, Jesus said that we must go into our inner room and then we need to *shut the door*. Jesus was highlighting that it is *our responsibility* to guard the holy ground of the secret place. In the first case, we do this by ensuring that we are not praying in a carnal mode by imposing our own projections and anxieties upon the Lord. That is, are we asking the Lord to support a religious projection that we have created for ourselves? Mat 6:5. Are we continually asking the Lord to meet our perceived needs, because we are motivated by anxiety? Mat 6:8. However, more than this, we must *shut the door* by guarding and maintaining the sanctification of our own life and of our family. We know that Satan presently has access to the heavenly places because of the uncleanness in our own houses. Rev 12:10.

Having established the context for our prayer in the secret place, and the need for us to shut the door, Jesus then continued by describing the culture and fellowship of the prayer that we have been called to join as we watch and pray with Him. Jesus said, 'In this manner, therefore, pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen".' Mat 6:9-13.

We know that Jesus was not asking the disciples to recite this prayer by rote or to use it as a religious mantra. He specifically warned the disciples against the 'vain repetitions' that are used by unbelieving heathen. Rather, Jesus was describing how a son of God prays when they are enabled by the Holy Spirit. Rom 8:26. The Holy Spirit is the source and capacity of our prayer. He is the One who initiates and focuses all of the dimensions of our prayer as a son of God.

## Our Father

The first dimension of prayer for a son of God is that *the Holy Spirit enables us to call God 'our Father'*. Mat 6:9. This is possible only by the Holy Spirit. When the gospel of God is proclaimed to us by the messengers of Christ, the Holy Spirit illuminates our spirit so that we can see the hope of our calling as a son of God. 1Co 1:26. Without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to comprehend the gospel of God with our mind. From a natural perspective, it is inconceivable that the Creator of the heavens and earth wants to be our Father! 1Co 2:9.

Having been illuminated to see our calling, we are still not able to call God 'our Father' until we receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of adoption. The apostle Paul declared, 'For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry, "Abba, Father".' Rom 8:15. It is important to recognise that the first prayer of a son of God is not a sinner's prayer. It is the cry, 'Abba, Father', which is enabled by the Holy Spirit.

## Who is in heaven

The second dimension of prayer is that *the Holy Spirit enables us to seek those things which are above*, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Col 3:1. This means that we are not preoccupied with the cares of the world. Like Abraham, we recognise that we are only pilgrims on this earth. Abraham 'dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God'. Heb 11:9-10.

As a son of God, our citizenship is in heaven. Php 3:20. We have come to Mount Zion and to the heavenly Jerusalem. Heb 12:22. When our mind is set upon the things of the Spirit, the Jerusalem from above is our chief joy. Like the psalmist, we worship the Father by proclaiming, 'Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. 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 48:1-2.

We 'fall from the heights' of Mount Zion and of the heavenly Jerusalem when we set our mind on the things of the flesh. For example, the presbytery in Ephesus had fallen from the right hand of Christ because they had chosen to focus upon the perceived needs of their own local congregations, rather than continuing to walk with Christ among His lampstand churches. Rev 2:5. When the word of Christ is proclaimed

to us, it is the conviction of the Holy Spirit that compels and enables us to remember the heights from where we have fallen.

### Hallowed be Your name

The third dimension of prayer for a son of God is to *hallow the name of the Father*. Mat 6:9. We hallow His name when we fear and respect His sanctification. The fellowship of Yahweh *Elohim* is 'holy, holy, holy'. Isa 6:3. Rev 4:8. When we pray to the Father, we are asking Him to show us *His way* so that we *know Him*. Moses prayed to the Lord, 'Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight.' Exo 33:13. The Lord God is holy, and His way is sanctified.

We worship the Father and magnify the holiness of His name *through our obedience*. When the Lord asked Moses to speak to the rock as an expression of prayer, so that the water would flow for the nation of Israel, Moses provoked the anger of the Lord by His disobedience. Motivated by frustration, Moses reacted by hitting the rock. The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.' Num 20:12.

We hallow the name of the Father by *our willingness to be separate from the spirit of the world* and its uncleanness. The apostle Paul proclaimed the word of the Father to the Corinthians, ' "Come out from among them and be separate", says the Lord. "Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. *I will be a Father to you*, and you shall be My sons and daughters", says the Lord Almighty.' 2Co 6:17-18. In contrast to this, we profane the name of the Father and reject the expression of His fatherhood toward us if we are unwilling to be sanctified.

The apostle Paul then continued, 'Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God'. 2Co 7:1. In a similar way, the apostle Peter declared, 'As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy". And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear.' 1Pe 1:15-17.



## Your kingdom come

The fourth dimension of prayer for a son of God is to pray, '*Your kingdom come.*' Mat 6:10. When we pray in this way by the Spirit, we are asking for the Father to take His seat for the purpose of establishing His kingdom on the earth. Dan 7:9. When the Father takes His seat on the top of Mount Zion, Jesus Christ will move His entire administration to be 'in and around' the Father's throne. Rev 4. The authority of the Father's throne will extend to the earth through the presbytery who will be seated with Christ on the twenty-four thrones that belong to the throne of David. Rev 3:21. Rev 4:4.

When the Father takes His seat, the authority of His throne will be established on the earth and above all nations. Isa 2:2-4. The mountain of the Lord's house will be raised above all world kingdoms. Speaking about the time when the Father will be enthroned on the earth, the psalmist declared, 'God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with understanding. God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne.' Psa 47:5-8.

As we eagerly look for the coming of the kingdom of God from heaven to earth, we also pray to the Father, 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' Mat 6:10. Jesus Christ has already accomplished the Father's will on His offering journey from Gethsemane to the cross, and then taken His seat at the right hand of God *in heaven*. Heb 8:1. In the time of the end, the will of the Father will also be revealed and accomplished *on earth* as the Lamb opens the scroll with its seven seals. Rev 5:9. The scroll contains the fullness of the Father's will in relation to both salvation and judgement.

## Our daily bread

The fifth dimension of prayer for a son of God is, 'Give us this day our daily bread'. Mat 6:11. In daily fellowship with the Father, by the Spirit, we are *asking Him to feed us with the bread from heaven*, which gives us the strength to believe His word and to do His will. We know that Jesus Christ, who has come down from heaven, is the full embodiment of the bread of God. Joh 6:32-33. He is the Word of Yahweh, who came from heaven to feed Abram by saying to him, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.' Gen 15:1. This word gave Abram the strength to believe and to enter the fellowship of Christ's righteous work for him.

The manna that fell in the wilderness as a daily provision for the nation of Israel on their journey from Egypt to the promised land was 'a type' of the true bread from heaven that sustains sons of God on their pilgrimage from the corruption of the world to the heights of Mount Zion. In this regard, it is important that we heed the warning in the book of Jude concerning those who despise this daily provision and draw back in *unbelief*. Jude wrote, 'I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe'. Jud 1:5.

In our present time, it is the work of presbyteries in the right hand of Christ to proclaim the word of God for the purpose of giving all those who belong to the household of God 'their portion of food in due season'. Luk 12:42. In the time of the end, the bread of God will be fed to the entire world by the apostolic administration of Christ through the worldwide presbytery who will be gathered around the Father's throne. Rev 4:4. This ministry of the word of God, as the bread of life to the world, will be the expression of the table of shewbread that belongs to the true temple on Mount Zion.

### **Forgive us our debts**

The sixth dimension of prayer for a son of God is, 'forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors'. Mat 6:12. When we pray in this way, by the Spirit, we are *asking the Lord to deliver us from the other law* and its effect upon God and others. We recognise that this deliverance from the other law is found only as we embrace our daily participation in the circumcision of Christ, which is the seven wounding events that Christ endured on His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. Col 2:11.

The apostle Paul declared concerning the offering of Christ, 'The death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Rom 6:10-11. On His offering journey, Christ learned our obedience and fulfilled the works of our sonship. Heb 5:8-9. Isa 26:12. When we walk by the Spirit on the journey that He has pioneered for us, we are receiving the power of His resurrection life to live each day as a son of God.

As we walk by the Spirit in the fellowship of Christ's offering, we are delivered from our propensity to use the Law to judge others, and we receive the grace that is necessary to forgive others. The capacity to forgive does not originate in us; nor is it a self-righteous expression.

Rather, as we reckon ourselves to be crucified with Christ, we receive the same grace to forgive which He demonstrated when He was nailed to the cross and prayed, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.' Luk 23:34.

### **Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one**

The seventh dimension of prayer for a son of God is, 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one'. When we pray in this way, by the Spirit, we are *asking the Father to sanctify us by His word*, because His word is truth. Joh 17:17. It is the truth of the word of the Father concerning our sanctification that delivers us from the lie of Satan that we can be the source of our own name and works. Joh 8:44. The foremost temptation for every person is the desire to create, promote, and then defend the projection that we have created for ourselves. Jas 1:14.

Immediately after His baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan for forty days and forty nights. Luk 4:1-2. During that extended season of prayer and fasting, Jesus overcame the *three dimensions of temptation* by Satan, through His obedience to the Father. Jesus overcame the temptation to become the source of His own provision; the temptation to trade with Satan for His own gain; and the temptation to test God by misappropriating the written word of God. Luk 4:3-13. Luke concluded his account by saying, 'When the Devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.' Luk 4:13.

The 'opportune time' presented itself when Jesus emptied Himself through prayer in the garden of Gethsemane to be fully identified with our death, including all of our weakness and infirmity. On His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, He was 'in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin'. Heb 4:15. By learning our obedience in every circumstance, He pioneered 'the way of escape' for us through every season of temptation in our life. In this regard, the apostle Paul rejoiced, 'God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.' 1Co 10:13. 'The way of escape' is the *obedience* that Christ has already learned for us as a son of God.

### **For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever**

Jesus finished describing the culture and fellowship of our prayer as a son of God by declaring to the Father, 'For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen'. Mat 6:13. This is the same

expression of prayer and worship that will continue to ascend before the throne of the Father in the time of the end. Rev 4:9-11. After the Father has taken His seat, the apostolic administration of Christ and the presbytery around the throne of the Father will lead *the prayer and worship* of the Father in the secret place of His tabernacle. The apostle John saw the twenty-four elders with harps and 'golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints'. Rev 5:8.

It is significant that the apostle John witnessed this expression of worship, intercession, and travail *before* he saw Christ open the first seal to send the white horse and its rider into the world. The rider of the white horse is 'the 144 000'. When the 144 000 proclaim the gospel of the kingdom as a testimony in all nations, their evangelistic ministry will be *the fruit* of the intercession and travail of the presbytery and the church in the secret place of the Father's tabernacle. We recall that Jesus taught the disciples to 'pray to your Father who is in the secret place, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly'. Mat 6:6.

144 000 is the symbolic number that represents the individuals and families who comprise the firstfruits of the true Israel of God. Rev 7:3-8. Rev 14:1-5. The 144 000 will manifest the resurrection life of God in their mortality. They will reveal and glorify the Father as they proclaim the gospel of the kingdom as a testimony in all nations. The gospel of the kingdom is the gospel that belongs to the Father as 'the God of all the families'. Jer 31:1. In the parable of the wheat and tares, Jesus described the ministry of the 144 000 in the time of the end by saying, 'Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!' Mat 13:43.

The kingdom of the Father is the true eighth world kingdom. When the Father takes His seat, His kingdom will be established over all the nations as an everlasting kingdom that has no end. Dan 2:44. The fruit of the evangelistic ministry of the 144 000 will be a great multitude from every tribe, nation, people, and tongue. Rev 7:9-17. This multitude will be a *great manifestation of sons of God!* In the same manner as the 144 000, every son of God who belongs to the great multitude will reveal the glory of the Father while they are still in their mortal body. When Jesus Christ physically returns on the day of resurrection, every son of God, including those who have already died in Christ, will receive the inheritance of a spiritual body. 1Co 15:44,50-54. The spiritual body is suitable for the everlasting kingdom of the Father in the new heavens and new earth. Mat 25:34.

# Chapter I

## The mercy and judgement of God

### Two dimensions of judgement

Jesus identified *two dimensions of judgement* in relation to His ministry. In relation to the first dimension of judgement, Jesus said, 'For *judgement* I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.' Joh 9:39. In this case, Jesus was saying that He had come into the world to provoke every person to make a judgement, or a decision. The proclamation of the word of Christ is accompanied by the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Joh 16:8. It compels every person to make a choice in response to His word.

When the word of Christ is received, it brings illumination to a person who recognises and accepts their spiritual blindness. Equally, when the word of Christ is rejected, it invokes the judgement of blindness upon a person who *presumes* to already see, because they depend on their own religious perspective. In this way, the hearing of the word results in either the blessing of illumination or the judgement of blindness. This is the polarising impact of the word upon all who hear it.

Jesus described the second dimension of judgement by saying, 'If anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him - the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For 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. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.' Joh 12:47-50.

In the last day, a person will be judged by the word of Christ that they heard and did not obey. Notably, the word of Christ is not His own word - it is *the word of the Father*. The word of the Father is a *commandment*. When a person is disobedient to the word of Christ, they have rejected the word of their own sonship and have thereby spurned God's fatherhood. In the same way that obedience to the commandment of the Father is eternal life, disobedience to the word of the Father is eternal damnation.

### The parable of the sower – examples of disobedience

A person's disobedience to the word of God may be the result of ignorance, offence or rebellion. In the parable of the sower, Jesus addressed each of these issues. The focus in this parable is the condition of our heart, which is likened to the ground, or the dirt, that needs to be regenerated. The *good ground* describes the heart of a person who has become *obedient from the heart* to the word of their sonship. Rom 6:17. A person becomes obedient from the heart by embracing their participation in the seven wounding events of Christ.

The *wayside ground* describes the heart of a person who is disobedient to the word because of ignorance. Jesus said concerning the wayside ground, 'When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.' Mat 13:19. Having heard the word of the kingdom, which is the word of their sonship, a person is accountable for their ignorance because the hardness of their heart is the result of resisting the conviction of the Holy Spirit and, instead, choosing to believe another gospel.

The *stony ground* describes the heart of a person who is disobedient to the word because of offence. Jesus said concerning the stony ground, 'For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word,

immediately he stumbles.’ Mat 13:21. Such a person will stumble because of their unwillingness to participate in the seven wounding events of Christ. When confronted with suffering, they view themselves as being the victim of their circumstances. Furthermore, having never met Christ eye to eye, as Peter met Him in the court of Caiaphas, they continue to believe in the veracity of their own self-righteous projection, and are offended when this projection is not affirmed by others.

The *thorny ground* describes the heart of a person who is disobedient because of rebellion. They have accountably chosen to prioritise other things. Jesus said concerning the thorny ground, ‘Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.’ Mat 13:22. ‘The cares of this world’ include all of the anxiety and pressure that wars against our obedience because of worldly cultures in our marriage and family. In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul described a fallen marriage culture by saying, ‘He who is married cares for the things of the world – how he may please his wife.’ 1Co 7:33.

The thorns and thistles also describe children who have grown up in a Christian household and have then rebelled against the Father by rejecting their predestination as a son of God and their place in the fellowship of the body of Christ. King David described some of his own children by saying, ‘The sons of rebellion shall all be *as thorns* thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands. But the man who touches them must be armed with iron and the shaft of a spear, and they shall be utterly burned with fire in their place.’ 2Sa 23:6-7. Esau is an example of a son who despised his predestination and then became a thorn because of his rebellion.

## The rain and the flood

Jesus concluded the sermon on the mount by saying, ‘Whoever hears these sayings of Mine [My word] and does them [is obedient], I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.’ Mat 7:24. The wise man hears the word of present truth and he obeys it by building his life in conformity with the word that he hears. The ‘rock’ is Christ. For those who are disobedient, He is ‘the stone of stumbling’ and ‘the rock of offence’. 1Pe 2:8. For those who believe and are obedient, He is ‘the chosen and precious cornerstone’ that has been laid in Zion. He is ‘the foundation’ of the true temple. 1Pe 2:6-7.

Jesus said concerning the wise man, 'The rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.' Mat 7:25. In contrast, the foolish man does not build upon Christ, because of his disobedience. Rather, he continues to build upon his own religious foundation that has been laid according to his own gospel and life experiences. Jesus said concerning the foolish man, 'The rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.' Mat 7:27.

Where does the rain and flood come from? In this regard, it is notable that the apostle John described the voice of Jesus Christ to be like the sound of many waters. This can equally be translated as 'the sound of *much water*'. Rev 1:15. The word of present truth that is proclaimed by the messengers of Christ descends upon us from heaven as the rain of righteousness. The prophet Isaiah declared, 'Rain down, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together.' Isa 45:8.

'The rain of righteousness' causes 'rivers of water to run as a flood in the desert' for the purpose of our salvation. Isa 43:18-20. However, this very same flood of water will undermine every foundation that has been built upon the sand. The word of present truth undermines all other gospels. If we are unwilling to forsake our other gospels and, instead, build on the Rock, through obedience to the word of Christ, then we will find ourselves to be in opposition to the flow of the river of life. We will become reactive to the word, and the flood of the water will remove us and destroy our house.

In conjunction to this, 'the wind that blows and beats upon our house' is the Holy Spirit, who is in opposition to us if we are building according to the ways of our flesh. Gal 5:17. We are reminded that when Job's children had all gathered in the oldest brother's house, a great wind came across the wilderness. It struck all four corners of the house and caused it to collapse. The primary message of the Elijah ministry is, 'All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, *because the breath of the Lord blows upon it.*' Isa 40:6-7.

The prophet Hosea declared, 'Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth.' Hos 6:3. When we consider the former and latter rain from an agricultural perspective, we note that the former rain causes the seed to *germinate* in



the ground, and the latter rain enables the crop to grow to full *maturity*. The word of Christ that comes to us like the rain is the full provision that is necessary for the beginning and the end of our pilgrimage. The beginning is our new birth, and the end is our full maturity as a son of God.

It is the word that comes to us like the rain that enables us to press on to know the Lord. This can equally be translated that we are to 'follow on' to know the Lord. We 'follow on' by continuing to be led by the Holy Spirit on the pathway that Jesus Christ has pioneered for us on His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. On this pathway, we are progressively coming to know the Lord, who is our eternal life. We are also acquiring 'the knowledge of the Lord', which is the knowledge of our obedience that He has already learned for us. 1Jn 5:20. Isa 53:11. Heb 5:8.

When Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, He was the first Man in the image and likeness of God. As we *press on to know the Lord* by looking into His face, we behold, as in a mirror, the glory of our own predestination as a son of God. 2Co 3:18. We have been predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. Rom 8:29. In this regard, we rejoice that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead as our great High Priest who forever lives to make intercession for us. Heb 7:25. We know that He was also raised from the dead as the King of kings and Lord of lords. We do not yet see the revelation of His kingship in the world. However, the apostle Paul proclaimed that the resurrection of Christ is the guarantee that God has ordained Christ to judge the world in righteousness. Act 17:30-31.

## **Psalm 99 – The Lord's kingship and holiness**

Psalm 99 is often referred to as one of the 'royal psalms' because it is focused upon the Lord's kingship. It was almost certainly written by King David. We know that King David ruled over the whole kingdom of Israel. However, he understood that his throne on the earth was beneath, and subject to, the throne of the Son on the top of Mount Zion. We observe that the psalm is divided into *three sections*. The first section of the psalm focuses on the Lord's sovereignty over the entire creation and all the inhabitants of the world. The second section of the psalm focuses on the Lord's kingship and judgements among His own people. The third section of the psalm focuses on His mercy and judgement in relation to every individual leader and believer.

Most importantly, each section of the psalm concludes with a declaration of Yahweh's holiness. The conclusion of the third and final section is, 'Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy.' Psa 99:9. Every son of God has been called to come to Mount Zion for the purpose of worshipping and exalting the holiness of the Father's name. We are reminded that Jesus instructed every son of God to pray, by the Holy Spirit, 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed [holy] be Your name.' Mat 6:9. When the apostle John witnessed the throne room of the Father in the time of the end, he heard the apostolic administration of Christ proclaiming before the throne, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!' Rev 4:8.

The fellowship of Yahweh is the holy ground on which the love of God is expressed by offering. In this fellowship, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each enabled by the capacity of Eternal Spirit to make offering for the purpose of revealing one another. They do not reveal Themselves. However, by offering, which is the expression of Their love, the unique sanctification of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is fully revealed. In this regard, *Their love reveals Their sanctification*. When we behold the love that God has for us as sons of God, we are illuminated to see that we have been called to join this same fellowship on holy ground. By illumination, we understand that the fire of the jealous love of God for our sanctification is also the fire of His wrath that burns against our sin.

### He is enthroned above the cherubim

As we have already stated, the first section of Psalm 99 focuses on the Lord's sovereign kingship over *all people* in the world. David began the psalm by declaring, 'The Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake! The Lord is great in Zion, and He is exalted *above all the peoples*. Let them praise Your great and awesome name - He is holy.' Psa 99:1-3.

Mount Zion is *the spiritual mountain* that was established at the beginning of the Everlasting Covenant. It was established when Yahweh the Son emptied Himself and was begotten as the Son of God by the word of the Father. The Father declared to the Son, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.' Psa 2:7. Mount Zion was established by the word of the Father. It is His holy mountain. However, it is the place of *the Son's throne*, because the Father immediately installed Yahweh the Son, who had become His Son, as the King on the top of Mount Zion. Psa 2:6.

He said to the Son, 'Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.' Psa 2:8.

Since the beginning of the Everlasting Covenant, the Son's throne has been on the heights of Zion. The Son of God then proceeded from His throne in the heavens to create the angelic host of heaven and the physical heavens and earth. The cherubim were created as the chief angels who carry the authority of the Son's throne within the angelic administration. When the prophet Ezekiel saw the cherubim in a prophetic vision, he described a firmament above their heads and then the likeness of a throne above the firmament. Eze 1:22. Notably, he also said, 'On that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man.' Eze 1:26.

The Son of God, who was enthroned far above the cherubim in the heavenly sanctuary, also descended to the top of Mount of Sinai and spoke to Moses through the angelic administration. Act 7:38. Furthermore, when Moses finished constructing the tabernacle on the desert floor, the cloud of the angelic administration covered the tabernacle, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Exo 40:34-35. The glory of the Son's presence, which was called the *Shekinah*, dwelt above the mercy seat and between the cherubim on the ark of the covenant. The Lord promised Moses that He would meet him and speak to him from between the cherubim. Exo 25:22. The mercy seat on the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle of Moses was the symbol of the Son's throne in the heavenly sanctuary on the heights of Zion.

When King David brought the ark of the covenant to the stronghold of Zion, which was also called 'the city of David', he placed it in another tabernacle. Remarkably, David went into the tent and sat before the Lord. 2Sa 7:18. David prayed before the presence of the Lord in the tent, but the Lord did not speak to him through the cherubim in the same way in which He spoke to Moses. Rather, the Lord primarily spoke to David through the prophet Nathan. This was the result of a transition in the Lord's messenger administration. Samuel was the first prophet who belonged to the Elijah ministry. He anointed David as the king of Israel and established 'the schools of the prophets'. We could consider Nathan to be the second prophet who belonged to the Elijah ministry. He was the prophet who confronted David regarding his sin. He was also the prophet who declared that David's Seed, Jesus Christ, would build His house and rule on His throne forever. 2Sa 7:8-17.

King David also received the prophetic revelation that Jesus Christ would ascend far above all principalities and powers to be seated at the right hand of God after His death, burial and resurrection. He prophetically declared concerning Christ's physical ascension from the Mount of Olives, 'The LORD [the Father] said to my Lord [Jesus Christ], "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool".' Psa 110:1. Jesus Christ is presently seated as the glorified Son of Man at the right hand of God. He is seated on His own intrinsic throne as Yahweh the Son, with the glory that He had with the Father before the foundation of the world. Notably, we do not yet see all Christ's enemies subjected under His feet. Heb 2:8. When the Father takes His seat, it will initiate the time for the Son to stand up to rule and reign in the midst of His enemies. Psa 110:2.

### Christ is speaking from heaven

In relation to our consideration of Psalm 99, it is important to recognise that Jesus Christ is still enthroned far above the cherubim on the top of Mount Zion. However, He no longer speaks to His people through the cherubim; that is, through the angelic administration. Jesus Christ speaks from heaven to His lampstand churches *through the seven stars in His right hand*. The seven stars are the presbyteries of His lampstand churches. Rev 1:20. Unlike the cherubim, who are great in might and power, the presbyteries of Christ's lampstand churches minister in the weakness of Christ. A presbytery does not proclaim the gospel with persuasive words of human wisdom. 1Co 2:4. Rather, the gospel is proclaimed in weakness so that a hearer's faith 'is not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God'. 1Co 2:5.

The apostle Paul testified, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is *the power of God to salvation* for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.' Rom 1:16. The mandate of a presbytery in the right hand of Christ is to proclaim the gospel of sonship, and the 'so great a salvation' that is available to every son of God who embraces their participation in the seven wounding events of Christ. Notably, if we reject the gospel that is proclaimed by Christ *from heaven* through His messengers, our judgement will be far worse than those who rejected His word which was spoken on earth through the dispensation of the angels. The apostle Paul warned us, 'For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect *so great a salvation*, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him.' Heb 2:2-3. Heb 12:25.

Jesus Christ is presently speaking from heaven, through His presbyteries, to His lampstand churches. He is not yet speaking to the world. However, when the Father takes His seat on the top of Mount Zion, for the purpose of dwelling among His people and establishing His kingdom on the earth, Jesus Christ will stand up from His throne and will move into the centre of the Father's throne. The entire administration of Christ will move to be 'in and around' the Father's throne. Rev 4. Following this transition, the Father will give the seven-sealed scroll to Christ. Rev 5. The scroll contains the fullness of the Father's will, in relation to salvation and judgement, which will be revealed in heaven and on the earth in the end of the age. When the first seal is opened, the message that belongs to the worldwide presbytery around the throne of the Father will be proclaimed by the 144 000 as the gospel of the kingdom in all nations.

When the gospel of the kingdom is proclaimed by the 144 000, accompanied by the judgements of God that will be manifested during the opening of the seals, it will cause the entire world to tremble and shake before the Lord. Heb 12:26. The Father will be revealed as the God of all the families, and Jesus Christ will be revealed as the King over all the nations. Jer 31:1. King David declared, 'The Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble!' Psa 99:1. Speaking about the opening of the sixth seal, the Lord said, 'Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.' Eze 38:23. The righteous judgements of God will reveal His holiness to all men. At the same time, the testimony of the 144 000 will cause a great multitude to be born as sons of God, and then saved through regeneration by embracing their participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

This brings us to the conclusion of the first section of the psalm. King David declared concerning the great multitude from all nations, 'Let them praise Your great and awesome name - He is holy.' Psa 99:3. The apostle John witnessed the fulfilment of this expression of praise and worship by the great multitude. He wrote in the book of Revelation, 'I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no-one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne [of God] and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb"!' Rev 7:9-10.

## Justice and righteousness in Jacob

The second section of Psalm 99 focuses on the exercise of the Lord's kingship and judgements among His own people. The psalmist declared, 'The King's strength also loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool - He is holy.' Psa 99:4-5. We know that Jacob was the father of all twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. In our day, the church is *the new house of Jacob* that was brought forth from the wellsprings of Judah through the offering of Christ. Isa 48:1. Notably, the word that is translated 'justice' in this verse means 'a verdict, or a sentence that has been passed', as a manifestation of God's righteous judgement.

In his letter, Jude addressed the church as those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ. Jud 1:1. The phrase 'kept for Jesus Christ' describes the church, which has been betrothed to Christ as a chaste virgin. Jude testified that he wanted to write to the believers about 'our common salvation'. However, he found it necessary to exhort the believers concerning 'the faith' which was 'once for all' delivered to all the saints. Jud 1:3. This was the faith of the Son of God which was first given to Abraham and then delivered to all the saints through the offering of Christ. On His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, Jesus Christ became the Author and Finisher of 'the most holy faith' that belongs to every son of God.

It was necessary for Jude to contend for 'the faith', because ungodly men had crept in to their congregation and had turned the grace of God into licentiousness. These men were proclaiming a false gospel that was a misappropriation of the grace of God. They were not preaching that we have been redeemed from the judgement of the Law for the purpose of becoming a partaker of the divine nature by new birth as sons of God. Rather, they were preaching that we have been redeemed from the judgement of the Law so that we are free to live as a Christian according to the sight of our own eyes and the dictates of our own heart. Jer 23:17. By implication, they were promoting the false gospel that our freedom from the Law is an opportunity for the activities of the flesh. Gal 5:13. The apostle Peter described such false messengers in saying that they *promise freedom*, but they themselves are still slaves of corruption. 2Pe 2:19.

Furthermore, Jude noted that these ungodly men were denying 'the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ'. Jud 1:4. That is, by rejecting the

gospel of God, they were denying both the Father and the Son. The false gospel that has reduced the offering of Christ to a legal transaction that promises that we will go to heaven because we are forgiven by God is a gospel that denies the Father and the Son. It denies the Father because it does not recognise that we must be born again as sons of God and then placed by the Father into the fellowship of the body of Christ. Joh 3:5. It also denies the Son, because it does not recognise that we must embrace our life-long participation in the seven wounding events of Christ's offering journey to be saved through regeneration as we are progressively conformed to the image of Christ. Tit 3:5. Rom 8:17.

Most notably, the evidence that we are on the pathway of salvation as sons of God is that we are *learning the obedience* that Christ has already learned for us as the Pioneer of our eternal salvation. Heb 5:8-9. Jesus Christ is our great High Priest. On His offering journey, He fully identified with all of our infirmities, and He learned our obedience within the context of every trial and temptation that we will face during our lifetime. Heb 4:15. Now, seated at the right hand of God, He forever lives to make intercession for us by ministering to us our participation in His finished offering. Heb 8:1. Heb 7:25. When we are illuminated to understand the nature of Christ's suffering priesthood, we also see that we have no excuse for disobedience! It is important for every believer to appreciate that, if we reject Christ's priestly initiative toward us, He is also the King who executes righteous judgement among His people. Psa 99:4.

### **Types of judgement – condemnation, chastening, persecution**

With the nature of Christ's judgement among His people in view, Jude continued, 'I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.' Jud 1:5. Jude was referring specifically to the judgement that is executed by the Lord Jesus Christ. This is an important point. The Lord who now judges His lampstand churches with eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished bronze is *the same Lord* who judged the nation of Israel in the wilderness. In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul identified specific examples of His sovereign judgement upon the Israelites because of their idolatry, immorality, grumbling, and the way in which they 'tested Christ'. 1Co 10:7-10.

Paul then declared to us, 'Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the

ends of the ages have come.' 1Co 10:11. We know that, in addition to those specific examples of judgement, by the end of forty years, the bodies of an entire generation of Israelites had been scattered in the wilderness. They died under the judgement of God and fell into hell because of their unbelief and disobedience. In his letter to the Hebrews, Paul wrote, 'Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.' Heb 3:17-19.

Despite their miraculous deliverance from Egypt, which symbolised 'the world', the generation of Israelites who refused to enter the promised land were condemned along with the world because of their unbelief and disobedience. In our day, the Lord Jesus is mercifully admonishing, rebuking and chastening those who belong to His lampstand churches so that we are not condemned along with the world. The chastening of Christ is another manifestation of His righteous judgement among His people. However, the purpose of His chastening is to deliver us from condemnation. We are reminded that Christ addressed the presbytery in Laodicea by saying, 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.' Rev 3:19. When we respond to Christ's chastening with repentance and faith, His judgements belong to His cleansing and sanctifying initiative toward us.

Furthermore, in his letter to the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul identified another manifestation of Christ's righteous judgement among His people. Paul commended the Thessalonians for their faith and their love. He wrote, 'We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other.' 2Th 1:3. The believers in this church were evidently committed to walking in faith-obedience to the word of present truth. As those who were born of God, and were embracing their participation in Christ's sufferings, they were also growing in their capacity to love and serve one another in the fellowship of the *agape* meal. Paul also commended the Thessalonians because they demonstrated faith and patience in the face of persecution. 2Th 1:4.

Paul described the persecution as the 'manifest evidence of the righteous judgement of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer'. 2Th 1:5. On some occasions, we will experience persecution as part of *the Lord's chastening hand upon us* for



the sake of our own sanctification. However, not all persecution is an expression of chastening. If we are walking in obedience to Christ, we should expect also to experience persecution *for the sake of the gospel*. We are reminded that Jesus said to the disciples, 'A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.' Joh 15:20. Likewise, the apostle Paul said to Timothy, 'All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.' 2Ti 3:12.

In a similar way, the apostle Peter said, 'If you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.' He then added, in relation to the perpetrators of the persecution, 'And do not fear their intimidation, and do not troubled'. 1Pe 3:14. 1Pe 4:14. At the same time, we must never view ourselves as being an innocent victim of persecution. It is still an expression of the righteous judgement of God toward us to make us worthy for the kingdom of God. Persecution is an effective instrument that the Lord uses to circumcise the other law from our hearts, and to conform us to the death of Christ. It is a unique context in which we may learn the obedience of Christ who 'when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously'. 1Pe 2:23.

God does judge His people righteously. Having encouraged the Thessalonians that their persecution was the righteous judgement of God upon them, Paul continued by saying, 'It is *a righteous thing with God* to repay with tribulation those who trouble you and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who *do not obey the gospel* of our Lord Jesus Christ.' 2Th 1:6-8. When we read this passage, we note how clear the apostle Paul was regarding the prerequisites for salvation. We must *know God*, as sons of God, and we must be those who *obey the gospel* of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### God who forgives, but takes vengeance

The third section of Psalm 99 is focused on the Lord's mercy and judgement in relation to every individual leader and believer. In this portion of the psalm, King David referred specifically to three of the Lord's greatest servants. He declared, 'Moses and Aaron were among His priests, and Samuel was among those who called upon His name; they called upon the Lord, and He answered them. He spoke to them in the cloudy pillar; they kept His testimonies and the ordinance He gave them.'

You answered them, O LORD our God; You were to them God-Who-Forgives, though You took vengeance on their deeds. Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy.' Psa 99:6-9.

King David proclaimed that the Lord God was *El-Nasa* to Moses, Aaron and Samuel. The name *El-Nasa* means 'God who forgives'. The reason why David recognised that the Lord God was *El-Nasa* to Moses, Aaron and Samuel was because he also, personally, knew the Lord in this way. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul identified what Abraham and David had found in their own flesh. We are reminded that he asked the question, 'What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?' Rom 4:1. He answered this question by proclaiming that Abraham had found the righteousness of faith apart from the works of the Law. In his mortality, he received the faith of God to believe for sonship.

We could ask the same question regarding David. What did he find in his flesh? The answer is that David found *forgiveness from the judgement of the Law*. The apostle Paul quoted the words of David from Psalm 32, 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.' Rom 4:7-8. In relation to the judgement of the Law, we know that David should have been killed as a murderer and adulterer. However, when the prophet Nathan confronted him regarding his sin, he accountably recognised that he had sinned against the Lord, and then met the Lord as *El-Nasa*. That is, David met the Lord as 'God-who-forgives', but still takes vengeance upon our deeds.

This brings us to an important point in relation to the forgiveness of sin. The first dimension of forgiveness is that it is the remission of the debt that has been accrued because of our sin under the Law. That is, forgiveness delivers us from the requirement to repay the debt to God under the judgement of the Law. However, at the same time, forgiveness delivers us to our participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ. The key point is that the forgiveness of sin delivers us *from* the judgement of the Law, and delivers us *to* the mercy and judgement of the cross. When David said that *El-Nasa* still takes vengeance upon our deeds, he was not referring to the punishment of the Law. He was referring to the righteous judgement of God upon us in the offering of Christ.

When we consider the lesson of the two thieves who were crucified on either side of Christ, we learn that there are *two sides of the cross* in

relation to God's vengeance upon our deeds. The unbelieving thief wanted forgiveness from the Law, but he did not want to be delivered to the cross of Christ. When he rejected his participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ, the cross became the instrument of his eternal judgement. It confined him to the lake of fire where he will forever suffer under the wrath of God upon his sin. In contrast, when the believing thief embraced his participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ, the cross became the instrument of his salvation. Christ took his sin out into the sea of God's forgetfulness, but he was redeemed from the death of sin by the power of God's resurrection life in the blood of Christ.

### *Second dimension of forgiveness*

This brings us to another important point regarding the forgiveness of sin. There is a further dimension of forgiveness which is operative only in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. In our publication, *The Pathway of our Pilgrimage*, we considered that there are three dimensions of redemption - redemption *from the Law* to adoption as sons; the redemption that is *in Christ*; and the redemption *of our body* on the day of resurrection. Significantly, there are *two dimensions of forgiveness* which accompany the first two dimensions of redemption. As we have already stated, the first dimension of forgiveness is the remission of the debt, and our deliverance from the judgement of the Law. The second dimension of forgiveness *is the remission of sin itself* and our deliverance from our sin, by the blood of Christ, through our fellowship in Christ's seven wounding events.

Speaking about the second dimension of redemption that is *in Christ*, and the operation of the second dimension of forgiveness, the apostle Paul declared to the Ephesians and the Colossians that '*in Him* we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins'. Eph 1:7. Col 1:14. The apostle Peter was referring to this second dimension of forgiveness when he proclaimed to the crowd on the Day of Pentecost, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ *for the remission of sins*; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' Act 2:38. Likewise, the apostle John was referring to the second dimension of forgiveness when he wrote in the book of Revelation that Jesus Christ '*loves us and released us from our sins* by His blood - and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father'. Rev 1:5-6.

If the first dimension of forgiveness delivers us from the judgement of the Law to the mercy and judgement of the cross, the second dimension of forgiveness is delivering us, through the cross, to our priestly service

in the kingdom of God. We wash our priestly robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb as we continue to embrace our fellowship in Christ's seven wounding events. As we serve as priests in the household of God, and call upon the name of the Lord in prayer, we continue to interface with the Lord as *El Nasa* for the entire duration of our earthly pilgrimage. We know Him as 'God who forgives', but who also takes vengeance upon our deeds. His chastening hand upon us is the expression of His judgement *and* His mercy, in the cross, for the sake of our sanctification as sons and priests.

## Moses and Aaron

King David referred to three of the Lord's greatest servants to emphasise that every individual leader and believer, regardless of their ministry profile, will interface with the mercy and judgement of God that belongs to the cross in relation to their deeds. David described Moses and Aaron as being *the Lord's* priests, and Samuel as a prophet who *called upon the name of the Lord*. Psa 99:6. All three men knew the Lord and were committed to walking in obedience to the Lord's commandments. David reflected on them by saying, 'They called upon the Lord and He answered them. He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud; they kept His testimonies and the ordinance He gave them.' Psa 99:7. However, David also noted that the Lord was faithful *to answer them with vengeance* whenever they were disobedient or deviated from the pathway of their sanctification.

The first example of the Lord's vengeance upon Moses happened immediately after the Lord sent him to deliver the nation of Israel from their bondage in Egypt. Despite his high calling as a messenger of God, the Lord met him on the way, to kill him, because of his disobedience in relation to his own family. Exo 4:24-26. He came under the judgement of God because he did not have a godly marriage or a worthy household. Specifically, Moses had failed to circumcise his son, because he had succumbed to the foreign culture and pressure of his Midianite wife. Notably, it was the Lord's vengeance upon Moses regarding this issue that established the cross in his marriage and family. It also became the context for Zipporah to meet the Lord herself and then to perform the circumcision as the expression of her obedience to Christ, which she then expressed as her submission to Moses. Exo 4:25-26.

In relation to Aaron, we know that the Lord was ready to kill him when he succumbed to the pressure that the entire nation exerted upon him to form the golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai. Exo 32. However, in

response to the intercession of Moses, the Lord did not destroy Aaron and blot the entire nation of Israel out of the book of life as the consequence for their idolatry. Exo 32:11-14. Deu 9:13-21. The Lord responded to the prayer of Moses, as *El-Nasa*. Nevertheless, the Lord still required all the people to fear His name and to respect His holiness. The nation of Israel was *preserved only* because of the intercession of Moses and the obedience of the Levites who sanctified themselves in the fear of the Lord. The word of Moses was the sword that divided the nation between those who stood with the Lord and those who stood against the Lord. Exo 32:26. When the Levites killed 3 000 men on that day, it was the expression of God's vengeance upon those who refused to repent from their idolatry. Exo 32:28.

Aaron did not escape the sword of God's judgement in relation to his own family even though all his four sons were ordained to serve as priests in the tabernacle. When his two eldest sons fell into the sin of presumption by offering profane fire before the Lord, the fire of God's eternal judgement came out from His presence and devoured them. Lev 10:1-2. In the immediate aftermath of this event, Moses prayed before the Lord to understand the reason for this specific manifestation of God's judgement upon the house of Aaron. When the Lord answered him, he said to Aaron, 'This is what the Lord spoke, saying: "By those who come near Me *I must be regarded as holy*; and before all the people I must be glorified".' Lev 10:3. Notably, Aaron maintained his own sanctification and did not contend with the Lord or with Moses on this point. Lev 10:3,6-7.

The final manifestation of God's chastening upon Moses and Aaron, which manifested His holiness before the eyes of the entire nation, occurred at Meribah. We recall that when the nation arrived at Meribah, there was no water for them to drink. Num 20:2. The people accused Moses and Aaron of misleading them and bringing them to a place where they would die. Num 20:3-5. In response to this accusation and contention, Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before the Lord at the doorway of the tabernacle. Num 20:6. The Lord commanded Moses to take his staff in his hand and then to *speak to the rock* before the eyes of the people. He promised that water would flow abundantly from the rock for the people and their livestock to drink. Num 20:8.

When Moses and Aaron gathered the nation together, they addressed the people as rebels, and strongly communicated their personal frustration to the people regarding the situation. Num 20:10. Then, in an overflow

of emotion, Moses reacted against the carnality of the people by *striking the rock twice* with his rod. Even though the water still flowed abundantly from the rock, Moses and Aaron had disobeyed the instruction of the Lord. Furthermore, their unbelief and disobedience had profaned the name of the Lord before the eyes of the people. The Lord clearly identified their transgression and its consequence by saying, 'Because you did not believe Me, *to hallow Me* in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.' Num 20:12.

### Eli and Samuel

Returning to our consideration of Psalm 99, King David also referred to Samuel as being a man who called upon the name of the Lord and knew Him as *El Nasa* - 'God who forgives, but takes vengeance upon our deeds'. We have considered some of the misdeeds of Moses and Aaron. However, when we consider the life and ministry of Samuel, it is a little more difficult to identify any obvious misdeeds. When the Lord spoke to the prophet Jeremiah, he referred to Samuel and Moses as being two great intercessors. Jer 15:1. Samuel was the last judge of Israel, and the first prophet in the Elijah ministry. Act 3:24. As we have already considered, he was the prophet who anointed David as king over all Israel. In many respects, Samuel had an exemplary prophetic ministry from his childhood to his old age. With this in view, what was Samuel's transgression that David was referring to in Psalm 99?

The key to understanding the transgression of Samuel is to identify *the sin of Eli*. Eli was a descendant of Aaron who served as high priest in the tabernacle of Moses when Samuel was born and first dedicated to the Lord. 1Sa 1:20. The Lord's primary issue with Eli was other than the nature of his priestly service. It was the culture and sanctification of his family. The sons of Eli were worthless men who did not know the Lord. 1Sa 2:12. Nevertheless, Eli allowed them to serve as priests at the doorway of the tabernacle. Unsurprisingly, they abused this position. They despised the offering of the Lord by demanding that the people give them the best portion of their offerings. 1Sa 2:17. Furthermore, the sons of Eli were extremely immoral men who were part of an immoral, religious, sub-culture that existed around the tabernacle in those days.

When Eli was very old, he became aware of how corrupt his sons had become. 1Sa 2:22. He tried to confront and admonish his sons regarding their sin. He even pleaded with them to see that they were sinning against

the Lord. 1Sa 2:23-25. However, despite their corruption and immorality, and their unwillingness to pay any attention to his voice, he was unwilling to send them away from the tabernacle for the sake of the sanctification of the Lord's house. Immediately after this, an unnamed 'man of God' visited Eli and proclaimed the Lord's judgement upon him and his sons. The Lord said to him through this messenger, 'Why do you kick at [trample] My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and *honour your sons more than Me*, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?' 1Sa 2:29.

It was the sons of Eli who trampled the offering of the Lord by demanding the best portion of every sacrifice. It is unlikely that Eli was guilty of the same corruption. However, he had become a partaker of their sin and of their judgement because he did not restrain his sons. The *sin of Eli* was that he loved his sons more than he loved the Lord. 1Sa 2:29. We know that Jesus said to every believer, 'He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.' Mat 10:37. Eli was unwilling to sanctify his household, because he did not want to compromise his relationship with his two sons. Nevertheless, the man of God proclaimed to Eli that the sign of God's judgement upon his house would be the death of his two sons on the one day. 1Sa 2:34.

The Lord first revealed His word to Samuel while he was still a boy ministering in the temple before Eli. The Lord said to Samuel, 'Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears will tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them.' 1Sa 3:11-13. The Lord's revelation to Samuel confirmed the word of judgement that had already been proclaimed to Eli by the unnamed man of God. The judgement upon Eli's house was fulfilled when the Philistines defeated Israel, captured the ark of the covenant, and slaughtered his two sons on the one day. 1Sa 4:11. When Eli heard that the ark had been captured, he fell off his seat backwards. The fall broke his neck, and he died. 1Sa 4:18.

Having considered this background in relation to the sin of Eli, we can identify the transgression of Samuel. Samuel faithfully served the Lord as a judge and a prophet from his youth to his old age. However, when he

was old, he decided to install his own two sons as judges over Israel. 1Sa 8:1-2. Despite witnessing the judgement of God upon the household of Eli because of his loyalty to his sons, Samuel did not seek the Lord regarding the appointment of his sons to be judges over Israel. Furthermore, his sons did not walk in his ways. They were corrupt judges who looked for dishonest gain. In practical terms, they willingly received bribes for the purpose of perverting the course of justice. 1Sa 8:3. The transgression of Samuel was the appointment of his sons. Even though Samuel was not aware of it, the behaviour of his sons caused the name of the Lord to be profaned before the eyes of the people.

When the elders of Israel came to Samuel to ask for a king, they referred to the fact that his sons did not walk in his way as part of the reason behind their request. 1Sa 8:5. The request for a king displeased Samuel because he felt dishonoured and rejected by the nation. 1Sa 8:6. However, rather than trying to defend himself or to justify his actions in relation to his sons, Samuel immediately sought the Lord in prayer. He called upon the name of the Lord. His prayerful response in the middle of this difficult circumstance demonstrated that, despite his transgression, he was a God-fearer. He loved the Lord more than his own position as the judge of Israel and more than he loved his own sons. Samuel prayed to the Lord because he wanted to know the Lord's will in the matter.

The elders of the nation of Israel sinned against the Lord when they asked for a king so that they could be like all the other nations. When they made this request, they were rejecting the Lord. 1Sa 8:7-8. Nevertheless, the Lord granted their request. In obedience to the Lord, Samuel forewarned the people about the negative implications of having a king. 1Sa 8:10-18. However, when the people insisted that they wanted a king, Samuel obeyed the Lord by anointing King Saul. 1Sa 8:19-22. The appointment of King Saul to replace Samuel as the judge of Israel was part of the Lord's chastening upon him in his latter years. However, because of Samuel's repentant and obedient response to the Lord, he continued to minister as the prophet of the Lord to the nation. He was still the first prophet in the Elijah ministry.

### **Christ is speaking to His churches – I know your works**

Jesus Christ is presently seated at the right hand of God in the middle of His lampstand churches as our great High Priest and our King. We know that the gospel of the kingdom is not yet being proclaimed to every family in the world. However, the word of Christ is being proclaimed to



every individual and family in His lampstand churches. The word of Christ to His lampstand churches is proclaimed *by the Holy Spirit* through the messengers in Christ's right hand. The word of present truth is proclaimed by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. For this reason, Jesus said to each presbytery and lampstand church, 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' Rev 3:22.

Significantly, in the light of our consideration of Psalm 99, we recognise that Jesus Christ is addressing His lampstand churches with eyes like a flame of fire, as *El Nasa*. That is, He is speaking to us as 'God who forgives', but He still takes vengeance upon our deeds. In relation to Christ's judgement upon our deeds, we observe that He said to every presbytery and lampstand church, 'I know your works.' Rev 2:2,9,13,19. Rev 3:1,8,15. When Jesus addressed the presbytery in Thyatira concerning the woman Jezebel, He said, 'I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.' Rev 2:23.

The word of Christ that is raining upon us as a word of present truth, by the Spirit, is equipping us to *overcome*. Jesus finished each admonition with a promise to the overcomers. Rev 2:7,11,17,26. Rev 3:5,12,21. The 'elect' is a company of overcomers who have made their calling and election sure. When we consider the content of the seven letters, we note that Christ addressed the need to overcome in specific areas of conflict; or in relation to disobedience; or in relation to resisting deceivers. He particularly identified the need to resist and overcome false messengers who promote the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of Jezebel. Rev 2:14,20. In His admonition to the church in Smyrna, Jesus also identified the need to endure persecution at the hands of the synagogue of Satan. We will consider the nature of the synagogue of Satan in Chapter 3.

The seven lampstand churches belong to the house of Jacob, who have been called to prevail and to overcome in order to become the true Israel of God. In the same way that the Lord *loved Jacob*, by dealing with his deceit and changing his nature, Christ rebukes and chastens His lampstand churches. For example, Jesus said to the presbytery in Laodicea, 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.' Rev 3:19. Notably, in the same way in which the Lord *hated Esau*, He hated the doctrine and the deeds of the Nicolaitans. Jesus commended the Ephesians by saying, 'This you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, *which I also hate*.' Rev 2:6. The doctrine of the

## THE OVERCOMING CHURCH

Nicolaitans comes from the attitude and motivations of Esau. We will consider the Nicolaitans and the profile of Esau in Chapter 2.

Jesus addressed the presbytery in Sardis specifically about the need for us all to be clothed with priestly garments that have been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. This is necessary for our salvation. He said, 'You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the book of life.' Rev 3:4-5. The obvious implication of this statement is that, if we are not clothed in white, priestly garments, our name will be blotted out from the Lamb's book of life. We will consider Christ's admonition to the church in Sardis in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 2

# The Nicolaitans – the profile of Esau

Jesus commended the Ephesian presbytery by saying, ‘This you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.’ Rev 2:6. In addition, Jesus rebuked the presbytery in Pergamum by saying, ‘You also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.’ Rev 2:15. It is notable that Jesus used such strong language in relation to this group of believers. He hated their doctrine, or their gospel. He also hated the way in which they conducted themselves within the congregations in Ephesus and Pergamum.

There is little historical information regarding the Nicolaitans. Some commentators speculate that this group derived their name from Nicolas, who was one of the seven deacons. From a scriptural perspective, the key to understanding the profile of the Nicolaitans is the fact that Jesus *hated* their doctrine and deeds. Within the community of lampstand churches, the Nicolaitans displayed the same attitude and demeanour as Esau and his descendants had displayed. Quoting from the book of Malachi, the apostle Paul said, ‘As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but *Esau I have hated*”.’ Rom 9:13.

The prophet Malachi declared, ‘ “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” says the Lord. “Yet Jacob I have loved; *but Esau I have hated*, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness”. Even though Edom has said, “We have been impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places”, thus says the Lord of hosts: “They may build, but I will throw down, they shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, and the people against whom the Lord will have *indignation forever*”.’ Mal 1:2-4.

It is notable that the prophet Malachi began by asking the question, ‘Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ Esau and Jacob were both born into a covenant house. In response to the prayer of their father, Isaac, the Lord opened the womb of their mother, Rebekah. Gen 25:21. The two boys were conceived, at the same time, as non-identical, or fraternal, twins. Both of them were called by God to belong to the household of faith. Within the household, God chose Jacob to receive the blessing of the firstborn, and He chose Esau to serve his younger brother.

The Lord said to their mother, Rebekah, ‘Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.’ Gen 25:23. The apostle Paul emphasised that this word revealed the purpose of God for the two boys according to His sovereign choice. Rom 9:11. Even though Esau was the firstborn, God had chosen him to be the servant of his younger brother. His salvation depended upon his choosing what God had chosen for him.

## Hebrews 12 – the profile of Esau

In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul exhorted us, ‘Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.’ Heb 12:14. When Paul spoke of the pursuit of peace, he was not referring to the pursuit of relational harmony through fallen, trading mechanisms. He was referring to *the pursuit of fellowship among brethren*. All fellowship requires sanctification, and it is possible only by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of sanctification and fellowship.

Notably, Paul said that if we do not pursue sanctification as sons of God, we will not see the Lord. When Paul spoke of ‘seeing the Lord’, he was referring to the day of resurrection when Christ will physically return. The day of resurrection is when every son of God will receive the inheritance of their spiritual body. The apostle John declared,

'Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' 1Jn 3:2. Rev 20:6.

In the light of his admonition to us to pursue sanctification, Paul then continued by saying, 'See to it that no-one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person *like Esau*, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.' Heb 12:15-17. This passage is a helpful summary of the profile of Esau.

In relation to falling short of the grace of God, Esau refused to choose what God had chosen for him and to serve his younger brother. The grace of God describes the power of the sevenfold Spirit of Yahweh, through the Holy Spirit, that enabled Jesus Christ to offer Himself to God on His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. Heb 9:14. Heb 2:9. On this offering journey, Jesus learned our obedience by fulfilling the works of our sonship. Heb 5:8. Christ learned the obedience that was necessary for Esau to fulfil his calling. If Esau had chosen it, there was grace for him to humble himself and to serve his younger brother in the land of Canaan.

The Lord displayed the same wrath toward the generation of the Israelites who refused to enter the promised land as He did toward Esau when he rejected his calling. The Lord declared, 'For forty years I loathed that generation, and said they are a people who err in their heart, and they do not know My ways. Therefore, I swore in My anger, "Truly they shall not enter My rest".' Psa 95:10-11. As we read in the book of Hebrews, failing to enter the Lord's rest is the same as falling short of the grace of God. It describes the place of damnation. The Israelites fell short of the promise of entering the Lord's rest because of their unbelief and disobedience. Heb 3:17-19.

In relation to displaying a root of bitterness, Esau became enraged because his carnal projection and desire for rulership was rejected by God. He did not recognise that this rejection was God's mercy toward him. He believed that it was merely the outcome of Jacob's deceit. His anger toward God was then directed as hatred toward his brother. Esau consoled himself with the thought of killing his brother. This is the same bitterness and hatred that belongs to the spirit of antichrist that is

manifested by those who go out from the church and then seek to justify themselves by persecuting the church. 1Jn 2:18-19.

In relation to being an immoral and godless man, Esau chose to marry Canaanite women, and the daughter of Ishmael. When the apostle Paul described Esau as 'godless', it does not mean that he was an unbeliever or was irreligious. It means that he was carnal and worldly. There is little doubt that Esau still believed in God. However, his attitude and behaviour demonstrated that he prioritised the cares of this world over his inheritance in the kingdom of God. Specifically, Esau despised his birthright, and he never repented in relation to that transgression. Heb 12:16. Many years later, in an unrepentant state, he still presumptuously expected to receive the blessing. Heb 12:17.

The apostle Paul exhorted us to look carefully at ourselves in relation to these points, because the same issues exist in all Christian congregations. As we have stated already, the profile of Esau in the household of Isaac is the same as the profile of the Nicolaitans in lampstand churches. Let us consider this in more detail.

### **Esau despised the birthright**

It is evident that there is a difference between the birthright and the blessing, because Esau despised the birthright, but he still desired the blessing. The birthright was given to the firstborn son at the time of birth. It was the right to receive a double portion of the family inheritance. In contrast to this, the blessing was given by the laying on of hands, and specifically by the father's right hand. The content of the blessing was articulated by the prophetic word.

The birthright initially belonged to Esau because he was the firstborn son. In his letter to the Hebrews, Paul referred to it as 'his birthright'. Heb 12:16. We know that God had chosen Jacob to receive the birthright and the blessing that belonged to the firstborn. In recognition of God's sovereign choice, the transfer of the birthright should have been a point of *offering* between the two brothers in the context of *fellowship* with their father. That is, Esau should have given to Jacob something that he valued, not sold something that he despised.

Jacob and Esau were both fifteen years old when their grandfather, Abraham, died in faith. Gen 25:7,26. It is likely that Esau sold the birthright to Jacob soon after the death of Abraham, while the two boys were still teenagers. Perhaps they were about sixteen years old. We note

that this is the time when many children who have grown up in a covenant household begin to solidify their own choice in relation to the call of God upon their lives. When Esau sold his birthright to Jacob in exchange for some red stew, two things happened. First, Esau despised his birthright. Second, he received the new name of Edom. Gen 25:29-34. Having rejected his calling by God, he was named after the thing that he valued more than his sonship.

Selling his birthright for a single meal was not simply an ill-considered or a short-sighted decision that Esau made during a period of momentary weakness. Esau's willingness to sell his birthright revealed that he had already chosen to set his mind on 'the things of the flesh'. He had already become godless, or worldly. The fact that he showed no remorse or regret after the transaction had taken place supports the point that he placed no value on the birthright, and had already decided to go his own way. We read in the book of Genesis, 'Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew: and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way'. Gen 25:34.

The summary of this account is that 'Esau despised his birthright'. Gen 25:34. This means that he had no regard for the family inheritance. This is particularly notable when we consider that he was the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham. We know that God promised to give the entire land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants as their inheritance. However, more than this, the inheritance that belonged to Abraham's family included the possession of heaven and earth! When Melchizedek met Abraham after the slaughter of the kings, He declared, 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of *heaven and earth*.' Gen 14:19.

### *The true birthright*

In relation to this inheritance, Yahweh the Son, who had also become the Son of Yahweh, came to Abram in a vision and said, 'Do not fear, Abram, I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.' Gen 15:1. In this interaction, Abram received the faith of God to believe that the Son of God would become his Son in flesh, and would be the Seed from whom a multitude of sons of God would be born. Revealing this great multitude of sons of God, the Lord took Abram outside and said, ' "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them". And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be".' Gen 15:5.

When the Son of God was made flesh in the womb of the virgin Mary, He was born as the Son of Abraham and the Heir of all the promises that had

been made to Abraham. He was the Firstborn Son in the family of Yahweh and the Firstborn Son in the family of Abraham. In the first case, *the true birthright* belongs only to Christ. The apostle emphasised this point in his letter to the Galatians, saying, 'Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds" as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed", who is Christ.' Gal 3:16. Significantly, the travail and offering of Christ as the one Seed, from Gethsemane to the cross, brought forth *a multitude of seeds* who inherit the same promise! Joh 12:24. Isa 53:10.

On His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, Christ fulfilled the work that has been predestined by the Father for every son of God. The glory that belongs to every son of God was harvested by the Father and built into Christ's heavenly body. When His offering journey was complete, Christ emptied Himself to the bosom of the Father. He stepped out of His physical body, which had been made immortal and incorruptible, and took up residence in His heavenly body. After three days and three nights, He stepped back into His physical body. His immortal and incorruptible body was clothed with the glory of His heavenly body, making it a spiritual body.

On the day of His resurrection, Jesus Christ was the Firstborn from the dead. Col 1:18. Rev 1:5. He was the first Man in the image and likeness of God. After the resurrection of Christ, it became possible for men to receive the adoption and to be born as sons of God. In the book, *The Pathway of our Pilgrimage*, we have considered the process by which we receive the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of adoption, and are born as a son of God. In relation to the birthright, the key point is that it belongs to sons of God who have been born of the divine nature. 2Pe 1:4. When we are born as a son of God, the life of Christ becomes our life, and we possess the true birthright as a *co-heir with Christ*.

The true birthright includes our citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem. We are reminded that Abraham 'dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God'. Heb 11:9-10. As sons of God, our citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem should be *our chief joy*. A son of God 'despises their birthright' when they choose to set their mind on the things of this world, rather than prioritising the fellowship of the *agape* meal that belongs to the Jerusalem from above.



Further, our birthright as sons of God and *co-heirs with Christ* is the right to inherit a spiritual body for 'the new heavens and new earth'. We have received the Holy Spirit in our mortal body as the pledge, or downpayment, of the full inheritance that we will receive on the day of resurrection. Eph 1:13. Eph 4:30. Importantly, our eternal inheritance is completely dependent upon our willingness to suffer with Christ on the pathway that He has pioneered for us. Rom 8:17. A son of God despises their birthright by drawing back from the fellowship of Christ's offering in unbelief.

### **Esau desired the blessing**

Returning to the account of Esau, the apostle Paul said, 'For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.' Heb 12:17. This verse describes the underlying corruption that belongs to the Esau profile. After Esau had despised the birthright, he still wanted to inherit the blessing that belonged to the firstborn. There was probably more than fifty years between the time when Esau sold the birthright to Jacob, and when Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau.

During those years, Esau did not demonstrate any fruit of repentance. Having shown no remorse after selling his birthright, he continued to despise the culture of his father's household and to go his own way. When he was forty years old, he married two Hittite women from among the inhabitants of Canaan. We are reminded that Abraham had been very careful to ensure that Isaac did not marry any of the Canaanite women. Gen 24:3-4. This was a rebellious action by Esau. He evidently embraced the foreign culture of these women because it caused grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah. Gen 26:34-35.

If Esau had recognised his sin in relation to the birthright, his repentance would have been demonstrated by his willingness to turn from his godless culture and, further, to serve his younger brother. In contrast to this, his lack of repentance was demonstrated by the fact that he still wanted to receive the blessing in his godless condition, becoming enraged when he was rejected. It is important to note that Esau was rejected because he found no place for repentance, not because he was cheated by his brother.

We know that Esau did not come to a place of repentance in relation to his own life and culture. However, it is important to note that it was not his 'own repentance' that Esau looked for diligently with tears. Esau never

looked for repentance in relation to his own attitude and behaviour. Rather, he desperately searched for some ground of repentance by his father and, by implication, by God Himself. Rom 9:11-12. That is, he wanted his father to change his mind and to revoke the blessing that he had given to Jacob. His tears demonstrated how much he wanted to inherit the blessing on his own terms.

When Isaac realised that he had blessed Jacob, he declared to Esau, 'I have blessed him - and indeed he shall be blessed.' Gen 27:33. Immediately, Esau began to remonstrate to his father with many tears. He pleaded with his father. We read, 'When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me - me also, O my father!" ' Gen 27:34. Of course, it was not possible for Isaac to revoke the blessing that he had given to Jacob. Even though Jacob initially obtained the blessing by deceiving his father, the blessing of the firstborn did belong to him.

The blessing of the firstborn belonged to Jacob *according to God's sovereign choice*. We know that God said to Rebekah, while the two boys were still in her womb, 'The older shall serve the younger.' Rom 9:12. Furthermore, in his letter to the Romans, Paul declared that, concerning the principle of election, 'the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable'. Rom 11:29. The King James version translates this as 'the gifts and calling of God are *without repentance*'. God does not change His mind in relation to His sovereign choice. Esau had to choose whether he would accept or reject what God had chosen for him.

Isaac clearly stated to Esau that the blessing upon Jacob could not be revoked. Additionally, he was clear that Esau needed to become a servant to Jacob. Isaac said, 'Indeed, *I have made him your master*, and all his brethren I have given to him as servants; with grain and wine I have sustained him. What shall I do now for you, my son?' Gen 27:37. By posing this question, Isaac was communicating to Esau that it was not possible for him, as his father, to establish an alternative pathway. However, Esau did not accept this. He continued to plead for an alternative. We read, 'And Esau said to his father, "Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me - me also, O my father!" And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.' Gen 27:38.

We can see that the tears of Esau were not the manifestation of godly sorrow. His tears were the manifestation of his anguish and bitterness because his father did not meet his carnal expectations. The only person who received any illumination in this interaction was Isaac. He came to

see that his fallen preference toward Esau, and the fact that he had normalised Esau's godless behaviour for so many years, had become a thick veil over his eyes. The veil was removed from his eyes as he turned to the Lord in the middle of this emotional and difficult situation. Isaac's repentance was demonstrated by his willingness to stand in faith to confirm Jacob's blessing and, equally, to withstand Esau's carnal demands.

Notably, Isaac did proceed to give Esau a blessing. In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul declared that 'by faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come'. Heb 11:20. Isaac did not bless Esau in response to his tears. Rather, he blessed him as an action of faith in a manner that was consistent with God's sovereign choice. As we have considered, Esau had also been called by God. He had the opportunity to choose what God had chosen for him. For each brother, the blessing was the prophetic word that defined, and enabled, their obedience. The same word also invoked the judgement of God upon their disobedience.

### The dew of heaven

When Isaac blessed Jacob, he declared, 'Therefore may God give of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you!' Gen 27:28-29. We note that the first dimension of the blessing was 'the promise of the dew of heaven'. If the birthright included the right to inherit the land, the blessing was the rain from heaven that was necessary for the land to be fruitful.

It is significant that the blessing was generally imparted by the father's right hand. Having been raised from the dead as the first Man in the image and likeness of God, Jesus Christ is now seated at the right hand of the Father. Furthermore, He is seated in the middle of His lampstand churches with seven stars in His right hand. Rev 1:12-16. The stars are the presbyteries of His lampstand churches. The word that is proclaimed by a presbytery in the right hand of Christ can be likened to 'the dew of heaven'. Foreshadowing this reality, Moses said to the nation of Israel, 'Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, as raindrops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass.' Deu 32:2.

Notably, the first dimension of the blessing to Esau was the same as the first dimension of the blessing to Jacob. When Isaac blessed Esau,

he began by saying, 'Behold, your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above.' Gen 27:39. The birthright did not belong to Esau. He was not going to receive the promised land as his inheritance. Nevertheless, he could have chosen to stay in the promised land as a servant to Jacob. If he had chosen to serve his brother in the land, the blessing of the rain from heaven would have *enabled* his service.

This brings us to an important point. The word that is proclaimed by the presbytery falls like the rain upon all those who reside in the heavenly Jerusalem on spiritual Mount Zion. The word of present truth is a blessing for every son of God who chooses to obey it. However, for every person who is disobedient, the same word will promote only the growth of thorns and thistles in their lives. The apostle Paul described this by saying, 'The earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.' Heb 6:7-8.

In the case of Esau, the blessing of the dew of heaven upon him, while he remained in the land of Canaan, brought forth only thorns and thistles. Jesus said that the thorns and thistles include the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things. Mar 4:19. When Isaac sent Jacob to Laban's house, he commanded him not to take a wife from among the Canaanites. We know that Esau had already married Canaanite women. In a misguided attempt to regain his father's approval, Esau decided to marry the daughter of Ishmael in addition to his other wives. Gen 28:8-9. The only fruit of this action was the mixture of the descendants of Ishmael with the descendants of Esau.

After Jacob was sent away to Laban's house, Esau remained in the promised land for some years. We know this because all of his children were in the land of Canaan. Gen 36:2-5. This included the son of the daughter of Ishmael whom he did not marry until after Jacob had departed. While he remained in the land, he misappropriated the blessing of 'the dew of heaven' to become rich. He was unwilling to let go of his desire to become stronger than his brother and to rule over him. When his possessions became too great for him to remain as a pilgrim in the land, he decided to depart for a far country.

We read in the book of Genesis, 'Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the persons of his household, his cattle and all his animals, and all his goods which he had gained in the land of Canaan,

and went to a country away from the presence of his brother Jacob'. Gen 36:6. In response to Esau's choice, the Lord gave him Mount Seir to become his inheritance. This region became known as the land of Edom. We are reminded that Esau first received the name Edom when he despised the birthright. Gen 25:30. The land of Edom became his inheritance after he rejected the calling that belonged to his predestination. The land of Edom became the place of his damnation.

With this in view, it is remarkable to consider that the Lord helped Esau and his descendants to possess the land of Edom. When the nation of Israel approached the promised land at the end of the sojourn in the wilderness for forty years, the Lord said to Moses, 'Command the people, saying, "You are about to pass through the territory of your brethren, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. Therefore, watch yourselves carefully. Do not meddle with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as one footstep, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession".' Deu 2:4-5. In the book of Malachi, the Lord referred to the land of Edom as being the 'Territory of Wickedness'. Mal 1:4.

## The rulership

When we consider the blessing upon Jacob, we note that the second dimension of the blessing was the kingship, or authority to rule. God promised that Jacob would receive oversight of his brethren and rulership over the nations. Isaac said to him, 'Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you.' Gen 27:29. In contrast to this, Isaac said to Esau, 'By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother, and it shall come to pass, when you become restless, that you shall break his yoke from your neck.' Gen 27:40.

The blessing upon Jacob and Esau defined God's sovereign choice in relation to rulership. Both brothers had been called to dwell in the land under the dew of heaven. However, in relation to their work, God had chosen Jacob to be the master over his older brother, and He had chosen Esau to serve his younger brother. In God's foreknowledge, the prophetic word to Esau also foretold how he would respond to this calling. Isaac declared that Esau would serve Jacob, but then that he would break the yoke of Jacob from his neck.

When Jacob returned from Laban's house, the Lord wrestled with him before he came back into the promised land. Gen 32:22-32. In this

encounter, Jacob met the Lord face to face. The Lord resisted his carnal propensity to attempt to inherit the promises of God according to the ways of the flesh. When the Lord touched Jacob's hip, he became both weak in his flesh and bankrupt in his spirit. The Lord then changed his name from Jacob, which means 'deceiver, or supplanter', to Israel, which means 'he will rule with God'. Gen 32:28. The change in Jacob's name reflected the change of his nature. He had overcome his carnal propensity to struggle with God and with men.

Having received his new name, Israel walked with a limp to meet his brother Esau. Gen 32:31. He had been joined to the fellowship of Christ's weakness. Importantly, despite his name change, Israel did not exercise any kind of rulership over his brother Esau during his lifetime. Rather, as Israel approached Esau, he bowed himself to the ground *seven times*. Gen 33:3. This was an important interaction from a prophetic perspective. It signified that God's elect will be subjected to the rulership of seven world kingdoms before the overcomers will receive authority to rule with Christ over the nations. Dan 2:34-35,44.

There is little doubt that Esau came to meet Jacob with 400 armed men because he intended to kill Jacob or, alternatively, because he intended to enslave him and claim rulership over him by force. Gen 33:1. Esau was certainly stronger than his younger brother from a natural perspective. Furthermore, his bitterness toward God and his hatred toward his brother were demonically energised. Nevertheless, when Israel bowed seven times before him, the strength of his own hatred, along with all the demonic energy, was immediately disempowered. In an empty and disempowered state before his brother, Esau broke down and wept. Gen 33:4.

We know that Esau's tears were not the fruit of godly sorrow, because they did not lead to repentance. He offered to become Jacob's benefactor, but he did not offer to become his servant. Furthermore, he did not want to follow Jacob to the promised land; rather, he wanted Jacob to follow him to Seir. Gen 33:12. After this meeting, the brothers parted company. It would appear that the only time that they saw each other again was to bury their father, Isaac. Gen 35:29. In relation to Isaac's prophecy concerning the two sons, it was not fulfilled in their lifetimes. Esau never served Jacob, and Jacob never received any kind of rulership over Esau or the nations. In fact, towards the end of Jacob's life, he took his whole family down to Egypt, where his descendants became slaves to the first world kingdom.

## The fulfilment of the prophecy to Jacob

In our present day, Christ's lampstand churches, which comprise the true Israel of God, are still living in subjection to the seventh world kingdom. The bowing of God's elect 'seven times' before the world kingdoms will not be complete until after the Father has taken His seat to judge the world and to establish His kingdom on the earth. The prophet Jeremiah described the opening of the seals as 'the time of Jacob's trouble'. The opening of the seals is the time of birth pains for the virgin bride of Christ, who will bring forth a great multitude of sons of God from every nation. Rev 12:1-2.

The prophet Jeremiah declared, 'Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labour with child? So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labour, and all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day is great. So that none is like it; and it is *the time of Jacob's trouble*, but he shall be saved out of it. "For it shall come to pass in that day," says the Lord of hosts, "that I will break his yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds, foreigners shall no more enslave them. But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them".' Jer 30:6-9.

Jesus Christ is the Son of David. He will receive the throne of David when the Father takes His seat to establish His kingdom on the earth. Luk 1:32. Jesus said to the Laodiceans that the overcoming presbyters will be seated with Him on this throne. Rev 3:21. In the time of the end, the authority of the throne of David will be expressed by the worldwide presbytery that will be seated with Christ on the twenty-four thrones that are around the Father's throne. Rev 4:4. When the sixth seal is opened, the power of the seventh world kingdom will be shattered, and the authority of the throne of David, which belongs to the house of Jacob, will be raised above all nations for a period of at least seven years.

The prophet Isaiah declared concerning the opening of the sixth seal, 'Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow to it. Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths". For out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their

spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.' Isa 2:2-4.

Isaac's prophecy *to Jacob* concerning his rulership over the nations will be fulfilled at the opening of the sixth seal, after God's elect have bowed seven times to the nations. However, we need also to consider the fulfilment of Isaac's prophecy *to Esau*. We are reminded that Isaac said to Esau, 'By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother, and it shall come to pass, when you become restless, that you shall break his yoke from your neck.' Gen 27:40. We note that Esau will serve his brother *before* he becomes restless and then breaks the yoke from his neck. With this sequence in view, the fulfilment of Isaac's prophecy *to Jacob and Esau* will occur after the opening of the sixth seal.

### The history of the Edomites

There was a partial or initial fulfilment of Isaac's prophecy to Esau during the reign of King David. When David ruled over the whole kingdom of Israel, he also subdued the Edomites, and they became his servants. David put 'garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became David's servants. And the Lord preserved David wherever he went.' 2Sa 8:14. Notably, Joab, the commander of David's army, spent six months in the land of Edom and killed every male. Hadad, who was a descendant of the king of Edom, escaped and fled to Egypt. Hadad gained great favour in the sight of the Pharaoh and, as a result, Pharaoh gave to Hadad the sister of the queen of Egypt to be his wife. 1Ki 11:14-22.

This was a notable development in relation to the descendants of Esau. The royal house of Edom became mixed with the royal house of Egypt. Hadad's son was raised in Pharaoh's house among the sons of Pharaoh. We note the similarity to the upbringing of Moses. However, when Moses came of age, he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than enjoying the passing pleasures of sin. He esteemed the reproach of Christ to be greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. Heb 11:24-26. In contrast, the only thing that Hadad esteemed greater than the treasures of Egypt was the opportunity to take revenge against the Israelites. As soon as he heard that David and Joab had died, he returned to his own country to become Solomon's adversary. 1Ki 11:14,21-22.



### *A false inheritance*

The period between the reign of Solomon and the Jewish exile was marked by ongoing tension between the natural descendants of Jacob and the descendants of Esau. King Jehoshaphat managed to exercise some rulership over the Edomites. 1Ki 22:47-50. King Amaziah slaughtered 10 000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. 2Ki 14:1-7. However, the next major development in relation to the descendants of Esau occurred when the Jewish remnant was taken captive by the Babylonians. At that time, the Edomites did not help their brethren. Rather, the Edomites rejoiced in the downfall of the Jewish nation and took advantage of the situation to join the plunder of the city of Jerusalem.

Furthermore, the Edomites migrated into the southern region of Judah. This region became known as Idumea. Notably, this region included Mount Hebron. This is notable because it was the mountainous region where Abraham had dwelt in the land of promise. Gen 35:27. Unlike Mount Seir in the land of Edom, the region of Idumea was not given to the Edomites as an inheritance. It was a false inheritance which they seized by taking advantage of the Jewish exile.

The Lord declared through the prophet Ezekiel, ‘Surely I have spoken in My burning jealousy against the rest of the nations and against all Edom, who gave My land to themselves as a possession, with wholehearted joy and spiteful minds, in order to plunder its open country.’ Eze 36:5. The way in which the Edomites betrayed their brethren and then seized their own portion in the promised land is the historical background for the prophetic book of Obadiah. Oba 1:10-14.

### *The prophecy of Obadiah*

The prophecy of Obadiah was addressed entirely to the Edomites. Obadiah began by declaring that the Lord has sent a messenger among the nations to proclaim the word of judgement upon Edom. Oba 1:1. Obadiah first proclaimed judgement upon the pride and presumption of the Edomites by saying, ‘ “The pride of your heart has deceived you, and you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; you who say in your heart, ‘Who will bring me down to the ground?’ Though you ascend as high as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down”, says the Lord.’ Oba 1:3-4.

The spiritual descendants of Esau include those who presume to live in ‘the clefts of the rock’. The cleft of the rock should be the place where the

Father has hidden sons of God *in the fellowship of the body of Christ*. The spiritual descendants of Esau have rejected their birthright and place in the body of Christ; nevertheless, they still presume to dwell in the cleft of the rock, or even to make their nest *among the stars* by cleaving to the presbytery with deceit or hypocrisy. Jude referred to the pride and presumption of such people by saying, 'These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves.' Jud 1:12. Oba 1:16.

The judgement of the spiritual descendants of Esau in the church will happen when the Father takes His seat and the judgements that belong to the day of the Lord begin. Oba 1:15. Notably, Obadiah prophesied that all of the alliances that the house of Esau had made, for the sake of maintaining their position in the land, would fail. The world would turn against them and cause them to be removed from the land. He declared, 'All the men in your confederacy shall force you to the border; the men at peace with you shall deceive you and prevail against you. Those who eat your bread shall lay a trap for you. No-one is aware of it.' Oba 1:7.

During the opening of the seals, the church will proclaim the gospel of the kingdom to all nations. This will cause the church to be hated by all nations. In that day, the house of Esau will be aligned with the synagogue of Satan and the rulers of the world to persecute the church of the firstborn. The word that will be proclaimed by the 144 000 will be like a fire that will consume the house of Esau like stubble. Oba 1:18. Mal 4:1. Notably, the judgement of God upon the house of Esau will be invoked by the word of the 144 000, but their judgement will be at the hands of the nations. The alliances will be revoked. The world will turn on the house of Esau so that there will be no survivors. Oba 1:15-18.

### The Herodians – the false kings

When we consider the history of the Idumeans, and particularly of the Herodians, we observe that the journey of Esau began by his despising the birthright, and ended with his obtaining *a false kingship* through religious and political alliances. It is important to remember that Esau hated Jacob because of *the blessing*. He wanted to rule. He did not want to serve his younger brother. The reason that the Herodians persecuted Christ, and then the church of the firstborn, is because they did not want to relinquish their claim to kingship. To illustrate this point, let us briefly consider the historical background of the Herodians.

As we have considered in other writings, the Lord re-established the Jewish remnant in the promised land after they had returned from exile in Babylon. However, in the years that followed, the corruption of the Jewish priesthood enabled Satan to regain access to the heavenly places and to empower the Seleucid Empire. Dan 8:10-12. When the transgression of the Jewish priesthood reached fullness, the Lord raised Antiochus Epiphanes as an instrument of judgement in His hand. Dan 8:23-24. He conquered the city of Jerusalem and desecrated the temple. Dan 11:31.

The actions of Antiochus Epiphanes did not bring the Jewish nation to repentance. Rather, it caused the nation to rebel against the Greeks under the leadership of the Maccabees. The Maccabees were a priestly Jewish family who led the rebellion. They were godless, religious zealots. The Maccabees belonged to the house of Jacob, but they lived by the mode of Esau. That is, they lived 'by the sword', and they presumed to claim the kingship in Judea by force. The Maccabees founded what became known as 'the Hasmonean dynasty'.

During this time, the high priests claimed the political leadership of the nation and then ultimately installed themselves as kings. Notably, the Hasmoneans conquered the Idumeans and forced them to be circumcised and to convert to Judaism.

### *Herod the Great*

Herod the Great was an Idumean. He belonged to the house of Esau, but he lived in the land of Palestine as a practising Jew. His father aligned himself with the Romans when they invaded the land of Palestine in 63 BC. Julius Caesar made Herod's father the governor of Judea in 47 BC and gave him Roman citizenship, which also passed to his children. This means that Herod the Great was an Idumean, a practising Jew, and a Roman citizen!

When the Parthians conquered Palestine in 40 BC, Herod the Great fled to Rome. The Roman Senate proclaimed him to be the king of Judea and sent him with a Roman army to make good on his claim. In the same way that Esau had marched to the promised land with his 400 men, Herod the Great marched into the land of Palestine with an entire Roman army. Herod the Great became the unchallenged ruler of Palestine in 37 BC. To solidify his power, he also married a Hasmonean princess, and later, in 20 BC, began a massive building programme to expand the temple precinct. The simple point is that Herod the Great obtained and

maintained his false kingship because of his religious and political alliances.

Herod the Great was immediately troubled when the three wise men arrived in Jerusalem to worship Christ as the King of the Jews. Mat 2:2. He was troubled because his kingship was threatened. It is important to note that Herod the Great did not hate the Jews. His kingship depended upon his maintaining some favour with the Jewish people. Rather, his hatred was directed toward Christ, *the true Firstborn*, because of His legitimate right to the throne of David. In a futile attempt to destroy Christ, Herod the Great killed all the male children in Bethlehem who were two years old and younger. Mat 2:16-18. Soon after that slaughter, he died an extremely painful death under the judgement of God.

### *Herod Antipas*

When Herod the Great died, his realm was divided among his sons. One of his sons, Herod Antipas, became the ruler of the region of Galilee. It is significant that Herod Antipas was the first descendant of Esau to interface directly with the Elijah ministry. We know that John the Baptist came 'in the spirit and power of Elijah'. Luk 1:17. He was the greatest of all the Old Testament prophets. He came to prepare the way for Christ by proclaiming the judgement of God upon the Jewish nation and calling the entire nation to repentance.

The Gospels recorded that John the Baptist rebuked Herod Antipas because he married his brother Philip's wife. Mar 6:18. Her name was Herodias. She hated John the Baptist and wanted to kill him. In contrast to his wife, Herod Antipas feared John and enjoyed listening to his preaching. However, at the behest of his wife, he ultimately placed John the Baptist in prison. On his birthday, Herod gave a great feast for all the important dignitaries in Galilee. After the daughter of Herodias had danced at the feast, he promised to grant her any request. Her mother instructed her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. To preserve his own honour and reputation before the nobles, Herod Antipas reluctantly granted her request. Mar 6:14-29.

When Herod Antipas heard about all the miracles that Jesus performed, he wondered whether John the Baptist had risen from the dead. When it was reported to Jesus that Herod wanted to kill him, Jesus responded by saying, 'Go, tell that fox, "Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected".' Luk 13:32. Jesus called Herod Antipas 'a fox' because the Herodians had risen to

power through their cunning schemes and political alliances. It was false rulership.

The Gospel of Luke recorded that Jesus appeared before Herod Antipas before He was scourged and crucified by Pontius Pilate. Luk 23:6-12. Pilate sent Jesus to Herod when he heard that Jesus was a Galilean and had begun His ministry in Galilee. Pilate was the Governor of Judea, and Herod Antipas was the Tetrarch of Galilee. Even though Jesus was being accused of crimes in Pilate's jurisdiction, He was one of Herod's subjects.

When Jesus appeared before Herod Antipas, it was the first time that he had seen Jesus. Luke recorded, 'Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him.' Luk 23:8. Herod Antipas, as a descendant of Esau, had the opportunity to recognise Jesus as the true Firstborn Son and the Seed of Abraham to whom all the promises of God had been made. In this interaction, Herod should have bowed his knee before Jesus and committed himself to *become His servant*.

In contrast to this, Herod Antipas wanted Jesus to *serve him* by performing a miracle at his behest. He wanted to misappropriate the power of Jesus' ministry to validate his own claim of rulership. Like his 'father', Esau, he wanted the Lord to bless the idol in his heart. It is notable that Jesus did not even speak to Herod. Luk 23:9. Herod had already rejected the message of the Elijah ministry that had been proclaimed to him by John the Baptist. Furthermore, the blood of John the Baptist was on his hands. Jesus had no further message for him.

Herod Antipas was infuriated by the refusal of Jesus to bless his idol and to validate his projection. Rather than bowing his knee before Christ, Herod, along with his men of war, tried to humiliate Christ by treating Him with contempt. Luk 23:11. This event was the full manifestation of the ancient hatred that belongs to the house of Esau and is expressed toward the true Firstborn. Herod's soldiers also arrayed Christ in a gorgeous robe and mocked His kingship before they sent Him back to Pilate to be crucified. Interestingly, the Gospel recorded that Herod and Pilate became friends with each other on that day. Luk 23:12.

When Jesus suffered at the hands of Herod and his soldiers, it was not the fulfilment of Isaac's prophecy concerning Jacob and Esau. That is, Christ did not rule over Herod; and nor did Herod bow his knee to Christ. Rather, Christ *fulfilled* the need for God's elect to *bow seven times* before

Esau in order for them to overcome the world. Furthermore, as the conquering Slave, Jesus laid hold of Herod, and of all the demonic principalities and powers that supported his rulership and energised his hatred, and took them all with Him to the cross as the place of their eternal judgement.

### *Herod Agrippa*

In AD 39, Herod Antipas was accused of conspiracy and was sent into exile. He was replaced by Herod Agrippa who was his nephew and the grandson of Herod the Great. Herod Agrippa ended up ruling over an area that was larger than the kingdom that belonged to his grandfather. He was a friend of the Romans and of the Jews, but he was the enemy of the early church in Jerusalem. This is an important point. As we have already considered, from Herod the Great onwards, the ancient hatred was no longer directed toward the Jews. In the days of Herod Antipas, it was directed toward Christ, the Firstborn. Then, in the days of Herod Agrippa, it was directed toward the church of the firstborn, and particularly toward the twelve apostles.

It was Herod Agrippa who killed the apostle James, the brother of John, with a sword. Act 12:2. When he saw that the death of James pleased the Jews, he also seized Peter and placed him in prison. There is little doubt that he intended to execute Peter as well, once the Feast of Passover had been completed. While Peter was in prison, the church gathered together in houses to pray for him. Secular history recorded that Herod Agrippa died suddenly in AD 44. The book of Acts states that he was struck down by the angel of the Lord because he did not give glory to God. His body was then eaten by worms, and he died.

It was King Agrippa's son, Herod Agrippa II, who questioned the apostle Paul alongside Festus, the governor of Judea. At the end of Paul's defence, after he had recounted his testimony, Agrippa II said to Paul, 'You almost persuade me to become a Christian.' Act 26:28. It is interesting that the apostle Paul, who established the lampstand churches among the Gentile nations, did not particularly suffer at the hands of the Herodians. The death of Herod Agrippa II marked the end of the Herodian rulers. The natural descendants of Esau have not persecuted lampstand churches. Rather, the profile of Esau has been picked up by the Nicolaitans and carried forward among Christ's lampstand churches.

## The fulfilment of the prophecy to Esau

We have considered that Isaac's prophecy to both *Jacob and Esau* will be fulfilled in the time of the end after the opening of the sixth seal. When the sixth seal is opened, the house of the God of Jacob will be established above all the nations. Isa 2:3. The authority of the throne of David will be exercised over all nations by Jesus Christ and the presbytery around the throne of the Father. During this seven-year period, there will be a great multitude from every nation who will rejoice in their birthright as sons of God and in the privilege of serving God, day and night, as a kingdom of priests in His temple. Rev 7:14-15.

However, during the same seven years, there will also be a final manifestation of the spiritual descendants of Esau who will despise their birthright as sons of God and will reject the call to serve God as priests in His temple. This final group of 'Nicolaitans' will *grow restless* under the yoke of Christ and the presbytery around the throne of the Father. They will resent the need to walk in obedience to Christ and the presbytery, because they will desire their own rulership in the kingdom of God. Antichrist will manifest the profile of Esau and the Nicolaitans when he exalts himself above the fellowship of the presbytery.

During the blowing of the trumpets, Antichrist will depart from the temple of God as the leader of a large company of apostate sons of God who have *broken the yoke of Christ* from their necks. This is 'the great falling away'. The apostle Paul has warned us that this falling away must occur before the physical second coming of Christ. 2Th 2:3-4. Antichrist will manifest the ancient hatred of Esau against the church of the firstborn. He will also create the final godless confederacy - including Satan, Abaddon, the false prophet, the former leaders of the seventh world kingdom, the unsaved nations, and the apostate sons of God - to establish his own rulership over the world.





## Chapter 3

# The synagogue of Satan

Jesus addressed the presbytery and church in Smyrna by saying, 'I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are *a synagogue of Satan.*' Rev 2:9. In Chapter 2, we have considered the specific nature of the Nicolaitans, who manifest the profile of Esau and the spirit of antichrist. Rev 2:6,15. In previous writings, we have considered the unique characteristics that belong to the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of Jezebel. Rev 2:14,20. Notably, the term 'synagogue of Satan' is not simply a broad designation that refers to all those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, the doctrine of Balaam, and the doctrine of Jezebel. The synagogue of Satan is also a distinct group with its own characteristics.

In order to understand *the unique profile* of the synagogue of Satan, we will need to consider the nature of this group during the ministry of Jesus, and particularly during the ministry of the apostle Paul when he began to establish lampstand churches. When we understand the historical profile of the synagogue of Satan, we can then identify how it relates to Christ's lampstand churches in our day. The synagogue of Satan could be likened to *a false church* that has its own leaders and adherents. The synagogue of Satan operates in direct opposition to Christ's lampstand churches and often persecutes the messengers of

Christ who proclaim the word of present truth. However, the apostle Paul also referred to *false brethren* within lampstand churches who also belong to the synagogue of Satan. 2Co 11:26. Gal 2:4.

### Say they are Jews and are not

When Jesus addressed the presbytery in Sardis and the presbytery in Philadelphia, He described the synagogue of Satan as being those who 'say they are Jews and are not'. Rev 2:9. Rev 3:9. In the first case, Jesus was referring to ethnic Jews or Jewish proselytes who believed that they were saved because of the rite of circumcision. That is, they believed that they were saved because of a religious position that was based on an 'old gospel'. They were not 'true Jews', because they rejected the circumcision of Christ. Col 2:11. The circumcision of Christ is the seven wounding events that He experienced on His journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. As a son of God, our daily participation in those seven wounding events *saves us* as the other law is circumcised from our heart, and our heart is regenerated and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Tit 3:5.

Paul summarised the distinction between these two different types of circumcision by saying, 'For he is not a Jew who is one *outwardly*, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one *inwardly*, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.' Rom 2:28-29. Likewise, he highlighted the same distinction in his letter to the Philippians. He wrote, 'Beware of the dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of *the false circumcision*; 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 3:2-3. A person who belongs to the synagogue of Satan is not born of God. They do not worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. Joh 4:24. Nor do they rejoice in the cross of Christ. Gal 6:14. Rather, they place their confidence in their own religious history and in their own gospel.

### *The Jewish leaders*

The first example of the synagogue of Satan in the New Testament is the leaders of the Jewish nation who rejected the ministry of John the Baptist. When John the Baptist saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming out to be baptised, he said to them all, 'Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father". For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to

Abraham from these stones.’ Mat 3:7-9. This group of leaders were the natural descendants of Abraham, but they were not the true descendants of Abraham. If they had possessed the faith of Abraham, they would have demonstrated the fruit of repentance. John recognised their false position. He described them as ‘the offspring of vipers’ because they were sons of the Devil.

Jesus also described the scribes and Pharisees as ‘a brood of vipers’ when He pronounced the judgement of hell upon them during His final public sermon in the temple before His crucifixion. Mat 23:33. In the book, *Choosing the culture of Zion*, we considered the eight statements of woe that are recorded in Matthew Chapter 23. Mat 23:13-36. It is helpful to consider each statement of woe, with its accompanying description, because they explain the various characteristics that belong to the leaders of the synagogue of Satan. Notably, the final statement of woe identifies that those who belong to the synagogue of Satan will always oppose and persecute the Lord’s prophets. They may venerate messengers from previous generations, but they will never receive the messengers of Christ who proclaim the word of present truth in their own generation. Mat 23:29-36.

### *Some of the Jewish believers*

The scribes and Pharisees were the leaders of the synagogue of Satan. However, during the ministry of Jesus, the synagogue of Satan had many other loyal adherents. Chapter 8 of the Gospel of John recorded an interaction that Jesus had with a group of believers who demonstrated, by their offended response to His word, that they belonged to the synagogue of Satan. Joh 8:31-59. Notably, this was a group of *believing Jews*. Joh 8:30. They had believed the word of Jesus, but they were unwilling to let go of their religious history and former gospel. This group used the fact that they were the natural descendants of Abraham to justify their refusal to become the disciples of Christ. When they did this, it proved that they were not the true descendants of Abraham.

Jesus exposed the *false position* of this group of Jews by saying, ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this.’ Joh 8:39-40. Having claimed that Abraham was their father, this group then claimed that God was their Father. Again, Jesus exposed their *false position* by saying, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.’ Joh 8:42. In this regard, those who belong to the synagogue of Satan claim to be the true children

of God, but their disobedience to the word of Christ reveals that they are not born of God. Joh 8:47. It demonstrates that, in reality, they are sons of disobedience, who are sons of the Devil. Eph 2:2. Joh 8:43-44.

During the ministry of the apostle Paul, there were two distinct manifestations of the synagogue of Satan. The first manifestation of the synagogue of Satan rose up from the Jewish synagogues and never belonged to the church. It comprised a group of Jewish zealots who vehemently opposed and persecuted Paul from city to city. Paul described this group as 'a thorn in the flesh' and 'a messenger of Satan' who had been sent to buffet him for the purpose of dealing with his pride. 2Co 12:7. The second manifestation of the synagogue of Satan comprised the Judaizers who were *in the church*. Arguably, this group caused Paul far more trouble, because they constantly proclaimed another gospel among the churches. Let us consider this in more detail.

### Paul's letter to the Galatians

The apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians soon after he withstood Peter to his face in the city of Antioch. Gal 2:11-14. Under the pressure of the Judaizers, who belonged to the synagogue of Satan in the Jerusalem church, Peter had defaulted to his carnal propensity and reverted to following *another gospel*. Paul called Peter to repentance by calling him to return to the truth of the gospel of God. Following this discussion, Paul then recorded the substance of his admonition to Peter, in a letter for the Galatians. He did this because the churches in Galatia had come under the same pressure from the synagogue of Satan and had fallen into the same transgression. Gal 3:1.

There has been some argument among scholars regarding the destination and timing of the Galatian letter. However, there is certainly strong support for the view that it was written to the churches in the southern region of Galatia *after* Paul's first missionary journey and *before* the council in Jerusalem. This means that it was probably written around 48-49 AD. In relation to the timing of the letter, it is certainly notable that Paul did not mention the decision of the Jerusalem council. The early date is significant, because it means that it was Paul's first letter! It was his first and foremost statement on the gospel of sonship! It contains a clear and concise summary of the gospel that he preached in every place throughout his ministry. Gal 1:8. It is helpful to consider the letter to the Romans, which Paul wrote much later in his ministry, as an expansion of his letter to the Galatians.

In this chapter, we will be referring to the history that was recorded by Luke in the book of Acts, and in Paul's letter to the Galatians, which contains his own testimony and personal reflections. Before we continue, it will be helpful to identify *the simple harmony* between the book of Acts and the book of Galatians. The book of Acts recorded that Paul visited Jerusalem *two times* before the council in Jerusalem. The *first visit* to Jerusalem was recorded in Acts Chapter 9. Act 9:26-30. Depending on the date of Paul's conversion, it may have been as early as 35-36 AD. Paul reflected on that visit in Galatians Chapter 1. Gal 1:18-24. The beginning of his *second visit* to Jerusalem was recorded in Acts Chapter 11, and the end of the *second visit* was recorded in Acts Chapter 12. Act 11:28-30. Act 12:25. The second visit may have been around 46-47 AD. Paul reflected on that visit in Galatians Chapter 2. Gal 2:1-10.

After his second visit to Jerusalem, Paul returned to Antioch and then travelled with Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Chapters 13 and 14 of the book of Acts contain a detailed account of their first missionary journey to the southern region of Galatia. The first missionary journey has been dated around 47-48 AD. Peter's visit to Antioch was not recorded in the book of Acts, but Luke did record the visit of the Judaizers to Antioch. Act 15:1. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul highlighted that Peter arrived before the Judaizers. Gal 2:12. Paul's confrontation with Peter and the Judaizers happened just before he wrote the letter to the Galatian churches and then travelled to Jerusalem for the council. The council was Paul's *third visit* to Jerusalem and was recorded in Acts Chapter 15. The Jerusalem council has been dated as occurring as early as AD 48 or as late as AD 50. It happened before Paul's second missionary journey.

### Paul's first visit to Jerusalem

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul proclaimed that he had received the gospel of God through direct revelation from Jesus Christ. He had not learned it in a theological school, nor received it from man. Gal 1:11-12. Supporting this point, Paul testified that after he was born as a son of God, he did not immediately go up to Jerusalem to confer with flesh and blood. Gal 1:15-17. Rather, he began to preach to his countrymen in the Jewish synagogues in Damascus. Act 9:19-22. When the Jews tried to kill him, he escaped from Damascus to Arabia, and then returned to Damascus. Act 9:23-25. Gal 1:17. It was three years after his new birth that he made his first visit to Jerusalem. Gal 1:18.

The book of Acts recorded that Paul was unable to join the disciples in Jerusalem because they were afraid of him. It was Barnabas who brought

him to see the apostles. Act 9:27. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul testified that the only apostles he met were Peter and James. Gal 1:18-19. Significantly, he stayed with Peter for fifteen days. This was the beginning of Paul's friendship with Peter. It is remarkable that Peter was willing to extend such hospitality to a man who had so vehemently persecuted the church three years earlier. Paul recounted this level of personal detail in his letter to the Galatians as part of his own testimony and as the background to his fellowship and friendship with Peter.

The Lord warned Paul that the inhabitants of Jerusalem would not receive his testimony. Act 22:17-21. When some of the Hellenists tried to kill Paul in Jerusalem, the brethren took him to Caesarea and then sent him to Tarsus. Act 9:30. Interestingly, not long after this, Peter began to travel from Jerusalem for the purpose of ministering to the saints in other parts of the country. While he was in Joppa, staying in the house of Simon, who was a tanner, he received the prophetic vision regarding the sheet that held unclean animals. Referring to the Gentiles, Jesus Christ said to him from heaven, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.' Act 10:15. The Lord then opened the door to the Gentiles through the ministry of Peter to the household of Cornelius, who was a Roman soldier in the city of Caesarea. Act 10.

In other publications, we have considered the way in which the apostle Peter travelled to the household of Cornelius as part of the Elijah ministry. Significantly, when Peter returned to Jerusalem, he was immediately confronted by the Jews in the church. They accused him by saying, 'You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!' Act 11:3. Peter responded to their accusation by recounting his testimony regarding the prophetic vision and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the household of Cornelius. When they heard Peter's testimony, the Jews became silent and glorified God, saying, 'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.' Act 11:18.

### **The beginning of the church in Antioch**

The church in Antioch began in a house-to-house mode of evangelism following the dispersion that was caused by the martyrdom of Stephen. We read in the book of Acts that believers from Jerusalem travelled all the way to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Act 11:19. Most of the believers who travelled from Jerusalem shared the word among only their fellow Jews. However, some of them, who were from Cyprus and Cyrene, came to Antioch and also shared the word among the Gentiles. Act 11:20. The hand of the Lord was with them and many people believed and turned to the Lord. Act 11:21. Perhaps the households in Antioch sent a

message to the apostles in Jerusalem to request some oversight of their rapidly growing congregation.

When the news reached the church in Jerusalem, the apostles decided to send Barnabas to Antioch. Act 11:22. Having arrived in Antioch, Barnabas immediately witnessed the grace of God that was among the congregation in fellowship from house to house. He encouraged the households that they should continue, with purpose of heart, to walk with the Lord in that fellowship. Act 11:23. At the same time, as a man who was full of the Holy Spirit and faith, Barnabas recognised that he needed to bring Paul to Antioch to proclaim the word as a messenger to this new congregation. Act 11:25. When Paul arrived in Antioch, he established a public gathering as well as fellowship from house to house. We know that the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Act 11:26.

As an aside, it is certainly possible that the believers from Cyrene who first came to Antioch included Simon, who had carried the cross of Jesus and then witnessed His crucifixion. Mat 27:32. The household of Simon of Cyrene may have been one of the firstfruits families who established the church in Antioch and then cared for Paul when he first came to proclaim the word in that city. We know that Simon's two sons, Alexander and Rufus, became well known among the churches. Mar 15:21. Most notably, when Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, he said, 'Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.' Rom 16:13. If this is the same Rufus, as many suggest, it shows that this godly woman had expressed motherly care toward Paul at some stage during his ministry.

### Paul's second visit to Jerusalem

Returning to Paul's letter to the Galatians, we note that he also testified about a second journey to Jerusalem which happened fourteen years after his conversion. Gal 2:1. It is important that we do not confuse Paul's second visit to Jerusalem with the Jerusalem council which is recorded in the book of Acts Chapter 15. We note in the second chapter of the book of Galatians that Paul's second visit to Jerusalem happened *before* he rebuked Peter to his face. Gal 2:11. Further to this, Paul confronted Peter before the Jerusalem council. In fact, it was the dispute between Paul and the Judaizers in Antioch that precipitated the Jerusalem council. As we have already noted, the book of Acts clearly nominated that the Jerusalem council was during Paul's *third* visit to Jerusalem.

While the reason for the convening of the council was to resolve a dispute with the Judaizers, Paul testified that his *second* visit to Jerusalem was *because of a revelation*. In the first case, Paul's second visit to Jerusalem

was precipitated by the prophecy of Agabus concerning a great famine. In response to this prophecy, the church in Antioch decided to raise an offering for their brethren in Judea and to send the offering to Jerusalem with Paul and Barnabas. Act 11:28-30. The book of Acts tells us that this famine took place during the reign of Claudius. Historians suggest that this famine in Judea was around 46-47 AD. Supporting the point that Paul's second visit was in conjunction with this famine, we note that the apostles specifically asked him to remember the poor in Jerusalem. Gal 2:10.

When Paul said that he travelled to Jerusalem 'because of a revelation', he may have been referring to the prophecy of Agabus. That was certainly a profound and very specific prophecy that precipitated the practical purpose of the visit. However, in addition, Paul may have also been referring to a further revelation that he had received from the Lord while he was in Antioch. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote about the surpassing greatness of the revelations that he had received. 2Co 12:7. Speaking about himself in the third person, he wrote, 'I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago - whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows - such a one was caught up to the third heaven'. 2Co 12:2.

We know that Paul's second letter to the Corinthians was written from Macedonia on his third missionary journey. It may have been written around 56 AD. If Paul had received the revelation fourteen years prior to that letter, it means that he received it well before his second visit to Jerusalem. In this regard, Paul probably travelled to Jerusalem with a twofold purpose in view. From a practical purpose, he was delivering the offering to the church in Jerusalem. However, his greater priority was to discuss the word with the apostles. He described the purpose of his visit in his letter to the Galatians by saying, 'I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but *privately* to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.' Gal 2:2.

Unlike the way in which he spoke to the whole church *publicly* on his third visit to Jerusalem, on his second visit, Paul met *privately* with only the apostles. Even though he had received his revelation of the gospel of God directly from Christ, Paul still wanted to submit his gospel and ministry in a fellowship among the apostles in Jerusalem. The apostles readily bore witness to Paul's ministry grace and his mandate as a messenger to the Gentiles. Paul wrote, 'When James, Cephas [Peter], and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we



should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised'. Gal 2:9. This was another major point of fellowship between Peter and Paul.

Notably, while Paul was in Jerusalem to deliver the offering to the church, and for fellowship with the apostles, he encountered *false brethren* who belonged to the synagogue of Satan. These false brethren were part of a faction of Judaizers within the church in Jerusalem. They believed that physical circumcision according to the Law of Moses was necessary for salvation. This group of Judaizers did not openly confront Paul on his second visit. Rather, they came in by stealth among his companions *to secretly spy out* their liberty in Jesus Christ, and to try to bring them into bondage to their other, Law-based, gospel. Gal 2:4. Paul testified to the Galatians, 'We did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.' Gal 2:5.

### Paul's first missionary journey

Following the return of Paul and Barnabas from Jerusalem, they continued to minister in Antioch as part of an apostolic administration which comprised prophets and teachers. Act 13:1. During a season of prayer and fasting, the Holy Spirit said to this group of men, 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Act 13:2. Having received this command from the Holy Spirit, the men fasted, prayed, and then laid hands on Paul and Barnabas to send them on their way. This was the beginning of Paul's first missionary journey to the Gentiles. Significantly, it was during this first missionary journey that Paul established all of the churches in the southern region of Galatia.

On this first journey, Paul proclaimed the gospel of God that he had received directly from Christ, which he had also laid down in fellowship with the apostles in Jerusalem. Having refused to compromise the truth of the gospel in relation to the Judaizers, we note that Paul's ministry was effective in every place. In the first case, this was demonstrated by the polarising impact that his ministry had in each city. Notably, because Paul had refused to incorporate the foundation of the 'old gospel' that was promoted by the Judaizers, into the *true gospel*, his word was offensive to every hearer who was not willing to let go of the old foundation.

In relation to Paul's ministry, this crisis was particularly relevant for the Jewish dispersion and the Jewish proselytes. In each city, Paul began his ministry in the Jewish synagogue. Act 13:5,14. Act 14:1. It is important to understand the difference between the Jewish synagogues and the synagogue of Satan. After the Jews returned from exile in Babylon,

the synagogues should have been a place of worship and the context for the teaching priests to publicly proclaim the word of God in each city to the families who were walking in the faith of Abraham. Mal 2:7.

According to the vision of the prophet Zechariah, the *lamp light* of the teaching priests should have been manifest in each synagogue as the flowers on the Jewish lampstand. Zec 4.

However, we know that after the ministry of Ezra, the role of the teaching priest was progressively lost in the nation. During the reign of the Greek world kingdom, and particularly under the Seleucid Empire, the Jewish nation was significantly impacted by Greek philosophy and education. Furthermore, after the Maccabean revolt, the sect of the Pharisees emerged and progressively gained power and control over the Jewish synagogues. Many of the scribes and Pharisees became a synagogue of Satan *within* the Jewish synagogues. As we have considered, they were revealed to be a synagogue of Satan when they rejected the ministry of John the Baptist and then the ministry of Jesus Christ.

It was necessary for Paul to begin his ministry in the Jewish synagogue in each place in order to give every family the opportunity to hear the gospel of God. Unsurprisingly, the truth of the gospel polarised the members of the synagogue in each place. Some of the Jews believed the gospel of sonship and repented from their dead works. However, many of the Jews rejected the gospel and then became *a synagogue of Satan* that opposed and persecuted Paul. They persecuted Paul because the truth of the gospel was an offence to them. When Paul preached that salvation is possible only through fellowship in the dying and living of Christ, it completely undermined their gospel that salvation was through circumcision.

In addition to the need to defend a religious position, another common motivation for the synagogue of Satan is *envy*. We recall that the chief priests, because of envy, delivered Jesus to Pilate to be crucified. Mar 15:10. Likewise, it was envy that motivated the Jews to oppose Paul in Psidian Antioch. After Paul had preached the gospel of God in the Jewish synagogue, some of the Jews followed him, and many of the Gentiles asked him to preach again the following week. We read in the book of Acts, 'On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were *filled with envy*; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul'. Act 13:44-45.

When their word was rejected by the Jews, Paul and Barnabas declared, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first;

but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.’ Act 13:46. This was a bold declaration with a clear implication. Paul was clearly saying to all of the Jews in the synagogue that their salvation was dependent upon their willingness to receive his gospel. Unless they responded to his gospel with repentance and faith, they were damned, and destined to be cast into the lake of fire because they had rejected his word. It was the clear implication of this statement which caused the greatest offence to the synagogue of Satan in Psidian Antioch.

The Jews then raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas by stirring up the prominent women and the chief men in the city. Act 13:50. Paul and Barnabas had come to the city in the mode of ‘the seventy-two’ to look for worthy houses. However, when they were expelled from the city, they shook the dust off their feet, also in the mode of ‘the seventy-two’, and travelled to the next city. Act 13:51. In the city of Iconium, Paul and Barnabas again began their ministry in the Jewish synagogue. Act 14:1. On this occasion, a multitude of Jews and Greeks believed. However, the *unbelieving* Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. Act 14:2. The opposition of the synagogue of Satan in Iconium caused the entire city to be divided. Act 14:4. When a group of Gentiles and Jews came to abuse and stone them, Paul and Barnabas fled to the next city. Act 14:5-6.

In the city of Lystra, Paul healed a man who had been a cripple from his mother’s womb and had never been able to walk. Act 14:8-18. Soon after this event, the synagogue of Satan from Psidian Antioch and Iconium arrived in the city. Having turned the people against Paul, they stoned him and then dragged him out of the city. Act 14:19. The crowd assumed that Paul was dead. However, when the disciples had gathered around his crushed and motionless body, he suddenly stood up again and returned to the city! Act 14:20. When God raised him up by the Holy Spirit, it was a remarkable manifestation of the resurrection life of Christ in Paul’s mortality. His physical body bore ‘the marks of the Lord Jesus’ as the outcome of this event. Gal 6:17. At the same time, the manifestation of resurrection life in Paul’s physical body was *an irrefutable sign* of the Son of Man to the entire city.

The next day Paul and Barnabas travelled to Derbe. They preached the gospel in Derbe and made many disciples. Act 14:20-21. We do not know how long they stayed in Derbe but, after some time, they decided to return to Lystra, Iconium, and Psidian Antioch. On their return journey, they strengthened the disciples and encouraged them to ‘continue in the faith’. Act 14:22. When Paul spoke of ‘the faith’, he was referring to the

faith of Jesus Christ. Paul's own testimony was, 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' Gal 2:20. He was encouraging all the Galatian believers to the same testimony.

Having looked for 'worthy' houses on their initial journey from Antioch, to Iconium, to Lystra, Paul and Barnabas looked for 'firstfruits' houses on their return journey through those same cities. A worthy house receives the word from messengers and embraces the fellowship of the word in their own home, with repentance and faith. A worthy house that has matured to become a firstfruits house is able also to promote and multiply that same fellowship, through testimony, from house to house in the church. Working from this foundation of firstfruits, Paul and Barnabas were able to appoint elders in each congregation. Act 14:23. This was the beginning of one presbytery for a lampstand church in the Galatian region.

### The Judaizers in Antioch

Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, 'where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed'. Act 14:26. They gathered the whole church together and testified about the work that God had done and how He had opened 'a door of faith' to the Gentiles. We read in the book of Acts that they then 'stayed a long time with the disciples' in Antioch. Act 14:28. At some point during this 'long time', the apostle Peter also travelled to Antioch to visit Paul and the rest of the church. No doubt, Peter rejoiced when he heard the testimony of Paul and Barnabas regarding the fruit of their first missionary journey in the Galatian region.

Some time later, a group of Judaizers also travelled from the church in Jerusalem to Antioch. The arrival of this group was recorded in the book of Acts and in Paul's letter to the Galatians. We read in the book of Acts, 'And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved".' Act 15:1. We recall that Paul had already contended with this group of Judaizers on his second visit to Jerusalem to deliver the offering from the church in Antioch. Notably, this group came from *within the church* in Jerusalem, and they began to teach their false doctrine within the church in Antioch. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul was even more specific. This group of Judaizers claimed to have come from James! Gal 2:12.

In this regard, we note that there was a distinction between this group of *Judaizers* from the church in Jerusalem, and the *unbelieving Jews* from the synagogues who had persecuted Paul in the region of Galatia. The unbelieving Jews in Galatia opposed and persecuted Paul because they were clear that his gospel was incompatible with their gospel. In contrast to this, the *Judaizers* from Jerusalem believed that a person could be a Law-keeping Jew *and* a Christian. In this regard, they believed that Paul's gospel was built on the foundation of their Law-based gospel. The *Judaizers* considered themselves to be followers of Jesus but, at the same time, they believed that they were saved because they were circumcised according to the Law.

The *Judaizers* viewed themselves to be Jews *first* and Christians *second*. They considered their Jewish history, culture, and family to be more important than obedience to Christ, and particularly more important than obedience to the word of present truth that was proclaimed by the apostle Paul. Because the *Judaizers* believed that they were saved by circumcision, as prescribed by the Law, they did not view obedience to Paul's gospel to be necessary for salvation. They considered themselves to be the custodians of the true gospel with a clear set of requirements to get to heaven. On this basis, they reserved the right to accept or reject the word of Paul in relation to their pre-existing religious framework.

The *Judaizers* did not have a problem with the Gentiles becoming Christians. However, they believed that the Gentiles needed to become Jewish proselytes *first* and Christians *second*, because that was their own view of the gospel. The *Judaizers* preached circumcision to the Gentiles as an expression of their loyalty to their religious heritage and to their extended Jewish families. If the Gentiles did not accept the need for circumcision, it was a threat to the *Judaizers*, because it undermined the validity of their own salvation. Furthermore, if circumcision was no longer deemed to be the basis of salvation, it also condemned all of their Law-keeping friends and family.

The *Judaizers* proclaimed the need for circumcision because they were fearful of alienation from their Jewish friends, family, and community. They were also fearful of suffering persecution at the hands of the Jewish leaders. We know that Paul suffered severe persecution, and even was stoned in the city of Lystra, because the cross of Christ was a stumbling stone and a rock of offence to the Jews. Gal 5:11. Act 14:19. 1Co 1:23. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul clearly identified the *fear-based motivation* of the *Judaizers* by saying, 'Those who desire you

to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.' Gal 6:12.

The church in Antioch was a multi-cultural church which comprised members of the Jewish dispersion, Jewish proselytes, and uncircumcised Gentiles. The apostle Paul had established the church on the sure foundation of obedience to Jesus Christ. He clearly proclaimed, 'In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but *a new creation*. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.' Gal 6:15-16. Paul understood that the true Israel of God had been brought forth from the wellsprings of Judah, through the offering of Christ on the cross, as a completely new nation. Isa 48:1. Furthermore, he knew that this new nation was populated only by *sons of God!*

### **Peter's transgression in Antioch**

As sons of God who belonged to the true Israel of God, the Jews and Gentiles in Antioch freely ate together in the fellowship of the *agape* meal. Significantly, when the apostle Peter visited Antioch, after Paul and Barnabas had returned from their first missionary journey, he, also, freely ate with the Gentiles. Gal 2:12. We recall that the Lord had already spoken directly to Peter to deliver him from his prejudice, during his prophetic vision on the rooftop of Simon the tanner's house in Joppa. Act 10:9-16. When Peter visited the house of Cornelius, in obedience to Christ, he testified, 'You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.' Act 10:28.

Peter already possessed a clear testimony on this point. However, Paul wrote to the Galatians, 'Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men [the Judaizers] came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, *fearing those who were of the circumcision*'. Gal 2:11-12. Remarkably, Peter withdrew himself from the fellowship of the *agape* meal with the Gentiles because he feared the Judaizers more than he feared God. Gal 1:10. Under the pressure of their false gospel, he became fearful of losing his reputation among the Jewish community. In this regard, he had regressed to the very same fear that had caused him to deny Jesus three times in the court of Caiaphas.

Peter's denials in the court of Caiaphas revealed that his fear of losing his reputation among the Jewish community was an even stronger

motivation in his heart than was his desire to maintain his religious projection as a disciple of Christ. Luk 22:54-62. When Satan sifted Peter's motivations, the pressure of the situation revealed that he was still in bondage to the fear of death, as much as it proved the inadequacy of his religious projection. Significantly, when Jesus looked at him, Peter was delivered from his self-righteousness *and* from his fear of death. The eyes of Christ revealed the wrath of God upon Peter's iniquity as a self-righteous zealot, but they also revealed the jealous love of God for his sanctification as a son of God. It was the revelation of the perfect love of God for Peter's sonship that delivered him from his fear. 1Jn 4:18.

Following this deliverance in the court of Caiaphas, we know that Peter was born as a son of God on the day of Christ's resurrection and then filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Joh 20:22. Act 2:1-4. Beginning with the Pentecost sermon, he certainly had an effective ministry as an apostle of Christ, and as one of the foundation stones of the heavenly Jerusalem. The Lord performed many miracles through Peter's ministry, including healing the lame man at the gate of the temple, and raising a woman from the dead in Joppa. Act 3:1-10. Act 9:36-43. Peter suffered much persecution and was miraculously delivered from prison by the Angel of the Lord - on two separate occasions! Act 5:17-20. Act 12:6-19. Most notably, as we have already considered, the Lord opened the door to the Gentiles through Peter's ministry to the household of Cornelius. Act 10.

Despite Peter's successful ministry, the motivation of his heart was sifted again by the synagogue of Satan in Antioch in the same way that it had been sifted by Satan in the court of Caiaphas. Remarkably, under the pressure of the Judaizers in Antioch, Peter failed to stand firm in his freedom as a son of God. He became entangled again with a yoke of bondage to fear and he then defaulted to his former gospel. Gal 5:1. Paul rightly identified that Peter stood condemned before Christ. Gal 2:11. When he defaulted in this manner, all of his previous ministry, and even his past testimony, had no capacity to save him. In fact, his condemnation was *greater* in Antioch than it had been in the court of Caiaphas.

Why was it greater? In the court of Caiaphas, Peter was converted from walking after the flesh to walking after the Spirit for the first time. In Antioch, as a son of God, who had already been set free by Christ, he accountably chose *to turn back* to walking after the flesh. Moreover, Peter's condemnation was greater in Antioch because of his legitimate ministry profile as an apostle of Christ and a shepherd in the early church. When he reverted to his former gospel, it caused the rest of the

Jews in Antioch to also regress to the same former gospel. In this manner, Peter was also guilty of causing 'little ones' to stumble. Paul noted, 'And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.' Gal 2:13.

Paul publicly withstood Peter to his face, because his actions had impacted the entire congregation. Paul was evidently motivated by the fear of God, not by the fear of men. When Paul rebuked Peter 'in the presence of all', he addressed at least three issues at once. First, motivated by sincere love for his friend, he addressed Peter's hypocrisy for the purpose of recovering him from the snare of the Devil, to his sanctification as a son of God and an apostle of Christ. Gal 6:1. Second, he addressed hypocrisy among all of the Jews, including Barnabas, for the sake of their recovery. Third, Paul stood firm in his own sanctification as a messenger and an overseer of the church who was accountable to proclaim the truth and to guard the fellowship of the *agape* meal in Antioch.

### ○ foolish Galatians

For the apostle Peter, this was *the second time* during his life and ministry that he had definitively met the eyes of Christ, which are like a flame of fire. Rev 1:14. We know that he did humble himself, and repented again in response to Paul's rebuke. Around the same time, Paul evidently received a message from the churches in Galatia informing him that they had been confronted by the same false gospel that was promoted by the Judaizers, and that many of the believers also had reverted to walking after the flesh. It is amazing that this may have happened within one year of Paul's departure from Galatia after his first missionary journey. Paul began his letter to them by saying, 'I marvel that *you are turning away so soon* from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel'. Gal 1:6.

In response to this troubling news from Galatia, Paul immediately wrote to all of the churches in that region and rebuked them in the same way that he had rebuked Peter, Barnabas, and the church in Antioch. As we have already noted, the content of his public rebuke and admonition to Peter became the content of his letter to the Galatians. Having recounted the way in which he withstood Peter to his face, Paul then continued, 'O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?' Gal 3:1. Paul had proclaimed the gospel of God to the Galatians, and he had also clearly exemplified the truth of the gospel by



his own testimony. His ministry had been a manifestation of the resurrection life of Christ in his own mortal body.

Paul summarised his own testimony by saying, 'For I through the Law am dead to the Law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.' Gal 2:19-20 KJV. Paul was dead to the Law as 'the chief of sinners' because the Law had crucified him with Christ. We note that the judgement of the Law has no power over a dead person! However, at the same time, Paul rejoiced that he also lived to God *as a son of God*. He lived because the life of Christ had become his life when he was born again of the incorruptible seed of Christ's life, by the Holy Spirit, as a son of God. 1Pe 1:23. Gal 4:6.

Furthermore, Paul rejoiced that he lived as a son of God by *the faith of the Son of God*. It was not his own faith. It was the faith of the Son of God, which He had specifically authored and finished for Paul through His offering journey. Heb 12:2. This faith enabled Paul to present his physical body to God, each day, to live as a son of God. As Paul embraced his daily participation in Christ's offering and sufferings, his heart was being regenerated, and he was learning the obedience that Christ had already learned for him. Heb 5:8-9. The righteousness of God was progressively revealed in his physical body as he fulfilled the works of his sonship by the grace of Christ's resurrection life. Rom 1:17. Paul concluded the summary of his testimony by saying, 'I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died in vain.' Gal 2:21.

## The council in Jerusalem

Some time after Peter was recovered by Paul, he travelled back to Jerusalem, perhaps to share his testimony of repentance with the brethren. We know that Barnabas also needed to be recovered by Paul. Gal 2:13. He was then able to join Paul in contending with the Judaizers in Antioch. We read in the book of Acts, 'Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them [the Judaizers], they [the brethren in Antioch] determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question'. Act 15:2. As we have already discussed, Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians *before* he travelled to Jerusalem. Considering the nature of the issue in Galatia regarding circumcision, Paul would have *almost certainly* mentioned the outcome of the council in his letter to the Galatians if it had already taken place.

When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem, they shared their testimony with the entire church, including the apostles and elders. Act 15:4. During a public meeting, they were confronted by some brethren who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees within the church in Jerusalem. These brethren belonged to the synagogue of Satan in the church, and they promoted the same false gospel as had the Judaizers who had travelled to Antioch. They declared that it was necessary to circumcise the Gentiles who had responded to Paul's gospel and to command them to keep the Law of Moses. Act 15:5. It is interesting that Paul and Barnabas did not publicly contend with this group in Jerusalem. Rather, all of the apostles and elders decided to come together as a presbytery to specifically consider the matter. Act 15:6.

After there had been much debate in the presbytery, the apostle Peter stood up and declared, 'Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made *no distinction between us and them*, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ *we shall be saved in the same manner as they.*' Act 15:7-11. This bold confession of faith was the fruit of Peter's repentance. Standing in the full authority of his name, he unreservedly proclaimed the same gospel as the apostle Paul proclaimed.

It was Peter's confession of faith that silenced the dispute and closed the mouth of the synagogue of Satan within the church at that time. Peter's word also opened the door for Paul and Barnabas to continue to share their testimony to the church. We read, 'Then all the multitude *kept silent* and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles'. Act 15:12. The apostle Peter did not deviate from his confession of faith during the remainder of his earthly pilgrimage as a son of God. Prior to the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, Peter led a large group of sons of God from Jerusalem to the region of Babylon. He wrote his two letters from Babylon to the Jews and Gentiles who possessed 'like precious faith' in Christ's lampstand churches. 1Pe 1:1. 1Pe 5:13. 2Pe 1:1.

### The exhortation to Smyrna

When the apostle John saw Jesus Christ as the glorified Son of Man seated at the right hand of God, in the middle of His lampstand churches,

he fell at His feet like a dead man. Jesus Christ laid His right hand on John and then declared, 'Do not be afraid, I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.' Rev 1:17-18. Significantly, Jesus Christ also addressed the presbytery and the church in Smyrna as 'the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life'. Rev 2:8. Meeting Christ and knowing Him as the One who 'was dead and came to life' is foundational to a person who possesses the testimony, 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me'. Gal 2:20.

Jesus addressed the presbytery in Smyrna in this way because they were about to suffer at the hands of the synagogue of Satan. Speaking as the Author and Finisher of their faith, and as their exceedingly great Reward, Jesus said to them, 'Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.' Rev 2:10. It is possible that the reference to the 'ten days' of tribulation had a particular historical fulfilment for this presbytery. However, more broadly, we note that 'ten' is the number of affliction and tribulation. Every presbytery and lampstand church that is walking in the light of present truth will suffer some degree of persecution at the hands of the synagogue of Satan in their own generation.

This brings us to an important point. The Lord has been progressively restoring His church through times and seasons of refreshing and revival for many years. Act 3:19. We are fast approaching the time when the Father will take His seat to initiate the period of 'the restoration of all things', which will precede the physical second coming of Christ. Act 3:21. Notably, as soon as leaders and believers cease from responding to the word of present truth with repentance and faith, they are no longer walking on the pathway of restoration to the heights of Zion. Wherever they stop along the way, they foolishly believe that they have arrived at a gospel that is sufficient to get them to heaven. Rather than pressing on to know the Lord, they then turn their attention to reinforcing and defending their old gospel.

One of the lessons of church history is that each new movement that has emerged from a season of revival has invariably stalled, and then regressed to become an opposer of the movement that has emerged from the next season of revival. Each new phase of restoration has always been perceived to be a threat to the religious foundation and validity of the previous movement. During the church age, there have been many examples of this principle which mirror the way in which the unbelieving

## THE OVERCOMING CHURCH

Jews persecuted the early Christian church. For this reason, there have been many iterations and variations of the synagogue of Satan that have come from the church to oppose and persecute the messengers of Christ who proclaim the word of present truth. Christ has called every messenger and, indeed, every son of God, to endure tribulation and persecution for the sake of His name. Act 14:22. 1Pe 4:12-14.

Jesus said to the presbytery in Smyrna, 'Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.' Rev 2:10. The crown of life is the reward, or prize, of Christ's resurrection life that is given to us when we continue to walk in the fellowship of Christ's death. James said, 'Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive *the crown of life* which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.' Jas 1:12. The apostle Paul identified the goal of his Christian pilgrimage by saying, '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 3:10-11. In this verse, we know that Paul was specifically referring to the manifestation of *exanastasis*, which is the resurrection life of Christ in our mortal body.

When we consider the letter to the presbytery in Philadelphia, we note that they had already overcome the opposition and persecution of the synagogue of Satan in the fellowship of Christ's death. Jesus said to them, 'Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie - indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.' Rev 3:9. Furthermore, the presbytery in Philadelphia had persevered in the fellowship of Christ's death to receive the crown of life. We know this because Jesus said to them, 'Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, *that no-one may take your crown.*' Rev 3:11. Significantly, this is the same crown that will be given to the 144 000 to reveal to the world at the opening of the first seal. Rev 6:2.

## Chapter 4

# The admonition to the church in Sardis

### The seven Spirits of God and seven stars

Jesus addressed the presbytery and lampstand church in Sardis as the One who 'has the seven Spirits of God *and* the seven stars'. Rev 3:1. There is evidently a relationship between the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars in the right hand of Christ. Jesus Christ possesses the seven Spirits of God as the Son of David and the glorified Son of Man. The prophet Isaiah declared, 'Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.' Isa 11:1-2.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus Christ was strengthened with the capacity of Eternal Spirit, by the Holy Spirit, to offer Himself to God. Heb 9:14. Eternal Spirit is the full capacity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to *multiply life* by offering in the fellowship of Yahweh. In relation to the fulfilment of Their covenant purpose to make man in Their image and likeness, the Father and the Son have sanctified the Holy Spirit to be the One who enables all offering by the power of Eternal Spirit. Having been strengthened by the capacity of Eternal Spirit, Christ then endured

*seven wounding events* on His offering journey from Gethsemane to the cross.

The capacity of Eternal Spirit, which belongs to the fellowship of Yahweh before the foundation of the world, was multiplied through the seven wounding events of Christ's offering to be the full manifestation of the seven Spirits of God to the world. The apostle Paul declared that the crucifixion of Christ was the full revelation of the wisdom and power of God. 1Co 1:24. Expanding this point, the seven wounding events of Christ reveal the fullness of the Spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of understanding, the spirit of counsel, the spirit of strength, the spirit of knowledge, and the spirit of the fear of the Lord. Isa 11:1-2.

Jesus Christ is 'the Man whose name is Branch'. Zec 3:8. Zec 6:12. He is the embodiment of the lampstand in the true temple. We could liken each wounding event that He suffered from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross to *the lighting of a lamp*. At the conclusion of His offering journey, all seven lamps were alight and shining brightly. Christ was revealed to be the Light of the world, manifesting the light of the seven Spirits of God. Joh 8:12. As the glorified Son of Man, Christ is now seated at the right hand of God in the middle of His lampstand churches. He has seven stars in His right hand. The seven stars are the presbyteries of His lampstand churches.

Jesus addressed the presbytery in Sardis as the One who has the seven Spirits of God *and* the seven stars, because each presbytery has been called to manifest the light of the seven Spirits of God to a lampstand church. This is possible only when a presbytery has been restored to the fellowship of first love which belongs to the heights of Zion. Rev 2:5. The fellowship of first love is the fellowship of Yahweh that was fully revealed, in time, by the offering of Christ. When presbyters are *walking with Christ* in the fellowship of His seven wounding events, they will lay down their lives for one another in the presbytery, and will proclaim the gospel of God and the word of the cross as a testimony to a lampstand church.

Notably, a presbytery who are *walking with Christ* in the fellowship of His offering will be committed to *walking with Him* among all the congregations that belong to a lampstand church and, when necessary, from lampstand to lampstand. When a presbytery continues to walk with Christ, the light of the *one star* will multiply, through offering, to become the light of the *seven lamps* on a lampstand. As we have already considered, the light of the seven lamps is the light of the seven Spirits of God. When the light of the lamp is placed in a congregation that belongs

to a lampstand church, it is reflected and focused to shed light on the pathway for every son of God.

The light of the seven Spirits of God is presently before the Son's throne in the true temple. When the Father takes His seat, Christ will shift His entire administration to be 'in and around' the Father's throne. Rev 4:4. At that time, there will be one worldwide presbytery around the throne. The light of the one presbytery will be revealed by the seven lamps on *one lampstand* before the throne of the Father. The apostle John described the throne room by saying, 'And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.' Rev 4:5. This one, worldwide lampstand will comprise all the wise virgins from Christ's lampstand churches in every nation. Mat 25:1-4.

The prophet Isaiah described this one lampstand by saying, 'In that day the Branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious.' Isa 4:2. Similarly, Isaiah declared, 'For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you.' Isa 60:2-3. When the first seal is opened, the seven Spirits of God before the throne of the Father will be *sent out into all the earth* to be the light of the world. Rev 5:6. Rev 6:2. As the ministry arm of the presbytery around the throne of the Father, the 144 000 will reveal the light of the seven Spirits of God by proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom as a testimony to all nations. Mat 24:14.

### **A name that you are alive, but you are dead**

Jesus called the presbytery and the church in Sardis to be part of this ministry of the seven Spirits of God. However, there was only a small remnant in this church who had not soiled their garments. The rest of the church was spiritually asleep, and some were spiritually dead. In relation to the group who were dead, Jesus said, 'I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but *you are dead.*' Rev 3:1. This was a group who had previously been born as sons of God, but they had lost their sonship because of their carnality. They had persistently chosen to set their mind on 'the things of the flesh'. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul declared, 'For if you live according to the flesh *you will die.*' Rom 8:13.

The parable of the sower and the seed teaches us that if the ground of our heart is not *regenerated*, in the fellowship of Christ's seven wounding events, then the seed of the divine nature that we have received as a son of God will die. The lesson of the stony and thorny ground is that the seed of the divine nature will die if we become offended by the need to

suffer with Christ or if we become distracted by the cares of this world. Mat 13:20-22. When the seed of the divine nature dies within a person, they will often regress to becoming 'wayside ground'. 'Wayside ground' describes the heart of a religious person who has rejected the word of their sonship by choosing to believe another gospel. Mat 13:19.

Remarkably, Jesus identified that this group of spiritually dead people were still in the church in Sardis. They maintained a religious projection within the community of the church or they continued to live in the afterglow of their previous religious experiences. Motivated by the fear of death, and searching for some assurance of salvation, this group may have been busy with many religious works. Jesus said, 'I know your works.' Rev 3:1. They were not the works of their sonship that Christ had already completed for them on His offering journey. They were dead works that were defined and motivated by their own fallen conscience, bearing witness to their own knowledge of good and evil. Heb 9:14.

### **Awake from sleep and buy oil**

Jesus addressed the presbytery in Sardis by saying, 'Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.' Rev 3:2. We note the clear distinction between those who had already died and those who were at risk of dying. This group was at risk of spiritual death because they were spiritually asleep. When Jesus said, 'Be watchful', it can equally be translated 'wake up' and 'keep awake'. We know that Jesus used many different parables to emphasise the need for us to be awake, watchful and ready for His coming.

From this perspective, let us briefly clarify a point in relation to the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. When we first read this parable, it appears that the virgins preemptively decided to go out from their houses to meet the bridegroom, and then found themselves waiting in some public place until they all fell asleep. Some commentators have emphasised, in a mistaken attempt to encourage us that we will all experience seasons of spiritual apathy, that the wise virgins *fell asleep*. This is certainly not the lesson of the parable. In fact, Jesus summarised the parable by saying, '*Watch* therefore [*stay awake*], for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.' Mat 25:13.

The key to understanding the sequence of this parable is to ask the question, 'Why did the virgins *go out* to meet the bridegroom?' They did not go out on a whim or because they expected the bridegroom to return



at a prearranged time. The only reason that they went out of their houses to meet the bridegroom was because they heard the word, 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; *go out to meet him!*' Mat 25:6. This is a simple point which clarifies the sequence of the parable. That is, the command to *go out* that is recorded in verse six of the parable precedes the decision to *go out* that is described in verse one of the parable.

Jesus began the parable by describing the time when the Father takes His seat. At that time, the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who all hear the word and go out to meet a bridegroom. However, five will be wise and five will be foolish. Jesus summarised the key distinction between the wise and the foolish virgins by saying that the wise had oil in their lamps *and* oil in their vessels. That is, they had a double portion of oil. Mat 25:1-4. In this regard, the first four verses of the parable are a summary of the key distinction between the wise and foolish believers when the Father takes His seat. Then, beginning in verse five, Jesus went back to describe the background so that we understand *why* there will be such a distinction.

Speaking about the time before the word came, Jesus said, 'But while the bridegroom was delayed, they *all* slumbered and slept'. Mat 25:5. The simple point is that the wise virgins were not initially wise. The parable begins with *ten unwise virgins*. They were all spiritually asleep! They were not ready for the Father to take His seat and for the coming of the Bridegroom until the word came to wake them up from their spiritual slumber. It was the nature of their *response to the word* that determined whether each virgin remained foolish or became wise. In the end, all the virgins did wake up and trim their lamps before going out to meet the bridegroom, but only the wise had purchased a double portion of oil. Mat 25:7.

### **The difference between oil in our lamp and oil in our vessel**

Let us consider this distinction in more detail. The mandate to announce the coming of the Bridegroom belongs to the Elijah ministry. We recall that John the Baptist, who ministered in the spirit and power of Elijah, described himself as 'the friend of the Bridegroom'. Joh 3:29. He rejoiced to hear the voice of Christ, the Bridegroom. We know that the Lord has promised to restore the Elijah ministry before the Father takes His seat to initiate the great and terrible day of the Lord. Mal 4:5. It is important to recognise that the word that belongs to the Elijah ministry will be proclaimed in a progressive way that is consistent with the sovereign

times and seasons of the Lord. 1Th 5:1. For example, in our present season, we are hearing the word, 'Behold, the Bridegroom is coming.' We are not yet hearing, 'Go out to meet Him.'

The virgins who became wise evidently woke up *in response to the word* in a prompt and timely manner. They trimmed their lamps and purchased oil. Perhaps the foolish virgins took a lot longer to wake up. We know that they eventually did wake up. However, when they awoke, they only *trimmed their lamps*. They did not purchase any *oil*. As we have already considered, Jesus summarised the difference between the wise and foolish virgins by saying, 'Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.' Mat 25:3-4. Notably, both the wise and foolish had oil in their lamps, but only the wise had oil in their vessels.

This raises an important question. What is the difference between 'oil in our lamp' and 'oil in our vessel'? Our lamp is our *spirit*. Speaking about our spirit, Jesus said, 'The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.' Mat 6:22. Our eye is 'clear' when we have been born of the Spirit as a son of God. As a son of God, the Holy Spirit brings illumination and conviction *to our spirit* when the word of God is proclaimed to us by the messengers of Christ. We could liken receiving the *illumination* of the Holy Spirit in our spirit to receiving 'oil in our lamp'. This is a necessary and wonderful provision! However, it is important to recognise that our *illumination* does not equal our *obedience*.

Having been illuminated by the Spirit, we must choose to become *obedient* to the word that we have heard. The Holy Spirit enables us, with the power of Eternal Spirit, to present our physical body to God, each day, to join the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Rom 6:16,19. Rom 12:1. Our daily participation begins as we pray in the Holy Spirit to join the fellowship of Christ's intercessory prayer and travail in the garden of Gethsemane. As we participate in the seven wounding events that Christ experienced from Gethsemane to the cross, our heart is being regenerated, and we are learning the obedience that Christ has already learned for us. Rom 6:17.

The Scriptures describe our physical body as a '*vessel*'. 1Th 4:4. Speaking about the resurrection life of Jesus, the apostle Paul said, 'We have this treasure *in earthen vessels*, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.' 2Co 4:7. If the evidence that we have oil in our lamp is illumination, the evidence that we have oil in our vessel will be that we have *a testimony of Christ's resurrection life in our mortality*. We will have

a testimony regarding the work of *regeneration* in our heart and a testimony regarding the *obedience* that we are learning as a son of God. The fruit of our obedience will be our *sanctification*. Rom 6:22.

When we consider that a foolish virgin has oil in their lamp, but no oil in their vessel, it highlights the reality that they are accountable for their disobedience and their lack of sanctification. In contrast, a wise virgin, with oil in their lamp *and* in their vessel, will be illuminated *and* obedient. They will be a 'vessel for honour, sanctified, and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work'. 2Ti 2:21. The work that belongs to a wise virgin, having a double portion of oil, is to serve the Father as part of a kingdom of priests. In the time of the end, the work that belongs to the wise virgins will include the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom as a testimony in all nations. Mat 24:14. Mat 13:43.

In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul summarised the exhortation to become wise virgins. He said, 'Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you [give you illumination]. Therefore be careful how you walk [on the pathway that Christ has pioneered for you], not as unwise men [a foolish virgin], but as wise [a wise virgin], making the most of your time [by obtaining oil in your vessel], because the days are evil [and the Father will soon take His seat]. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is [which is your sanctification as a son of God].' Eph 5:14-17.

### Establish the remnant

Returning to our consideration of the church in Sardis, Jesus firstly admonished the presbytery to wake up. Each presbyter needed to ensure that he had a double portion of oil in relation to his own household. Jesus then commanded the presbyters who were awake, and were purchasing this oil, to 'strengthen the things that remain'. This can equally be translated as 'strengthen *the remaining ones*'. Jesus was instructing the presbytery to strengthen, or establish, *the remnant* in their lampstand church. The remnant includes every son of God, and all the families, who are making their calling and election sure by obeying the word of God. 1Pe 1:2. 2Pe 1:10.

The work of the presbytery is to proclaim the word of God for the purpose of *firmly establishing* every household upon the Rock, who is Christ. Jesus Christ is the chosen and precious Cornerstone in Zion. 1Pe 2:6-8. A presbytery who are obedient to Christ will call every household to the same faith obedience to the lordship of Christ. The apostle Paul declared that he had received grace from Christ as a

messenger for the purpose of calling all nations to the obedience of faith. Rom 1:5. The call to obedience is a polarising word. Many believers become offended by the need to be obedient to Christ, particularly when this obedience causes conflict or division within their family. Mat 10:34-37.

## In the sight of My God

Having instructed the presbytery in Sardis to firmly establish the remnant, Jesus then continued to admonish them by saying, 'For I have not found your deeds completed *in the sight of My God*.' Rev 3:2. Evidently, the presbyters in Sardis had not yet fulfilled the works that Christ had authored for them on His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. However, more importantly, when Jesus used the phrase 'in the sight of My God', He was referring to a specific mode of ministry. It was necessary for each presbyter to learn this mode of ministry before they could complete the work of establishing the remnant.

What does this mode of ministry look like? It is the mode that the apostle Paul used when he ministered to the church in Corinth for the purpose of establishing a remnant in that city. Paul used this same phrase, 'in the sight of God', to highlight the difference between his own ministry and the mode that was employed by many other men who claimed to be speaking on behalf of Christ. There were many messengers who used the name of Christ to empower their own ministry projections. The apostle Paul wrote, 'For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak *in Christ in the sight of God*'. 2Co 2:17.

Later in the same letter, Paul said, 'All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved.' 2Co 12:19. The apostle Paul had received grace and authority from Christ as a messenger to the Corinthians. However, he recognised that his ministry grace, by itself, did not have the capacity to deliver the Corinthians from their carnality, nor to establish them as a remnant church. Paul ministered in the weakness of Christ as an expression of his own testimony in the sight of God, so that the power of God was directed toward the Corinthians for the sake of their salvation. 2Co 13:4.

## Remember how you have received and heard

Jesus continued to admonish the presbyters in Sardis who were asleep by saying, 'Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.' Rev 3:3. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to remember the word that has been proclaimed to us by Christ and His messengers. Jesus said to His disciples, 'The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.' Joh 14:26. However, more than this, the Spirit enables us to remember the word that was proclaimed about us before the foundation of the world, which we never knew before! Rev 2:5.

It is notable that Jesus did not simply ask the presbytery in Sardis to remember *what* they had heard. He was not asking them to recall the content of the word. He was asking them to remember *how* they had received the Spirit and heard the word. During His earthly ministry, Jesus said, 'Take heed *how you hear*', because there are two different ways in which we can interface with the word of God when it is proclaimed to us. Luk 8:18. When we hear the word, we can appraise the word as a resource, with our *mind*; or we can allow the Holy Spirit to bring *conviction and illumination* to our *spirit*. The gift of faith comes through illumination. In this way, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. Rom 10:17.

The gift of faith that we receive enables us to believe that God will accomplish His word in our life. However, for His purpose to be accomplished, we also receive the Holy Spirit through faith. Jesus was asking the presbytery in Sardis to remember how they *received faith through hearing the word*, and then how they *received the Spirit through the hearing of faith*. Receiving the Spirit through faith is essential for our *new birth* as a son of God, and then for our *regeneration* as a son of man. When the apostle Paul first came to the believers in Ephesus, he began by asking them the question, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' Act 19:2.

We could compare the way in which Jesus addressed those who were spiritually asleep in Sardis as being 'foolish virgins', with the way in which the apostle Paul addressed the believers in the region of Galatia. Paul wrote to them, 'O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: *Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?* Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being

made perfect by the flesh?' Gal 3:1-3. Paul was compelling the Galatians to become spiritual again by receiving illumination from the Spirit and then by walking according to the Spirit.

### I will come like a thief

Jesus warned the presbytery in Sardis that if they did not wake up, and then remain alert, He would come upon them as a thief in the night. Rev 3:3. In the first case, Jesus likened His coming to 'a thief in the night' because it is completely *unexpected* if we are not awake. During His earthly ministry, Jesus warned His disciples by saying, 'Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming *at an hour you do not expect.*' Mat 24:42-43.

In the second case, Jesus likened His coming to 'a thief in the night' because, if we are not stewarding what He has given to us, He will come in judgement to take it away from us. For example, Jesus warned the presbytery in Ephesus that if they did not repent, He was coming to take their entire lampstand away from them. Rev 2:5. In the parable of the minas, we observe the nature of Christ's coming in judgement to take something away from His servants. Luk 19:11-27. The mina represents the authority that belongs to our name, as a son of God, which is *multiplied by our obedience to Christ*. The nobleman, who represented Christ in the parable, commanded that the mina be taken away from the man who had hidden it in a handkerchief. Luk 19:24-26.

We observe the same principle in the parable of the talents. Mat 25:14-30. The talent represents the grace of Christ that is given to us to *multiply by offering in the fellowship of the body of Christ*. The Lord commanded that the talent be taken away from the man who had hidden it in the ground. He said, 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has *will be taken away*. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gashing of teeth.' Mat 25:29-30. Notably, if Christ comes as a thief in the night to take the mina or the talent from a person, they will also be taken away in judgement.

There have been many seasons of visitation during the church age when Christ has come like a thief in the night to judge certain individuals, households, congregations, and even whole lampstand churches. However, the major season of judgement upon the church, and the world,

is still ahead of us. It will commence when the Father takes His seat to initiate 'the great and terrible day of the Lord'. Mal 4:1. The apostle Paul said, 'For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape [the judgement]. But you, brethren, are not in darkness [if we are awake], so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.' 1Th 5:2-4.

### You have a few names in Sardis who have not soiled their garments

In relation to *our readiness* for the day of the Lord, we must be awake, have a double portion of oil for our lamps, and be clothed in white priestly garments. The apostle John recorded in the book of Revelation that he heard Jesus proclaim from heaven, 'Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and *keeps his garments*, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.' Rev 16:15. In relation to *keeping our garments*, Jesus referred to a small group of believers in Sardis by saying, 'You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.' Rev 3:4.

A son of God first receives their white priestly garment when they are placed by the Father into the body of Christ. This is the initiative of the Father and belongs to the first dimension of baptism. In his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul described this dimension of baptism by saying, 'For as many of you as were baptised [by the Father] into Christ *have put on Christ*.' Gal 3:27. The word that is translated 'put on' in this verse means 'to sink into a garment' or 'to be invested with clothing'. The prophet Isaiah rejoiced, 'He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with jewels.' Isa 61:10.

The garments of salvation are *priestly* garments and *wedding* garments. They are given to sons of God who belong to the bride city. The Lord declared concerning the bride city, 'Her priests also I clothe with salvation.' Psa 132:16. Having been clothed with our priestly garment, we must then choose to embrace our participation in the seven wounding events that Christ experienced on His journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. In the fellowship of those seven wounding events, our heart is being regenerated, and our priestly garment is being

washed in the blood of the Lamb. If we draw back from our participation in Christ's offering, our priestly garment will be unclean.

It is important to consider that there are *two reasons* why our garments become unclean - our interactions with the 'world' and our own 'flesh'. In relation to the world, we read in the book of James that we are to keep ourselves and, by implication, our priestly garments, 'unspotted *from the world*'. Jas 1:27. Of course, James was not inferring that a son of God should not mix with unbelievers in the world. If that were the case, a son of God would have no opportunity for evangelism. Jesus was clear that we are called to be 'in the world, but not of the world'. It is primarily the attitudes and behaviours that belong to *the spirit of the world in the church* that make our garments unclean.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul clarified this point concerning the world by saying, 'I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner - not even to eat with such a person.' 1Co 5:9-11. Paul had the same instruction regarding those who are openly disobedient, walk in a disorderly manner, and cause divisions and offences. 2 Th 3:14. 2 Th 3:7. Rom 16:17. Tit 3:10. 2Ti 3:2-5.

### The example of Joshua the high priest

In Scripture, one of the most obvious examples of a man who had filthy garments was Joshua the high priest. Zec 3:3. Joshua served as the high priest when the Jewish nation returned from exile in Babylon to begin rebuilding the temple and the city of Jerusalem. In a prophetic vision, Zechariah saw Joshua standing before the Angel of the Lord in filthy garments, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. Zec 3:1. The Angel of the Lord rebuked Satan by saying, 'The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?' Zec 3:2. This statement bears witness to the Lord's commitment to cleanse and sanctify every family in the heavenly Jerusalem, *and* it also bears witness to the fire of God's judgement upon our uncleanness.

For many years now we have been considering that Jesus Christ is walking among His lampstand churches with eyes like a flame of fire. He is coming to wash away the filth of the daughters of Zion by 'the spirit of judgement and by the spirit of burning'. Isa 4:4. The fact that the Angel



of the Lord called Joshua 'a brand plucked *from the fire*' tells us that, prior to his deliverance, the fire of God's judgement was burning upon him because of his uncleanness. This was the same eternal fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Lot. Jud 1:7. Joshua was unclean, and needed to be delivered from the fire of God's eternal judgement even though he was serving the nation as high priest.

The reason that Joshua was clothed in filthy garments was not because of some lack in the way that he was performing his priestly duties. His garments were filthy because of *his lack of sanctification in relation to the uncleanness of his own family*. We read in the Scriptures that after the Jews returned from exile in Babylon, many of the people married pagan wives and embraced their idolatry in their homes. Ezz 9:1. When Ezra returned, he was informed by some of the leaders that 'the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass'. Ezz 9:2. Notably, the book of Ezra specifically nominated that *the sons of Joshua* the high priest were guilty of this transgression. Ezz 10:18.

Joshua himself was not guilty of this transgression. Nevertheless, his robe was *stained by the world*, and Satan had gained access to his house because of the way in which he normalised and embraced the uncleanness of his own sons. This brings us to another important point. His garments had also become soiled by *his own flesh*; that is, by *his own carnality*. We don't know why Joshua had embraced the uncleanness of his sons. He may have been guilty of the sin of Eli by loving his sons more than he loved the Lord. Alternatively, he may have been guilty of looking into the face of his wife and trying to please her by maintaining her religious agenda for the family. Again, he may have believed that he had the capacity, in the context of his own home, to recover his sons. Perhaps it was a mixture of all these expressions of carnality.

The foremost manifestation of carnality is *self-righteousness*. We are reminded that the prophet Isaiah said, 'All of our righteousness is like filthy rags.' Isa 64:6. A self-righteous person does not fear God. Rather, they believe that God approves of and supports their own religious perspective and initiatives. They believe that their own fallen expression of love is the same as God's love. The Lord addressed this sin of presumption among His people by saying, 'These things you have done, and I kept silent; *you thought that I was altogether like you*; but I will rebuke you, and set them in order before your eyes.' Psa 50:21. In a similar way, the apostle Paul rebuked the Corinthians regarding the self-righteous, religious sophistication that had become leaven among them. 1Co 5:2.

We know that Joshua the high priest was cleansed and sanctified in response to the Lord's word. His filthy garments were removed, and were replaced by clean garments in fellowship among his brethren who also stood before the Angel of the Lord. After Joshua had been cleansed, the work of rebuilding the temple was completed, and the nation celebrated the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread with joy. Notably, the people 'kept the feast' as a sanctified meal. We read in the book of Ezra, 'Then the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the Lord God of Israel'. Ezzr 6:21.

Having exhorted us to keep ourselves in the love of God, Jude noted that there is provision within the fellowship of the *agape* meal for us to show mercy, or to have compassion, on a person who is doubting or is weak in faith. Jud 1:21-22. We do not engage in a dispute with such a person; rather, we encourage them to receive the word of God with meekness and to stand accountably before Christ in relation to their obedience. Rom 14:1. Jas 1:21-22. Furthermore, Jude identified that there will be opportunities for us to take a loving initiative toward a brother in order to save them from the fire of God's judgement. Such an initiative will be possible only if we have the fear of God before our eyes, and if we hate 'the garment spotted by the flesh'. Jud 1:23. Of course, a person's deliverance will be completely dependent upon their own willingness to be cleansed and sanctified.

### **I will not blot out his name from the book of life**

Jesus said concerning those who had maintained the sanctification of their priestly garments, 'They will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.' Rev 3:4. It is not possible to be 'a worthy house' if our priestly garments have become soiled by the world or by the flesh. However, if we are a worthy household, we are called to walk with Christ as part of a kingdom of priests. Every worthy household is called to become a firstfruits household that walks with Christ in fellowship from *house to house*. Furthermore, a presbyter with a worthy house is called to walk with Christ among the congregations of a lampstand church. Some presbyters will also walk from lampstand to lampstand.

Jesus continued, 'He who overcomes will be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the book of life.' Rev 3:4. If we are overcoming by washing our robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb, we rejoice that our name is written in heaven. However, it is

sobering to consider that the reverse is also true. If we are not washing our robes, then our name will be blotted out of the book of life! If a person's name is blotted out of the book of life, it means that they have been assigned a portion in the lake of fire. Describing the judgement of the great white throne at the end of the millennium, the apostle John wrote, 'And anyone not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire'. Rev 20:15.

Our *priestly* garment is also our *wedding* garment. Jesus emphasised, in the parable of the wedding feast, that we must have a wedding garment. Mat 22:1-14. In this parable, the king represents the Father, who will host the wedding feast for Christ and His bride, the church, in the time of the end. When the king saw a man in the feast without a wedding garment, he said to his servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Mat 22:13. 'Outer darkness' is another name for the lake of fire. It signifies a person's relational alienation and complete incapacity to move and communicate for all eternity. It is the place of unresolvable grief and bitterness.

## I will confess his name

In contrast to this, if we are clothed in 'white garments', Jesus Christ will *confess our names* before His Father and His angels. Rev 3:5. This means that Jesus will bear witness to the Father that we have been obedient to His lordship. We know that we must confess that Jesus Christ is our Lord in order to be saved. Rom 10:9. The veracity of our confession is demonstrated by our obedience to Christ and to the word of present truth that is proclaimed to us by His messengers. Having warned the disciples that they would suffer persecution because of the word of present truth, Jesus said, 'Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.' Mat 10:32-33.

We do not confess Christ before men by professing to be a Christian. There are many Christians who profess to know Christ, but they do not keep His commandments. The apostle John was unequivocal on this point. He wrote, 'By this we know that we know Him, *if we keep His commandments*. He who says, "I know Him" and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him'. 1Jn 2:3-4. Similarly, the apostle Paul said concerning Christians who are defiled and unbelieving, 'They profess to know God, *but in works they deny Him,*

being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.’ Tit 1:16.

Many Christians profess to love Christ, but they *deny Him by their actions* when they are required to choose between obedience to Christ and preserving their own reputation in the world. Many also deny Christ before men by preserving family relationships with those who have rebelled against God and departed from the fellowship of the body of Christ. Matthew recorded that Jesus continued by saying, ‘He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of Me.’ Mat 10:37-38.

When Jesus confesses our name before the Father, He will be confessing that we know Him, and that we are *known by Him*. We begin to know Christ when we meet Him face to face and eye to eye in the fellowship of His second wounding event in the court of Caiaphas. Luk 22:61. We press on to know Christ by continuing to walk in the light of His word, and by continuing to be led by the Holy Spirit on the pathway that He has pioneered for us each day. The apostle Paul declared that this was the goal of His pilgrimage as a son of God, saying, ‘I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.’ Php 3:8.

When the Father takes His seat to establish His kingdom on the earth, Jesus Christ will either confess that He does know us or He will deny that He knows us. The parable of the wise and foolish virgins teaches us that if we do not have a double portion of oil, the Lord will say to us, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, *I do not know you*.’ Mat 25:12. Jesus explained that many religious people and self-righteous Christians will be shocked when He denies that He knows them. He said, ‘Many will say to Me in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness!”’ Mat 7:22-23.

Notably, we will not be known by Christ if we are not known among our brethren in the fellowship of the body of Christ. If we are known by Christ, our brethren will be able to bear witness to our obedience to the word of Christ and to the work of regeneration in our life. The apostle Paul could confidently say to the church in Corinth, ‘You know the household of Stephanas.’ 1Co 16:15. Similarly, the apostle John bore witness to a man named Demetrius, who was evidently known by all the brethren. He wrote, ‘Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from

the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true'. 3Jn 1:12.

## The seal of the living God

Jesus promised to confess the name of every overcomer before the Father and *His angels*; that is, before His messengers. When the Father takes His seat, the worldwide presbytery will be seated on the twenty-four thrones around the throne of the Father. Rev 4:4. In contrast to the seven stars in the right hand of Christ, the presbytery on the twenty-four thrones will be *the Father's presbytery* for His kingdom in the time of the end.

Dan 7:9. The Father will set His seal upon the presbytery. The Father's seal is called 'the seal of the living God'. Rev 7:2. The seal of the living God is the authority of the Father to *reveal His name* and to *minister His word* as the bread of life to the entire world. The word of the Father is the gospel of the kingdom.

Jesus testified that He had been sealed by the Father in relation to His ministry as the Bread of Life. Immediately after the miracle of feeding the five thousand people, Jesus said to the crowd who followed him, 'Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man *will give to you*, for on Him, God [the Father], has set His seal.' Joh 6:27. When the Father takes His seat, the work of the presbytery will be to proclaim the Father's word as the bread of life for every family in the world. In the time of the end, the ministry of the word will reveal the operation of the true table of shewbread in the heavenly sanctuary. Furthermore, the presbytery will travail with Christ, by the Spirit, to see a great multitude of sons brought forth in all nations. Rev 7:9.

When the Father takes His seat, the 144 000 will comprise the individuals and families who are the firstfruits of the true Israel of God. Rev 7:4-8. Rev 14:1-5. The 144 000 will be *the ministry arm of the presbytery*. They will be sent out to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom as a testimony to all the families of the earth. Mat 24:14. Notably, prior to the opening of the seals, the 144 000 will be sealed by Christ and the presbytery for the work of feeding the bread of life to the nations. The apostle John said, 'Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, *having the seal of the living God*; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees until *we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads*".' Rev 7:2-3.