

THE CHURCH

FROM JUDGMENT TO RESTORATION

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The Church has begun to feel the effects of a judgmental shaking for “the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of the things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.” Heb 12:27. The things that have been initiated by man, and glorify man, will not survive the shaking. Only the things of the Spirit will remain, for they cannot be shaken.

To precipitate this shaking, God has withdrawn His restraining hand on the power of Antichrist, to bring the hidden apostasies that have plagued the Church out in the open. Far from being against God’s will, Antichrist’s attack on the Church, commonly referred to as the battle of Armageddon, is actually initiated by God Himself.

This is not a military battle with the armies of the world under the control of Antichrist surrounding Israel, or the Christians of the world gathered at Jerusalem. It is a spiritual battle between Christ and Antichrist - between the truth of the doctrine of Christ, opposed by the deceptions and lying wonders of Antichrist. Never before has the very existence of the Church been so threatened by heresies, lying signs and wonders, New Age Philosophies, eastern mysticism, false prophets and teachers, and so forth.

God has actually initiated this confrontation so that,

- (i) The Church may be refined and restored. Restoration, as its name implies, means to restore to its original state - in this case the pattern of the early Church.
- (ii) Antichrist and all his deceptions may be brought out in the open and destroyed by the light of truth.

This book deals with these issues by outlining,

- The present state of the Church and its need of restoring.
- A revelation of Antichrist and his operation in the Church.
- The pattern of the early Church.
- The nature of God’s judgment on the Church.
- The restoration of the Church.

John Holland
Bob Thomson

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SECTION 1

THE PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST IN THE CHURCH

Chapter 1

THE PRESENCE OF ANTICHRIST IN THE CHURCH

The real identity of Antichrist is a critical issue for the Christian church. Many believers down through the centuries have imagined Antichrist to be a world figure of unimaginable evil who will suddenly appear on the world scene at the close of the age. Accordingly, it is said that this person will gain awesome authority and power, enabling him to autocratically control the church and all worldly governments. Speculation as to his identity increases as the time draws near, and as new figures appear on the world scene.

It is largely because of the misconception that Antichrist is a figure to appear at the close of the age, that the church has failed to recognize his presence and influence in her midst here and now. The apostle John advised the young church that **"the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, ...is now already in the world."** (1 John 4:3). And again **"...as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come..."**(1 John 2:18).

The apostle was not referring to an event due to occur at some time in the future. Instead he was warning these first century Christians that the enemy who had been prophesied to come (**"which you have heard was coming"**), was already in their midst (**"even now many ... have come"**).

WHO IS ANTICHRIST?

John lists three identities whose influence was already evident in the New Testament church - **"the Antichrist," "the spirit of the Antichrist,"** and **"many antichrists."** Who then are these three identities?

"the ANTICHRIST"

The bible uses several names when describing this identity and his evolution through spiritual history. From reading and comparing Revelation 13, where he is called **"the first beast,"** and Daniel 7, where he is called **"another horn, a little one,"** it is possible to chart his progress and development. Antichrist is present from the very emergence of the Babylonian empire, throughout the Persian, Greek, and Roman empires, to the Papacy of Rome, from where his influence has contaminated all of denominational Christendom.

In studying these wide-ranging biblical references, it becomes apparent that Antichrist cannot be a physical man, subject to the law of mortality. Instead he is a spiritual entity, a lieutenant of Satan, whose presence has been recorded at different times over several thousand years. Revelation 17:11 uses a range of tenses to describe him as **"the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition."**

The task of the spiritual entity called "the Antichrist" is to impose false religious authority. This is in direct contrast to the mission of Christ and His church, which is to restore the righteous authority of God the Father. Right from the earliest mentions of him, Antichrist is reported to have a spiritual intent that is particularly directed **"against the Most High...[and] the saints of the Most High.."** (Daniel 7:25).

"the SPIRIT of the ANTICHRIST"

Once again the apostle John is referring to a spiritual entity. He warned that **"every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and now is already in the world."** (1 John 4:3). The **"spirit of the Antichrist"** is called **"another [or second] beast"** in Revelation 13, and has been given power and authority by **"the first beast"** (who is Antichrist) to create a false church or **"image of the beast."** His main task is to deceive, and so he is also called **"the false prophet"** in Revelation 16 and 19.

Through his deceptions, the spirit of Antichrist brings believers into unknowing worship of Antichrist through acceptance of those things he has introduced into the church. Those captivated by his influence have imparted to them a deceiving spirit - a **"spirit of the Antichrist"** - which does not of itself rob them of their salvation, but greatly impedes their spiritual progress.

"many ANTICHRISTS"

After declaring in his letter that **"even now many antichrists have come"** (verse 18), John goes on to say, **"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us."** (verse 19). It is clear from these two verses that in using the phrase **"many antichrists,"** the apostle is actually referring to people who were once members of their Christian fellowship. However, these same people had at some stage allowed themselves to be completely overtaken by **"the spirit of the Antichrist,"** becoming his manifest vessels of deceit and destruction.

There have been **"many antichrists"** throughout the history of the church, and there may well be one who gains much authority and power at the end of the age. But he will not be the Antichrist.

When the apostle Paul told the Thessalonian church that **"the lawless one will be revealed,"** he was prophesying of a time of complete revelation of Antichrist as a spiritual entity. The entire corrupting influence of **"the first beast"** in the church and throughout the world will finally be exposed. Visible then will be Antichrist's whole spiritual empire and his throne on earth - where he, through many antichrists, has posed as head of all Christendom - **"oppos[ing] and exalt[ing] himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."** (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

WHY HAS ANTICHRIST'S PRESENCE ESCAPED ATTENTION?

The success of Antichrist in eluding detection by the church has much to do with the nature of his deception. We can gain greater insight into this by considering the elements of his name.

The prefix 'anti' has two root meanings. The first of these is 'against' or 'opposed to,' which is the most commonly accepted definition. The second rendering, less common but equally valid, is 'instead of.' The joining together of these two produces the composite meaning of being 'opposed to' by being 'instead of.'

In other words, Antichrist opposes Christ by seeking to replace Christ. He does this through a process of counterfeit designed to undermine the Lord's position in the church.

This is part of an overall stratagem by the powers of darkness to undo the righteous works of God. At some time in spiritual history it became apparent to Satan that he could not destroy the church by physical persecution alone. He has therefore contrived to create a counterfeit to deceive the saints - a counterfeit trinity - and through them, a counterfeit church.

THE COUNTERFEIT TRINITY

Scripture declares the existence of a Holy Trinity. For example, Jesus commanded us to baptize **"... in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ..."** (Matthew 28:19).

Scripture also declares the existence of a False Trinity. **"I saw three unclean spirits coming out of the mouth of the dragon (Satan), out of the mouth of the beast (Antichrist), and out of the mouth of the false prophet (or spirit of the Antichrist)."** (Revelation 16:1). The members of the Satanic Trinity are continually striving to undermine and subvert the positions of their opposite numbers in the Holy Trinity.

GOD has been counterfeited by SATAN

Satan has always coveted the worship due to God from all of His creation. It was he who said in his heart **"I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars [or 'angels'] of God;... I will be like the Most High."** (Isaiah 14:13-14). To this end, Satan has diverted worship away from God in several ways and directed it towards himself.

Through Idolatrous Worship

The essence of idolatry is the worship of those things that are created, rather than worship of the Creator Himself. By lauding those things initiated or created by man, such as statues, pictures, buildings, religious titles, vestments, and liturgies, we are in fact honoring Satan, who is the inciter of all false worship.

Through Occultist Practice

The nature of occult is submission to something or someone concealed in mystery and secrecy. To be involved in any occultist practice - whether it is consulting astrologists and horoscopes, submitting to hypnotism, divining water or metals, being initiated into sorcery and Satanism, dabbling in spiritualism and ouija boards, wearing lucky charms, or listening to heavy music - is to worship the demon spirits behind those activities, and so worship Satan himself.

Through New Age Philosophies

Eastern Mysticism promotes the belief that man has within himself vast reservoirs of power, which only need to be unlocked and released for him to have all that he desires. The ultimate delusion is, **"You are gods"** (Ps 82:6) - and its origin lies in him who would be God. This age old ploy to replace God by man comes from Satan, and so to accept humanistic philosophies and engage in New Age practices is to honor Satan from whom they originated.

CHRIST has been counterfeited by ANTICHRIST

By Usurping Christ's Headship

This is a serious business. The Scriptures make it absolutely clear that God the Father **"raised [Jesus] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."** (Ephesians 1:20-23).

Despite Christ having God-given authority to rule the church, very little actually remains under His control. So much of what is accepted in the church today has been initiated at the direction of

man rather than Jesus. The church staggers under the burden of man-made denominations that are governed by various ecclesiastic councils. Church leaders are rarely recognized and appointed after waiting on the Lord, but instead elected by popular vote, or at worst, through an institutionalized process involving conspiracy and intrigue.

Christ **"Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body..."** (Ephesians 4:11-12). However Christ's gifts of leaders to His body have been ignored and replaced by 'ministers of religion' with worldly academic qualifications. Local churches, which should be autonomous and governed by a team of mutually submitted elders, are instead managed by professional clergymen (and women). These are in turn subject to a hierarchy of similarly qualified peers at regional, national, and even international level.

By Preaching Another Christ

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church that he feared for them **"lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you may well put up with it."** (2 Corinthians 11:3-4).

The church has lost her **"testimony of Jesus Christ."** (Revelation 12:17). Too often the pulpit presents a false vision of the Lord. His commandments are liberalized and His holiness demeaned. Sceptics cast doubt on His virgin birth, His sinlessness, His miracles, and His resurrection. The Word of God says **"Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come ..."** (Revelation 12:10). But this is denied, or projected forward to a supposed millenium reign sometime in the future. Just as Paul warned, the church has **"a form of godliness"** (2 Tim 3:5) but is denying the power and glory of her risen Lord.

By Practicing Lawlessness

Jesus forewarned His followers that **"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but [only] he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 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 practice lawlessness!'"** (Matthew 7:21-23).

Prophesying, deliverance and the performance of miracles all have a sound basis in Scripture and in the practice of the New Testament church. Nevertheless, only Jesus has God's authority to commission and initiate. Those who ignore Christ's headship in ministry and engage in lawlessness are in reality manifesting the works of Antichrist, who is called **"the lawless one"** in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 & 9.

By A Crossless Christianity

Paul wrote **"...we preach Christ crucified .."** (1 Corinthians 1:23). The cross of Christ should be the focal point of all belief, all teaching and preaching, and all ministry. Now however, it is possible to attend church services for months on end, listening to moralistic sermons on social issues or extravagant promises of unlimited blessings, and never hear the cross mentioned. The failure to teach the power of the blood of the cross has left the church vulnerable to spiritual attack and unable to cast down Satan's strongholds. And the failure to teach the training and discipline of the cross has left church leaders anchorless and unable to resist the wiles of Antichrist.

The HOLY SPIRIT has been counterfeited by the SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST

In Worshipping Another Spirit

The Holy Spirit is Christ's representative here on earth. Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would not act on His own initiative, or speak on His own authority. He said that **"when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you."** (John 16:13-14).

The Holy Spirit therefore always honors Christ's position as head of the church, only moving and speaking as Christ directs Him. But now, because of an idolatrous longing for power and blessing, many Christians have made 'the Holy Spirit' the head. It is common for zealous people 'wanting more' to 'call down the Spirit' and then blindly accept whatever happens next as being of God. However the Holy Spirit never acts independently of the Lord, or glorifies Himself. So the spirit that 'comes down' in these cases is not the Holy Spirit, but the spirit of **"the lawless one ... with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception .."** (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10).

While the first apostles were completely reliant upon the Holy Spirit in their ministries, it was Jesus Christ who remained the focal point of their preaching and teaching. **"And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs."** (Mark 16:20).

In Ignoring The Holy Spirit

The early Christians were continually receptive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. As a consequence they were intimately connected with the Lord, receiving His directions, and His commissioning and anointing through His Spirit. In contrast, conventional denominational churches have little communication with the Holy Spirit, relegating Him to an impersonal 'it,' who has been guardedly read about, but kept at a distance.

The Holy Spirit has been pushed into the background because the spirit of Antichrist has successfully implanted the mark of humanism in the church. Undue honor is therefore given to what is of man - man-initiated programs and 'ministries' and man-sustained institutions and 'movements'. Paul called these works of man **"wood, hay, [and] straw,"** to be consumed by **"the fire [that] will test each one's work."** Only the **"gold, silver, [and] precious stones,"** or things of the Spirit, will stand when the fire of God's judgment tests all things. (1 Corinthians 3:12-13).

ANTICHRIST HAS CREATED A FALSE RELIGION

Antichrist has spawned a great many false religions over the centuries - all of which deny the divinity of Christ and the saving power of His cross. However in this case we are looking at an all-embracing religion - one which affects everyone on earth. It does not have a doctrinal basis. Nor does it involve the conscious worship of a spiritual entity.

This religion is far more expansive than the worship of false deities or involvement in false doctrines because it captivates the whole world. It is the religion that exalts man. It entices man to seek fulfillment as man, without reference to God.

Through the pursuit of wealth and possessions, through ambition and lust for power, and by the constant seduction of the intellect and senses, mankind is enticed into its net. Sport, sex, fashion, entertainment and the arts, are all used to entice him. So pervasive is this world religion that man has come to believe its elements are evidence of his social evolution.

Few realize that there is a corrupt spiritual force behind this system, or that it is imposed by the spirit of the Antichrist to bring man into bondage. An angel had to open the apostle John's spiritual eyes before he could recognise its source and widespread influence. **"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters [a symbol of the nations], with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.'**" (Revelation 17:1-2).

Most of mankind has been caught up in the world religion of Antichrist and his Harlot. Their hearts and minds have been turned away from God to self. This is the 'religion of man', or 'humanism,' and those who have yielded to its lure have received upon themselves **"the mark of the beast."**

ANTICHRIST HAS CREATED A FALSE CHURCH

Just as the Holy Spirit is the instrument used by God in creating a church that is the image of Jesus Christ, likewise the spirit of Antichrist is used by Satan to create a false church in the image of Antichrist.

In the seventeenth chapter of Revelation, the apostle John was given a vision of the false church. **"So [the angel] carried [John] away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And [he] saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns."** (Revelation 17:3).

Here the false church is symbolically presented as a woman (the Harlot), riding a beast (Antichrist). The apostle was told the **"seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits."**(v7). The heads have a double significance. As the **"seven mountains,"** they are a readily recognizable reference to the 'seven hills' of Rome - the geographical center of the Roman Catholic Church.

The **"seven mountains"** are also referred to as **"seven heads."** These seven heads have alternative significance in subsequent verses. They are said to be **"seven kings [or world empires]. Five have fallen, one is [the Roman Empire was in existence at the time of John's writing], and the other has not yet come... And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition."** (Revelation 17:10-11). The beast, or Antichrist, is identified with the eighth kingdom, which emerges out of and has its origins in the preceding seven. In this way the beast is again linked to the Papacy of Rome, on which the false church, or Harlot, sits.

The Roman Catholic Church is Antichrist's fully emerged expression of the false church. The Papacy, or Vatican, is his throne on earth, and it is from here that he has used the **"many antichrists"** of 1 John 2:18 to **"blaspheme [God's] name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven,"** giving them **"a mouth speaking great things [or pompous words] and blasphemies."** (Revelation 13:6-5).

NAMES describing the CHARACTER of the HARLOT

Further insight into the nature of the false church, or Harlot, is gained by studying her composite name. John tells us that **"on her forehead a name was written:**

MYSTERY,

BABYLON THE GREAT,

THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS

AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." (Revelation 17:5)

She is called **'Babylon the Great'** because she embraces and incorporates within herself the pagan rites and idolatrous practices of ancient Babylon. She is called **'The Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth'** because of her gross idolatry. Harlotry in biblical terms is the forsaking of God, and turning instead to worship pagan gods and idols.

The list of unscriptural doctrines and pagan practices that have been introduced into the Roman Catholic Church from ancient Babylon and other sources is an extensive one. It includes the idolatrous worship of Mary, the accompanying false doctrines of her 'immaculate conception' and 'assumption into heaven,' and the blasphemous proclamation of her as 'mother of the church.' The kingdom of Antichrist is propagated through such beliefs as 'apostolic succession,' the primacy of 'the holy see,' and the 'infallibility of the pope' in all doctrinal matters. And millions continue to be brought into demonic bondage by the 'sign of the cross,' 'stations of the cross,' 'holy water,' 'rosary beads,' 'worship of the host,' 'observance of feasts and fasting days,' 'reverencing images and relics,' 'prayers for the dead,' 'canonization of saints,' 'dedicated virgins,' 'confession to a priest,' and many others.

The Harlot is also called **'Mystery.'** Like all the ancient pagan religions, Roman Catholicism enshrouded herself in a cloak of mystery. The 'secrets of the faith' were withheld from all but those who were initiated into them, creating a void between those who 'knew' (called the clergy) and those who did not 'know' (the laity). All but the initiated elite were discouraged from reading the Bible; services were conducted in a foreign language and according to a rigid liturgy; while all interpretation and religious teaching remained the preserve of the priesthood.

However it would be wrong to assume that the Roman Catholic Church is the only expression of the Harlot, or false church. True, she is Antichrist's masterpiece - with a vast membership encompassing the globe, enormous wealth in physical assets, and a politically influential pontiff who claims headship over all Christendom. But she is also **'the Mother of Harlots'** and her apostasy is found in every denominational church.

When the Reformers left the Catholic Church, they did not fully divest themselves of the taint of the Harlot. Evidence of this is found in their continued adherence to the distinction between clergy and laity; unscriptural appointment and recognition of church leaders; undue reverence towards buildings, furnishings, vestments, liturgy, and tradition; and preoccupation with ceaseless 'good works' to sustain and maintain man-made programs and institutions. The garments of humanism and worldliness are just as comfortable in the environment of the 'reformed churches' as they ever were in Rome.

THE WHEAT AND THE TARES

The institutional church is so overcome by the mark of humanism that she is not even aware of the foul apostasy in her midst. This is not really surprising if we recall Christ's likening of the counterfeit to tares growing amongst wheat. He said **"The kingdom of heaven is like a man [Christ] who sowed good seed in his field; but while men [the church] slept, his enemy [Antichrist] came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way."** (Matthew 13:24-25).

Tares look so much like wheat that it is not until just before harvest that the black grains of the tares appear and the weed is clearly identified. Similarly it is not until the time of harvest at the end of the age that Antichrist and his deception will be finally revealed to all. **"For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed."** (2 Thessalonians 2:7-8).

In Jesus' parable, the owner of the field told his servants not to pull up the tares before harvest in case they also damaged the wheat. Just as the wheat and the tares growing together in the same field are so nearly identical as to be difficult to tell apart, so too the doctrines of Christ and the tares of apostasy coexist in the church. The Lord in His wisdom has therefore decreed that both remain together until the end of the age, lest in the process of casting out the tares of apostasy we damage some of the wheat.

But then, at the time of harvest, the Lord Himself will separate the tares from the wheat. It is His work. **"The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire."** (Matthew 13:41-42).

It is already possible to discern the black grain of the tares appearing and the darkness of apostasy spreading throughout the church. Already the bundling together of the tares is taking place, as those under the power of Antichrist band together in rejection of the call to holiness and total surrender to Christ and His cross. And right now the world-wide 'ecumenical' movement gathers momentum, pursuing its ultimate goal of 'uniting' all denominations under the skirts of Mary '**the queen of heaven**' and the pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church.

THE CHURCH HAS BEEN OVERCOME BY ANTICHRIST

It is conventional wisdom to minimize Antichrist's influence in the Christian church, and those who sound a warning are frequently ridiculed. Nevertheless the Bible books of Daniel and Revelation contain clear prophecies that the saints (i.e. the church) would be subject to an all out assault by Antichrist - AND THAT THEY WOULD BE OVERCOME.

The prophet Daniel writes that he **"was watching; and the other horn [ie Antichrist] was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them ... He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall attempt to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a *time and times and half a time*."** (Daniel 7:21-25).

The apostle John writes that he **"saw a beast [i.e. Antichrist] rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns ... And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue *for forty-two months* ... And it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them."** (Revelation 13:1, 5, 7).

The symbolic period of time mentioned in both references is 3.5 years, and is variously rendered in the Bible by the derivatives '**a time and times and half a time**' (or $1+2+1/2=3\text{and}1/2$), or '**forty-two months**' or '**one thousand two hundred and sixty days**'. It always signifies a period of tribulation for God's people at the hands of false religious authority, and in this case is equivalent to the length of the Church Age.

COME OUT OF HER MY PEOPLE

We are entering into a climactic time in spiritual history. The Christian church is about to suffer a purging judgment in preparation for her restoration. The '**two witnesses**', (who are the Word of God and the Spirit of Prophecy), are now standing '**on their feet**' to sound God's warning. (Revelation 11:3-11). **"Come out of her [i.e. 'Come out of the Harlot or false church], My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities."** (Revelation 18:4-5).

IN SUMMARY

Having failed to destroy the church with physical persecution, Satan has embarked on a strategy of deception. He has created a counterfeit church which preaches "**another Jesus**" by the working of "**a different spirit**". (2 Corinthians 11:4). Satan's strategy has been so successful that the saints have been overcome and the church brought into bondage by the spirit of Antichrist.

Nevertheless the Scriptures are adamant that the church will be restored and that Christ the Lord will return to "**a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle ... holy and without blemish.**" (Ephesians 5:27). The following chapters are directed towards examining this process of restoration as revealed in the Word.

SECTION 2

RESTORATION OF ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

Chapter 2

RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH CONFIRMED BY THE PROPHETS

KEY BIBLE READING

"But these things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, who heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." [Acts 3:18-21].

The Key Bible Reading records part of an address given by the apostle Peter to a large crowd in Jerusalem, shortly after the ascension of Christ. In his speech, Peter declares that God's promise of restoration has been faithfully proclaimed "by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."

INTERPRETING RESTORATION PROPHECIES

Many of the Old Testament prophecies of restoration are addressed directly to 'Israel', 'Jacob', 'Mount Zion', 'Judah', or 'Jerusalem'. The question then arises as to whether these terms, and therefore the whole prophecy that follows, should be interpreted literally or in a figurative sense. In other words, do the prophecies relate only to the Old Testament Israelites, or are they also relevant to the Christian church.

A strictly literal interpretation is appropriate in those circumstances where the language used in the prophecy is obviously not figurative. This is the case where the prophecy refers to detail that has one clear and specific historical application.

For example, in the following prophecy the prophet Jeremiah refers to particular commercial procedures and then links them to specific geographical areas. These details had a particular and immediate relevance to the Jews in Babylonian captivity. For these people, resumption of normal business activities in their homeland must have seemed impossible, but the specific details of its application are included to convince them otherwise.

"For thus says the LORD: 'Just as I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will bring on them all the good that I have promised them. And fields will be bought in this land of which you say, "It is desolate, without man or beast; it has been given into the hand of the [Babylonians]." Men will buy fields for money, sign deeds and seal them, and take witnesses, in the land of Benjamin, in the places around Jerusalem, in the cities of Judah, in the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the lowland, and in the cities of the South; for I will cause their captives to return,' says the LORD." (Jeremiah 32:42-44).

In addition, any strictly literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy must not contradict truths and principles presented in the New Testament. In this context it is useful to look at two examples which ignore this premise.

(1) Many interpret the various Old Testament prophecies concerning a future Messianic kingdom on earth in a literal manner. They visualise the nation of Israel physically restored to a position of political prominence, with Christ reigning from the city of Jerusalem and exercising authority over all nations **"with a rod of iron."** (Psalm 2:9).

But Jesus said to Pilate **"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight [like soldiers], so that I should not be delivered [up] to the Jews;"** (John 18:36). Christ's kingdom, which is manifest here and now through the true church, is a spiritual kingdom. To expect a physical rather than a spiritual kingdom is to fall into the same error that ensnared most of the Jewish people at the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. They rejected Jesus because they believed that only a physical kingdom could vindicate Israel in the sight of the world.

(2) Similarly, a strictly literal interpretation of the prophet Ezekiel's vision of a restored temple and sacrifices leads many people to expect the temple in Jerusalem to be restored, with the 'church' officiating at all of its rituals and offerings. However such a view is rejected by New Testament teaching.

"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect ... For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins ... [but] we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." [Hebrews 10:1-4].

The clear New Testament teaching is that by Christ's perfect sacrifice, we have been redeemed, made righteous, and sanctified forever, to the end that we stand before God **"holy and blameless and above reproach in His sight."** [Col 1:22]. To suggest that a restored temple and further sacrifices are needed is a rejection of the efficacy of the blood of Jesus.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS OUR INTERPRETER

Even when following these guidelines, the most appropriate method of interpreting prophecy is not always clear. There are some prophecies for example, that are addressed to Israel or Judah, but have been only partially fulfilled in their history. In these cases it would appear that there remains a final and more complete fulfillment at the end of the age. There are also prophecies, which although addressed to Jerusalem or Zion, have a parallel application to the church.

The crux of the matter is this - **"no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."** (1 Peter 1:20-21). As a result we must continually look to the Holy Spirit as our ultimate guide to the interpretation of Scripture. This need for the direction of the Holy Spirit is even more critical in those cases where we adopt a figurative interpretation of prophecy. While this approach often opens the door to new depths of spiritual revelation, it can also have the effect of exposing us to the danger of deception.

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES OF RESTORATION

In the Key Bible Reading, Peter asserts that God's promise of restoration had been **"spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."** The following Old Testament prophecy given by Haggai is one such example. Although the Book of Haggai has a clear application to the Jewish people of the time (who were engaged in the physical restoration of Jerusalem after their Babylonian captivity) this part of the text is declared to be directly relevant to Christ's church by the New Testament writer of Hebrews.

The prophet writes "For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations [a reference to Christ the Lord], and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of hosts. 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts." (Haggai 2:6-7).

Part of this prophecy is quoted by the author of the Letter to Hebrews, who applies it to the refining of the church at the end of the age. "[B]ut now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.' Now this, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are [man-] made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:26-29).

There are a number of other examples of restoration prophecy in the Old Testament which have an application "**in the latter days**". The following selection has been drawn from the prophets Isaiah, and Joel. Each excerpt is notable for its use of figurative language, as well as elements within which are yet to be fulfilled. In each case the prophecies look forward to a risen and ruling Christ who reclaims His dwelling-place in absolute holiness.

"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." (Isaiah 2:2).

"Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. 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 ... The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the cypress, the pine, and the box tree together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary; and I will make the place of My feet glorious." (Isaiah 60:1-2, 13).

"The LORD also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the LORD will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again. And it shall come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; a fountain shall flow from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Acacias." (Joel 3:16-18).

RESTORATION CONFIRMED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The apostle Peter confirms the continuing validity of the Old Testament prophecies on restoration in his address in the Key Bible Reading. He also outlines various stages that need to take place on the path to restoration.

First his audience was charged to "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..." In this Peter was assuming that an individual's repentance would automatically result in personal salvation and forgiveness of sins.

Once a person is saved, he becomes a member of the church. Peter's subsequent remarks therefore relate to the body of believers. In this context he goes on to say "so that times of refreshing [or revivals] may come from the presence of the Lord, and that [God] may send Jesus Christ ... whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things..." In other words, Peter's

prophecy is of a series of refreshings or revivals throughout church history, which are followed by Christ's intervention at the end of the age when 'all things' will be restored to the church.

Peter's prophecy of a restored church was confirmed by Paul, who declared that Christ **"loved the church and gave Himself up for [her], that He might sanctify and cleanse [her] with the washing of water by the word, that He might present [her] to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that [she] should be holy and without blemish."** (Ephesians 5:25-27). Jesus Christ is coming back to claim His bride - a bride prepared and made **"holy and without blemish."**

THE CHURCH IS PROPHETICALLY LINKED WITH ISRAEL

In order to understand why we can apply many of the Old Testament prophecies to the church, it is necessary to see Israel from a spiritual point of view rather than as a nation-state. Paul makes the distinction between spiritual Israel and physical Israel in his letters to the Romans and to the Galatians.

To the Romans he wrote, **"For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but 'In Isaac your seed shall be called.' That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed."** (Romans 9:6-8).

And similarly to the Galatians, **"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."** (Galatians 3:29).

In God's eyes, not all who are Jews by birth are counted as Abraham's 'true children.' Instead, only those who believe God and walk by faith can legitimately claim that position. So while many Old Testament prophecies of restoration are addressed to Israel or Judah or Jerusalem, they are in reality written to **"the children of the promise"** or spiritual Israel - i.e. the church.

ISRAEL IS AN EXAMPLE FOR OUR INSTRUCTION

God chose Israel to be an example to us. It was through His interaction with the Jewish people that God revealed His own nature toward mankind, and the nature of mankind by their responses to Him. The Old Testament is therefore more than a history of the Jewish nation. It provides a pattern of God's dealings with mankind, and their typical behavioural responses to Him.

The Jews were God's covenant people and experienced His providential care. Nevertheless a consistent pattern of rebellious behaviour developed. Periods of blessing and prosperity were inevitably followed by backsliding and idolatry involving the false gods of surrounding nations. This in turn precipitated God's awesome judgment through the removal of the hedge of His divine protection, resulting in their captivity or exile. It was not until after a period of hardship that they were brought around to repentance and then restored to freedom in their homeland.

This pattern of behaviour was repeated continually throughout Jewish history - first blessing, then backsliding, followed by judgment, repentance, and eventual restoration. God's prophets were sent time and time again to admonish the people and warn them of impending judgment, but finally their hearts became so hardened that they were incapable of further repentance. This had the effect of removing them from the covenantal care and protection of their heavenly Father.

God turned away from physical Israel and her intractable hard-heartedness. He said **"...she is not My wife, nor am I her husband."** (Hosea 2:2). However God's love for Israel is unchangeable, and His announcement of divorcement is followed by an assurance of reconciliation at the close of the age. **"I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and**

justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD." Afterwards the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David (Christ) their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days." [Hosea 2:19-20, 3:5].

The temptation for us is to dissociate ourselves from the behaviour of our Jewish forefathers. After all, we tend to think of them as those who lived under the old covenant, whereas we have been filled with the Spirit and walk by the life of Jesus in a different dispensation. And so we convince ourselves that we could never conform to their backsliding and idolatrous ways.

The apostle Paul expressly denies this presumption. In his first letter to the Corinthian church he writes, **"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."** (1 Corinthians 10:11-12).

THE PARALLEL OF ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

There is a strong parallel between the history of Israel and that of the church. Both began in the nurture of God's covenant love. Both forsook their Lord and fell into idolatry. In particular, both fell prey to the idolatries of the world around them. Israel's pattern of blessing, backsliding, judgment, repentance, and revival, has been repeated by the Christian church many times throughout the centuries of her existence.

Now, at the close of the age, the church is just as far away as Israel is from her true spiritual inheritance in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The prophet Isaiah's description of a corrupted Judah and Jerusalem in the 8th century BC, provides us with a pointed reference to the real spiritual state of the church today.

"They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward ... the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.

Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; strangers devour your land in your presence; and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a hut in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Unless the LORD of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah." (Isaiah 1:4, 5-9).

Essentially both Israel and the church have been brought into captivity by the deceptions of Antichrist, and as a result, both have dishonored the headship of Lord Jesus Christ. While both have experienced periods of restoration and revival, these intervals have been of relatively short duration.

God's love is immutable. Both Israel and the church are assured prophetically of the full restoration of their spiritual inheritances at the end of the age. But this restoration will be on exactly the same terms that have applied to Israel in the past. First judgment, then repentance, and finally restoration.

SUMMARY

Many people doubt that the Christian church will be restored in this dispensation. However Peter said that her restoration has been foretold by all of the Old Testament prophets. Paul confirms that Christ will return to a glorious church, cleansed and sanctified, made holy and without blemish.

Biblical prophecy indicates that both Israel and the church will be restored to their true spiritual inheritance. But God's dealings with Israel suggest that both she and the church must first embark on a path of judgment and repentance, before encountering God's grace and restoration. The next chapter will specifically address this process as it applies to physical Israel.

Chapter 3

THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL FIRST PHYSICAL AND THEN SPIRITUAL RESTORATION

EZEKIEL'S PROPHECIES OF RESTORATION

Chapters 36 to 39 of the Book of Ezekiel contain prophecies concerning the restoration of Israel. At the time of writing, Jerusalem had been conquered by Nebuchadnezzar and the prophet Ezekiel, along with most of the inhabitants of Judah, had been taken as captives to Babylon. Ezekiel's prophecies are therefore an obvious reference to the Jewish nation's deliverance from bondage in Babylon and their physical return to the land of Judah. As such these words would have provided an immediate source of hope and comfort to the exiles. However the scope and extent of these prophecies stretches out beyond this direct application of their meaning - to encompass the restoration of the Christian church at the end of the age.

Chapter 36

Verse 24 of Ezekiel 36 speaks of the Jew's physical restoration to the land of Israel. **"For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land."** This portion of the prophecy was fulfilled when the Children of Israel returned from their captivity in Babylon during the 4th and 5th centuries BC. There was a further fulfilment of these words in 1948, when the Jews were gathered "out of all countries" to return to their homeland and form the nation state of Israel.

Verses 25 to 27 then go on to declare God's promise of a subsequent spiritual restoration. **"Then [ie after being physically restored to their land] I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."** This part of the prophecy has only been partially fulfilled. For the most part the Jewish people have rejected Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour and they have therefore not received the Holy Spirit of regeneration.

Verse 28 looks forward to a time when this latter portion of the prophecy will be completely fulfilled. **"Then [ie when their spiritual restoration has been accomplished] you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God."** This land, "the land that I gave to your fathers," is not the physical land, but the land of their spiritual inheritance in Jesus Christ.

In a similar way Abraham dwelt in the physical land of his inheritance **"as in a foreign country."** He waited for a spiritual land **"whose builder and maker is God,"** although he did not experience it in his own lifetime. **"By faith [Abraham] sojourned in the [physical] 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 [spiritual] foundations, whose builder and maker is God."** (Hebrews 11:9-10).

Chapter 37

The thirty seventh chapter of Ezekiel also speaks of a physical restoration, which is then followed by a spiritual restoration. The prophet was taken **"in the Spirit of the LORD"** to a valley **"full of bones."** There he was told that **"these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!'"** (verse 11). These words are a vivid description of the despondency of those captive in Babylon.

Ezekiel was firstly commanded to prophesy regarding the people's restoration to their physical land. **"Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!'" ...So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them."** (verses 4,7-8).

Then Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy of their spiritual restoration. **"'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: 'Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they might live.''" So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army."** (Verses 9-10). Without the Spirit or **"breath"** of regeneration the Jews were a nation dead in their sins, but after receiving Him they were described as standing up on their feet, "an exceedingly great army."

The last half of Chapter 37 goes on to describe a process of unification which is to occur after the nation Israel's spiritual restoration. Ezekiel was told to prophesy that God would **"take the stick of Joseph,"** representing the northern kingdom of Israel, and join it to **"the stick of Judah,"** representing the southern kingdom of Judah, **"and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand."** (Verse 19).

The prophet was then instructed to say **"Thus says the Lord GOD: 'Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all;'"** (verses 21-22).

This prophecy is yet to be fulfilled. The northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah have never been officially re-united, and neither has the nation of Israel recognised Jesus Christ as their king. Rather than viewing this prophecy as one concerning the physical union of Israel and Judah, we ought to interpret it in a much wider sense. The true meaning of this prophecy is that after the nation Israel has been spiritually restored, God will then make the whole of spiritual Israel 'one nation.' That is, the stick of Joseph, representing national Israel, will be united with the stick of Judah, representing the Christian church, and the two will at long last become one stick in the Lord's hand.

"[T]hey shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again ... David My servant [Jesus] shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My Statutes, and do them ... My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (Verses 22, 24,27).

Chapters 38 and 39

The thirty eighth and thirty ninth chapters of Ezekiel address Israel as being united and one with the church - which is to say they address spiritual Israel. These two chapters describe an all-out attack on the church by the confederates of Antichrist, which is to take place at the close of the age.

The forces of Antichrist confronting the church at that time are symbolically portrayed as **"Gog, of the land of Magog,"** who is allied with **"Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya"** as well as **"Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops - and many people..."** (Ezekiel 38:2, 5, 6).

There is a corresponding account of the prophecy of Antichrist's attack on the church in the Book of Revelation, where we are told that **"Satan ... will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea."** (Revelation 20:7-8).

Far from being out of His divine will, this attack is actually brought on by Almighty God. His purpose is to ensure that Antichrist and his allies are defeated and destroyed forever. Through the prophet Ezekiel, God says, **"You will come up against My people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be in the latter days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am hallowed in you, O Gog, before their eyes."** (Ezekiel 38:16).

It is at this time that the church, or spiritual Israel, will be purged of all impurity. Ezekiel uses the analogy of dead bodies and bones covering the land to represent the apostasy that pollutes the church. A symbolic seven months is required to remove every trace of their presence from the land (or church).

When this process is finally completed, God promises to restore **"the whole house of Israel" to their spiritual homeland forever.** **"When I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and I am hallowed in them in the sight of many nations, then they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also brought them back to their own land, and left none of them captive any longer. And I will not hide My face from them any more; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel,"** says the Lord GOD." (Ezekiel 39:27-29).

SPIRITUAL RESTORATION THROUGH TRIBULATION

We can conclude from this study of Ezekiel's prophecies that Israel's physical restoration to their geographical homeland precedes their spiritual restoration. God's purpose in restoring Israel to their ancestral lands is to allow Him to deal with them collectively as a nation again, in order to prepare them to receive the spiritual 'land of promise that they rejected in the past. His intent is to purge them of their apostasy, just as He purged their forefathers in the wilderness of Sinai.

"As I live," says the Lord GOD, **'surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face. Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you,'** says the Lord GOD." (Ezekiel 20:33-36).

The nation Israel has been restored to her physical homeland, but the prophet refers to it here as **"the wilderness of the peoples."** The reality is that the Jewish people have been placed in a crucible of internal strife with Palestinian inhabitants and explosive friction with surrounding Arab nations. Their remains only one route to their full spiritual inheritance - through **"the valley of Achor"** (or 'the valley of trouble').

**"Therefore, behold, I will allure her,
Will bring her into the wilderness,
And speak comfort to her.
I will give her her vineyards from there,
And the Valley of Achor as a door of hope;"** (Hosea 2:14-15).

The Hebrew name **"Achor"** has the literal meaning of 'trouble' or 'troubling.' The **"Valley of Achor"** is presented here as a **"door of hope"** because trouble and tribulation produce repentance,

and repentance is the necessary precondition to restoration. Only when the Jewish nation has repented will God be able to pour out His **"Spirit of grace and supplication"** upon them.

"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a first-born. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo [when the good King Josiah was killed in battle (2 Chronicles 35:20-25)]. And the land shall mourn, every family by itself [in universal mourning]: the family of the house of David by itself, [including those of royal lineage] and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself [signifying the prophets], and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Levi by itself [representing the priesthood], and their wives by themselves; the family of Shimei by itself [Shimei cursed David so he stands for everyman - from the highest to the lowest], and their wives by themselves; all the families that remain, every family by itself, and their wives by themselves. In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." (Zechariah 12:10-14, & 13:1).

This passage presents a picture of the whole nation in a state of mourning and repentance - a condition which is then followed by an outpouring of God's grace and acceptance. It is just as Ezekiel's prophecy declares: **"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean;"** As Israel accepts the anointed Word of God through His prophets at the end of the age, so He will open up the fountain of His forgiveness and cleansing for her.

TO WHAT DEGREE WILL ISRAEL BE RESTORED?

Some people believe that the whole nation of Israel will be restored. However there is no scriptural warranty for this assumption. God's great purpose behind the return of the Jews to the physical land of Israel is to undertake a mighty work amongst them and bring about their repentance. He still wants them to enter into the New Covenant, but they can only do this by recognising and submitting to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

The apostle Paul expressed this divine hope in his letter to the Christians in Rome. In this letter he described all non-Jewish believers in Christ as branches of a wild olive tree which had been grafted into the stock of a good olive tree. This analogy reflects their (and our) spiritual status as true sons of Abraham, having been brought in through faith and belief in Christ rather than by strictly biological descent.

"And if some of the branches were broken off [representing those Jews who rejected Christ], and you, being a wild olive tree [ie not a Jew by birth], were grafted in among them [that remain], and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree [that is their true spiritual inheritance], do not boast against the branches [that were cut off.] ... Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith ... And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted [back] in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, how much more will these, who are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?" (Romans 11:17-18, 20,23-24).

The natural branches of the good olive tree who were broken off are those Jews who were removed from their true spiritual inheritance through unbelief. But Paul assures us that **"if they do not continue in unbelief"** they will be restored to their full inheritance because **"God is able to graft them in again."** The apostle goes on to say, **"For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in."** (Romans 11:25).

Again we see hope for the restoration of the Jewish nation to their spiritual inheritance, but that hope rests on their discontinuing in unbelief. First the Gentile nations are given a full and complete opportunity to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. And when this time has elapsed, God has promised to perform a mighty work to soften Jewish hearts to repentance, so that they too are grafted into Christ and His New Covenant.

WILL ALL ISRAEL BE SAVED?

This question is answered by Paul in the verses directly following on from the 'grafting' passage quoted above. **"And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion,**

**And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;
For this is My covenant with them,
When I take away their sins.'"** (Romans 11:26-27).

Some have concluded that these words indicate that all the Jewish people - or even every human being - will be saved. This is not correct. It is important to remember Paul's earlier definition of true Israel. **"For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called.' That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as the seed."** (Romans 9:6-8). True Israel is not made up of those who can trace their genealogy back to the patriarchs, but those who are called **"the children of the promise."**

The apostle's declaration that **"all Israel will be saved"** is followed by a quotation from the prophet Isaiah (59:20-21). The use of this quotation establishes that the condition for their salvation is **"as it is written"** - that is, on the same terms that are declared throughout the Bible. In this case it is written that the **"Deliverer will come out of Zion."**

In other words the Jewish people are promised salvation on the same basis as everyone else - by their faith in the Deliverer from Zion who is Jesus Christ. It is this Deliverer alone who can **"turn away ungodliness from Jacob"** as it is only His atoning blood that can **"take away their sins."** The single condition that has to be met before natural Israel can be grafted back into their full inheritance is that **"they do not continue in unbelief."**

There is no promise of unconditional salvation for the Jews. Instead we see a consistent promise that God the Father will institute a mighty sovereign work towards convicting them to repentance, and all who believe will be saved.

SUMMARY

The restoration of Israel involves more than a return to their homeland and becoming a political nation again. Their true **"land of promise"** is a spiritual homeland where they are re-united with Jesus Christ their Messiah. It is where they receive the promise of their eternal salvation in the Kingdom of God.

God has brought Israel back to their physical land, but this is only a step towards His preparation of their hearts to receive Jesus Christ as Lord. The entrance into their full inheritance is through **"the wilderness of the peoples"** and the doorway of trouble.

Under the mighty dealing hand of God **"...they will look on [Jesus] whom they have pierced [and] they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son.."** In response to their repentant

hearts, God will open for Israel **"...a fountain...for sin and for uncleanness.."** and **"whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."** (Joel 2:32 & Acts 2:21).

The next chapter deals with the nature of restoration in an overall sense.

THE NATURE OF RESTORATION

REPENTANCE - TIMES OF REFRESHING - RESTORATION

In the Key Bible Reading in Chapter 2, the first part of Peter's address was directed to the people in the crowd as individuals. The apostle said "**Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..**"

The second part of his speech was related to all those who believe, which is the church as a whole - "(Repent)...so that **times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.**"

Peter lists three key elements in the process of restoration. They are:

(1) "**Repent...that your sins may be blotted out**"

(2) "**...that times [Gk 'kairos' meaning 'special occasions'] of refreshing may come...**"

(3) "**...until the times [Gk 'chronos' meaning 'a season' or 'space of time'] of restoration of all things..**"

1. REPENT THEREFORE

The apostle's first command was to "**Repent...**" Repentance is fundamental to all that follows. It was crucial that each individual, and therefore the church as a whole, repent and turn to God. The fulfilment of the two subsequent promises depended on that initial foundation of repentance.

Repentance is a subject often misunderstood by Christians. There is a tendency to think of it as a feeling of remorse. However repentance is much more than an emotion. The real meaning of the word is to 'turn around' or to 'change direction.' Repentance therefore involves an act of the human will which results in departing from a wayward path and turning to the right ways of God. If there is no action taken to remove the sin then there has been no genuine repentance.

Repentance in the Old Testament

God's first requirement of His wayward children has always been repentance. The Old Testament prophets consistently warned the Israelites to repent of their rebellious ways and return to their Father God. For example, "**Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, 'If you return to the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the LORD, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.**" (1 Samuel 7:3).

The prophet Samuel's instruction to the errant house of Israel required them to repent and change direction. They had to "**return to the LORD with all [their] hearts.**" As a necessary outworking of this change of direction, they were also required to change their behaviour. They were to "**put away the foreign gods**" and "**serve Him only.**"

Repentance in the Preparation for the Lord's First Coming

When John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah to prepare the way for our Lord's First Coming, his message was, **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"** and **"Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance."** (Matthew 3:2, 8).

This pattern will be repeated at the close of the age when God the Father **"send[s] Jesus Christ ... whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things..."** The same prophetic spirit that rested on John the Baptist to prepare the way for the Lord's First Coming, will return to prepare the way for His Second Coming.

Repentance in the Preparation for the Lord's Second Coming

After Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain, the three disciples who were with Him asked, **"Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"** (Matthew 17:10). They were referring to a passage from the prophet Malachi which says, **"Behold, I [God] will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD."** (Malachi 4:5).

Jesus answered their question with the words, **"Elijah truly is coming first and will restore all things [which is a statement made in the future tense]. But I say to you that Elijah has come already [a statement in the past tense], and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished...' Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist."** (Matthew 17:11-12, 13).

The Lord is describing two separate occurrences here. He speaks of John the Baptist's ministry in the past tense because by this stage Herod had already beheaded him. But he also speaks of a future manifestation of the same spirit of prophecy that had rested on John - this time coming before the day of His return in order to **"restore all things."**

It is the premise of this book that **"the times of restoration of all things"** are drawing near. The Lord is investing His end-time servants with the prophetic spirit of Elijah, and commissioning them to prepare the way for His Second Coming. The task for these end of the age prophets is to **"restore all things,"** and so their primary message is identical to that of John the Baptist - **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

The prophets of the Old Testament obediently declared the sinfulness and idolatry of rebellious Israel, always exhorting them to repent and return to Almighty God. Similarly the Lord's end-time prophets are required to testify to an apostate church, exposing her disobedience and spiritual corruption, so that through her repentance she might be restored.

2. TIMES OF REFRESHING

The history of the church reveals a number of **"times [or special occasions] of refreshing"** that have **"come from the presence of the Lord."** These are occasions when the Holy Spirit has fallen upon a parched church and breathed new life into her. Conviction to repentance, resurgence of forgotten truths, and the flame of revival have all been experienced.

The world-wide tide of charismatic renewal that has occurred during this century is one example of this. As one of the most profound movements of the Holy Spirit in the whole of the church age, this wave of anointing has brought spiritual revival to an ailing body. Nevertheless it is important to see the difference between revival and restoration.

Many Christians would appear to believe that restoration consists of nothing more than breathing new life into the old and corrupt structure. Their view is that the church will be restored to

its former glory by a surge of Holy Spirit power and the reinstatement of 'the gifts of the Spirit.' This is not so. The revival of the power of the Holy Spirit within the church is an indispensable part of the process of restoration, but it is not restoration in itself.

3. RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS

Restoration, as the name suggests, is the act of bringing something back in accordance with its original pattern. If we are to understand God's perfect will for the church, then we must study its structure and working at the beginning of its history. Because God wants us to understand His directive plan for establishing and maintaining churches, He has created a pattern for us to follow. However restoration according to the original pattern does not require us to slavishly copy every organisational detail. Rather it means a whole-hearted return to basic principles.

The history of the early church is recorded in the Book of Acts and Paul's letters to the young churches. These documents provide the clearest picture of God's directive will for the formation and subsequent operation of Christian churches. As the church at Jerusalem was still contaminated to some degree by traditional Judaism, the most reliable pattern is provided by the church at Antioch - as well as subsequent Gentile churches founded by the apostles as they operated under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The state of the church today is vastly different to that of the early church. Her present condition of spiritual decay and lawlessness is in pointed contrast to her portrayal in the New Testament. This corruption of the church has occurred because of the saint's carelessness and complacency. As we have read, it was **"while men slept, [that] his enemy came and sowed [the] tares"** of apostasy in her midst.

Jesus warned us that it would be imprudent to put new wine into old wineskins. Restoration which involved pouring new life into the old corrupt structure would be doing just that. Before restoration can properly take place, the old structure must be stripped away. This means the breaking down and removal of all that has been the invention of man, so that the purity of the original pattern may be restored.

Old Testament prophecies assert that God will shake heaven and earth to remove the defilement of all that is initiated and constructed by human effort. These prophecies are confirmed in the New Testament. For example the author of Hebrews quotes the prophet Haggai as saying, **"'Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.' Now this, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things made [by man], that the things which cannot be shaken may remain."** (Hebrews 12:26-27).

All the corrupt works and lawless ministries of man will be cast down by this shaking. Only the true works of Christ - those which have been inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit - will remain, because they cannot be shaken. As a result, the Lord will return to a restored church - purged of the fleshly works of man.

SUMMARY

The apostle Peter outlines three stages in the process of restoration. They are repentance, times of refreshing (or revival), and the restoration of all things. There have been periods of backsliding and gross idolatry, followed by genuine repentance and times of revival, in the history of both Israel and the church. But there has never been a complete restoration of all things.

We can take comfort in the continuing thread of prophecy that indicates that the restoration of all things will occur at the end of this age. However we should also be aware that this will not take place until the existing contaminated structure is exposed and swept away.

In the next few chapters we will examine the pattern of the early church and determine the extent of our deviation from the original God-given design.

SECTION 3.

GOD'S PATTERN - THE EARLY CHURCH

Chapter 5

THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST

In declaring that Jesus Christ is Lord, it should be acknowledged that Almighty God the Father is above all authority and power. Paul makes this distinction in his letter to the Ephesians. **"There is ...one Lord...[and] one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."** (Ephesians 4:4,5, 6).

This was not always so. We read in Philippians that before Jesus came to earth as a man, He was **"...in the form of God, [and] did not consider it robbery to be equal with God..."** (Philippians 2:6). However, in order that God's purposes in redeeming mankind might be fulfilled, Jesus **"made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."** (Philippians 2:7-8).

During His earthly ministry Jesus was God's bondservant, never acting on His own initiative, but always moving in perfect obedience to the will of the Father. He did only those things that He saw His Father doing. He told His disciples, **"...the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner."** (John 5:19). Similarly, He only spoke those words that His Father commanded Him to speak. **"For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak."** (John 12:49). He was God's representative on earth, speaking and acting in perfect accord with God's will.

Because of His perfect obedience even **"to the point of death,"** God raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand, enthroned in glory. To accompany this exalted position of authority, God invested Jesus with a new title, proclaiming Him to be LORD. **"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."** (Philippians 2:9-11). Jesus' full title now is Jesus Christ the Lord.

As a result of Jesus being proclaimed Lord, **"All authority has been given to [Him] in heaven and on earth."** (Matthew 28:18). God the Father has **"put all things under His feet, and [given] Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."** (Ephesians 1:22-23).

THE SENDING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Before He departed from their midst, Jesus promised His disciples that they would not be completely cut off from His presence. Instead He would send another to be His representative, to guide them and help them in the work that He set before them. Jesus told them, **".. I will pray the**

Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you for ever, even the [Holy] Spirit of truth..." (John 14:16).

The central task of the Holy Spirit is to testify to the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, **"...when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me."** (John 15:26). In other words, when the disciples proclaimed what Jesus accomplished through the cross, the Holy Spirit would confirm their words by testifying to Jesus in living power.

THE HOLY SPIRIT HONOURS THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS

Just as God the Father sent Jesus to be His representative on earth, so too Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to be His representative in the church. And just as Christ did and said nothing on His own authority, only doing and speaking those things which were of the Father, in like manner the Holy Spirit honours Jesus as Lord, only saying and doing those things which are from Him.

Jesus told His disciples that, **"...when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you."** (John 16:13-14).

This unassertive role of the Holy Spirit is reflected in the following account of the young church in action. **"Therefore they [the apostles Paul and Barnabus] stayed there [in Iconium] a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands [in the power of the Holy Spirit]."** (Acts 14:3).

It was the Lord who granted **"signs and wonders to be done by their hands."** He did this by directing the Holy Spirit to accompany the apostles' teaching with miracles and healings. Nowhere is the Holy Spirit seen to be taking the initiative. Even in those passages which state that **"the Spirit said"** (such as Acts 8:29), it is the Lord who issues the directive as **"head over all things to the church."** (Ephesians 1:22).

THE OPERATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE EARLY CHURCH

In the SELECTION and ANOINTING of LEADERS

It is apparent from the accounts of the early church in operation that believers continually sought the will of their Lord, and it was He who then spoke to them through the Holy Spirit. A clear example of this is provided at Antioch with the selection of Paul and Barnabus as apostles.

A group of prophets and teachers belonging to the church of that city had gathered together for prayer and fasting. **"As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Now separate for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I [the Lord] have called them.'"** (Acts 13:2).

Note that it was as they ministered **"to the Lord"** that the Holy Spirit spoke to them. To minister to the Lord is to prayerfully wait on Him - to seek His direction. In response to their waiting on Him, the Lord then made His will known to them through the Holy Spirit.

In a similar way, it was through the direction of the Holy Spirit that elders were recognised and appointed. Paul told the elders of the church at Ephesus to **"...take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers .."** (Acts 2:28).

However to put this into its right perspective, we should remember that it was Christ who gave the gifts of leadership to His church in the first place. "**And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers** [or 'those who minister as elders']...for the edifying of the body of Christ .." (Ephesians 4:11-12).

In the experience of the early church therefore, the preparation and anointing of leaders was initiated by Christ the Lord and executed through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In RECEIVING the LORD'S DIRECTION

The Lord directed the ministries of the apostles by speaking to them through the Holy Spirit. For example, "**While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I [the Lord] have sent them.'**" (Acts 10:19-20).

Others in ministry received similar direction from the Lord through the Holy Spirit. When the evangelist Philip saw the Ethiopian on the road to Gaza, "**the Spirit said to [him], 'Go near and overtake this chariot.' So Philip ran to him...**" (Acts 8:29-30). And when Paul, Silas and Timothy, "**...had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.**" (Acts 16:6).

In INTERPRETING DOCTRINE

In matters of doctrine the early Christians sought the will of their Lord through the Holy Spirit. When asked to address a question presented by the church at Antioch, the apostles and elders at Jerusalem answered with the words, "**For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: ..**" (Acts 15:28).

An important part of the Holy Spirit's ministry is to lead in the discernment of truth. The apostle John encouraged the young church to seek discernment from the Spirit who was within them. "**...you have an anointing from the Holy One [Jesus Christ], and you [therefore] know all things ...the anointing [Holy Spirit] which you have received from Him [Jesus Christ] abides in you... the same anointing [Holy Spirit] teaches you concerning all things, and is true ..**" (1 John 2:20-27).

In PROPHETIC REVELATION

Just as Jesus had promised to His disciples, the Holy Spirit told the church of "**things to come.**" (John 16:13). For example, a visiting prophet to the church at Antioch, "**...named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.**" (Acts 11:28).

Another example is found during Paul's final journey back to Jerusalem. He confided to the Ephesian elders that "**...now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.**" (Acts 20:22-23).

In ANSWERING their ACCUSERS

Whenever the apostles were confronted with hostile opposition, the Holy Spirit gave them words to speak. Jesus advised them, "**...when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or**

what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you." (Matt 10:19-20).

Peter and John experienced personal fulfilment of this promise after their arrest in the temple porch for preaching in the name of Jesus. The Jewish religious leaders were confounded as the Holy Spirit gave Peter words to answer them. **"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marvelled."** (Acts 4:13).

In the GIFTS of the SPIRIT

Just before His ascension into heaven, Jesus instructed His followers to **"...tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."** (Luke 24:49). Later, as they waited on God in obedience to Christ's command, **"...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."** (Acts 2:4).

This promise of the Spirit coming upon them with power was not limited to the early church or the city of Jerusalem. Peter told the crowd that gathered around those first baptised with the Spirit, **"Repent, and let everyone 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. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."** (Acts 2:38-39). His statement embraces mankind from all ages and all parts of the earth.

The apostle Paul subsequently taught the Corinthian church that **"...the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all."** (1 Cor 12:7). This understanding is confirmed by the apostle Peter who counselled, **"As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."** (1 Pet 4:10). In other words, each believer received at least one gift of the Spirit for ministering to others in the church.

The result of being **"endued with power from on high"** was soon apparent in the life of the early church. The author of Acts records that **"...with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all."** (Acts 4:33). It is clear that **"through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people."** (Acts 5:12).

It is also clear that the exercise of this **"great power"** and **"great grace"** was not restricted to the original apostles, as some have since claimed. For example, **"Philip (who was a deacon) went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralysed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city."** (Acts 8:5-8).

Note that this account illustrates the proper order in lawful ministry. First Philip **"preached Christ to them."** Then the Holy Spirit testified to Christ with accompanying miracles.

HONOURING THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus warned those who rejected Him, **"that all should honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him."** (John 5:23). It follows that all who do not honour the Holy Spirit, do not honour the Lord Jesus Christ who sent Him.

We honour the Holy Spirit by accepting His position as representative of Christ's headship and authority in the church. Christ's presence in His church is expressed through the Holy Spirit. His will

and desires are made known to His church through the Holy Spirit. Therefore to be obedient to the Holy Spirit is to be obedient to the Lord Himself.

THE SPIRITUAL GROUND OF THE CHURCH

The spiritual ground of the church is the foundation on which she stands. It is what gives her legitimate status as the true church. The spiritual ground required before a body of believers can be rightly called part of that church, is that they honour the Lordship of Jesus Christ as their Head. This is achieved by honouring the delegated authorities He has set in the church, the most important being the Holy Spirit whom He sent as His representative.

The spiritual ground of the early church was solid. The overall picture presented in the Book of Acts is one of the Lord directing the operation of His church, through the Holy Spirit dwelling in her midst. As those first Christians obediently followed the directions of the Holy Spirit, they were in fact obeying their Lord. As a result, the early church was a faithful expression of Christ's life and fullness.

The spiritual ground of the church is removed when members disregard the Holy Spirit as the Lord's representative, thereby replacing the headship of Christ with the authority of man. A group of believers may meet together in Jesus' name, but still have no legitimate spiritual ground to be called a part of the church. They may vehemently profess to be Christians, but by ignoring the Lord's headship through the Holy Spirit and busying themselves with the lawless works of man, they forfeit their claims to the true church. Of these Jesus said, **"I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"** (Matthew 7:23).

THE GROUNDLESS STATE OF THE MODERN CHURCH

In general terms, the present-day church has lost its spiritual ground. Far too much is initiated by man, without referring to the Lord and seeking His directive will through the Holy Spirit. In this respect the 'church' has little to differentiate it from any other worldly institution.

This has not occurred through deliberate disobedience. Rather it has come about through the spirit of Antichrist gradually permeating the church with his mark of humanism. Over the centuries believers have lost their dependence on the Holy Spirit to guide them into an intimate and ongoing relationship with their Saviour. They have little sense of Christ's abiding presence, or of His commissioning and anointing of their ministries by the Holy Spirit.

Instead they have taken upon themselves the burden of doing the Lord's work, and consequently there is so much of man's initiation in the church today. The authority and power of the Holy Spirit has been replaced by the earnest, 'well-meaning,' works of man - man's organisation, man's program, man's opinion, and man's decision. But no matter how zealous the effort or how eminently qualified the servant, those works that are not conceived by the Spirit remain the flawed works of the flesh. In effect the Lord's position of authority as **"head over all things to the church,"** has been overridden and replaced by the false headship of Antichrist.

SUMMARY

Because of His perfect obedience to the will of the Father, even to the point of death on the cross, God has highly exalted Jesus and given Him the title Lord - declaring Him to be head over all things to the church.

In the same way that Jesus was God's representative on earth, so the Holy Spirit is Christ's representative in the church. And just as Jesus always honoured the authority of God the Father, so the Holy Spirit honours the Lordship of Jesus Christ - never speaking or acting on His own authority.

If we as the church desire to honour the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, then we must honour the Holy Spirit as His representative in our midst. The modern church has to a large extent forfeited its spiritual ground in Christ, by ignoring the Holy Spirit and allowing Antichrist to usurp the position of headship by default.

In the next chapter we will consider the New Testament pattern for correctly dividing the church as a whole (singular) into constituent churches (plural).

Chapter 6

THE CHURCH AND CHURCHES

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

The bible refers to the church in a manner that suggests that it has two forms. First of all it speaks of 'the church' as a single entity. For example, the apostle Paul wrote, **"Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God."** [1 Corinthians 10:32]. Again he wrote that **"...Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body."** [Ephesians 5:23]. These readings refer to the universal church, or the whole worldwide body of Christ.

THE LOCAL CHURCH

The bible also speaks of 'churches' in the plural form. In his letter to the Romans Paul wrote, **"The churches of Christ greet you."** [Romans 16:16]. And to the Thessalonians, **"we ourselves boast of you among the churches."** [2 Thessalonians 1:4].

By referring to churches in the plural, Paul assumed that the one universal church had been divided into a number of individual churches. The key issue therefore, is to establish on what grounds **"the Church of God"** (or universal church), can be divided into **"the churches of God,"** or a number of component churches. According to the New Testament, there is only one valid reason for division, and that is on the ground of LOCALITY.

Each city or town had its own local church, and the geographical boundary of these localities determined the extent of the church. The bible speaks of **"the church that was at Antioch"** [Acts 13:1], **"the church of God which is at Corinth"** [1 Corinthians 1:2], and **"the church of the Thessalonians"**[at Thessalonica] [1 Thessalonians 1:1].

There is no biblical record of any other name attached to a church than that of the city in which it was located. When referring to these churches generally from now on, we will use the commonly accepted term, LOCAL CHURCH, as distinct from the UNIVERSAL CHURCH.

In the modern context of large cities, it is useful to determine what constitutes a 'locality.' In practice, each city is divided into convenient suburbs, which may be further divided into smaller administrative districts. Each one of these administrative districts provides suitable grounds for a local church. The general principle is that the universal church can only be divided into smaller churches on the basis of what comprises an effective and practical geographical area.

In some cases the apostle Paul used the plural form to refer to a number of churches situated within a larger geographical or political region. For example, **"the churches of Macedonia"** [2 Corinthians 8:1], **"the churches of Galatia"** [Galatians 1:2], and **"the churches of Judea"** [Galatians 1:22]. He did this without inconsistency, because each of these names referred to a particular province within the Roman Empire. In any one of these provinces there were a number of cities or towns, and therefore a number of local churches.

This way of defining churches was confirmed by Christ when He addressed **"the seven churches which are in [the province of] Asia."** [Revelation 1:4,11]. He then addressed them individually as **"the church at Ephesus...the church in Smyrna...the church in Pergamos...the church in Thyratira...the church in Sardis...the church in Philadelphia...and the church of the Laodiceans."** [Revelation 2:1, 8,12,18,&3:1,7,14].

THE AUTONOMY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

It was never God's intention for local churches to be split into denominations, or be controlled by national or international organizations. In the original pattern, each local church was self governing. Each one had its own character, and was responsible for its own progress and well-being. Because of this, Christ did not address the seven churches in Asia collectively. Instead He ministered to each one individually, commending or admonishing them in accordance with their own unique spiritual condition.

LOCAL INDEPENDENCE AND UNIVERSAL CONFORMITY

The independent character of the local church provided a necessary safeguard against heresy or apostasy on a large scale. Nevertheless it did not remove their obligation to conform to the same spiritual precepts that applied to the universal church. For example, local churches had to submit to the authority of the Scriptures, and were obliged to follow the same pattern of behavior that was taught to the church as a whole.

This principle was stressed by Paul's in his letters to the young churches. He wrote, **"For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church."** [1 Corinthians 4:17]. And again, **"But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches."** [1 Corinthians 7:17].

There was a uniformity in Christ's commands to all the churches. God said, **"I am the LORD, I do not change,"** so naturally Christ could never give a command to one church that contradicted one given to another church. Local churches were independent in character, but interdependent in body life. If one church was in need, then the rest were expected to succor it. For example Paul encouraged the church in Corinth to provide support for the church in Jerusalem, so that **"your abundance may supply their lack."** [2 Corinthians 8:14].

CHURCHES IN A HOUSE

We have already observed that the New Testament church was not divided on any other grounds than that of locality. It follows logically that just as local churches were not grouped into units larger than locality, neither were they subdivided into smaller units.

While there is scriptural mention of house meetings taking place, these home fellowships did not constitute a church in themselves. Rather they comprised a part of the local church, and each group was therefore under the supervision of their local church eldership.

The situation in the church in Jerusalem illustrates this point. The bible refers to **"the church in Jerusalem,"** but never the plural, **"churches."** Despite the fact that the church in Jerusalem was always referred to in the singular, we also read that there were many home fellowships in its midst. The Book of Acts speaks of the saints in Jerusalem **"...breaking bread from house to house...And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease from teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."** [Acts 2:46 & 5:42]. When Peter was released from prison **"he came to the house of Mary...where many were gathered together praying."**[Acts 12:12].

At that time Jerusalem was by far the largest church, it had the greatest number of members, and consequently the greatest number of house meetings. Nevertheless the bible always refers to the church in Jerusalem as a single entity. The home fellowships were not separate churches, but part of the local church in Jerusalem, and therefore under the authority of its elders.

WHAT ABOUT "THE CHURCH THAT IS IN THEIR HOUSE"?

On four occasions the bible actually mentions "**the church that is in their** [or his or your] **house.**" (Rom 16:5, 1 Cor 16:19, Col 4:15, and Phil 2). For example, Paul wrote, "**Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.**" [1 Corinthians 16:19].

This terminology is in fact the result of historical circumstance rather than a matter of doctrine. The first letter to the Corinthians was written from Ephesus in about 56 AD, when the local church was still in its infancy. At the beginning of the forming of each church, numbers were so small that believers met regularly in one house. In this case it was the house of Aquila and Priscilla.

Because the church at Ephesus was meeting in Aquila and Priscilla's house, Paul referred to it as "**the church that is in their house.**" He did not refer to it as "their church," but rather, "**the church that is in** [or meeting in] **their house.**" This same background applies to the three other New Testament examples.

DIVISION BY DOCTRINE OR DENOMINATIONALISM

At the present time the church has been subdivided into several denominational 'churches,' each one promoting doctrinal variations unique to itself. Paul was adamant that doctrine does not compromise legitimate grounds for dividing the church. He admonished the Corinthian Christians for entertaining such divisions in their midst.

"Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul', or 'I am of Appollos', or 'I am of Cephas', or 'I am of Christ'. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ...for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul', and another, 'I am of Apollos', are you not carnal?" [1 Corinthians 1:12-13, & 3:3-4].

The undeniable truth of Paul's argument is convicting. Even though the statement "I am of Christ" is highly commendable as a confession of belief, Paul declared that even that was not sufficient grounds for division into a separate faction or church. In looking at the denominational maze of the twentieth century, a modern apostle could justifiably write, "each of you says, 'I am of Luther', or 'I am of Calvin', or 'I am of Booth', or 'We believe in the authority of the Scriptures', or 'We believe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit.' Are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?"

Our behaving like '**mere men**,' or men of the world, has had drastic consequences. We have ignored Paul's warning, and completely divorced ourselves from the pattern of the early church. As a result, the modern church is fragmented into numerous denominations which have all the characteristics of worldly institutions. The New Testament pattern has been ignored, and no longer are there autonomous local churches, governed by anointed elders under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Instead we have international institutions which are controlled by a hierarchy of clergy, each with its unique interpretation of doctrine, and its set forms of worship.

WILL DENOMINATIONALISM SURVIVE?

Denominationalism is not of God's initiation. The bible warns us that Antichrist will set up a false religious system so much like the real thing that it will "**deceive, if possible, even the elect.**" [Mk 13:22]. The image and number of the beast in Revelation 13 is the image of man, or humanism. It is the worship of things created "**rather than the Creator.**" [Rom 1:25]. The one clearly

identifiable feature of the false church is that its accent is on man. Most denominations have their origins in the teachings of one person, and each has instituted practices, doctrines, orders, and liturgies invented by man.

By comparison, the true church was established by Jesus Christ **"on the foundation** [supplied by] **the apostles and prophets"** as they were led by the Holy Spirit. In all teaching and preaching, and in all ministry, the accent was on **"Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."** Because man was subservient to the Spirit, all works of the true church were able to be directed by Christ through the Holy Spirit. Christ's authority as head was upheld as His will was transmitted by the Spirit to prepared and anointed leaders, and then obeyed by the rest of the body.

In reality the denominational system has been imposed on the church by the spirit of Antichrist. Much of what now exists has been the invention of man - the worldly organization, the professional clergy, the set forms of worship, the idolatrous trappings, the hierarchical control, and the overall promotion of the works and ministries of man. Its doctrinal prejudices have introduced harsh divisions, suspicion, and lack of love to the body of Christ. It has stifled the power of the Holy Spirit, and negated the Lord's authority as **"head of all things to the church."**

At first it might appear unreasonable to suggest that the denominational system be dismantled. After all, largely through the efforts of the denominational churches the whole world has been evangelized, and the name of Jesus Christ has to a degree been upheld throughout the centuries. Whilst it is true that much has been accomplished under the denominational system, we cannot ignore the gross apostasy propagated in its midst, and the damage it has done to the name of Jesus.

We are reminded that the bible prophesies a time of horrendous shaking, which will result in **"the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made [by man], that the things which cannot be shaken may remain."** [Heb 12:27]. The **"things that are made,"** which are the things initiated by man, will be removed by the shaking. Only those things in the church which have been initiated by the Spirit will remain, for they cannot be shaken. We are also reminded that Jesus will return to a **"glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish."** [Ephes 5:27]. In the light of these prophecies, we should expect that the Lord will do a mighty work that will remove the denominational barriers that so corrupt His Church.

THE RESURGENCE OF HOME FELLOWSHIPS

Church buildings as such were not a part of the early church. At the start Christians met in houses or convenient meeting places. The earliest church buildings were houses that were converted to create more space. It was not until the fourth century when Christianity was legitimized by the Roman Empire that formal church buildings appeared. These were mostly in the form of basilicas, erected over sacred shrines and sites idolized by man. As the accent on man became more prominent, buildings became more and more elaborate, culminating in the erection of cathedrals that were to the glory of man rather than God. It was not long before the name 'church' registered in people's mind as the building, rather than a fellowship of believers.

One of the most significant movements of the Holy Spirit over the past decades has been the resurgence of home fellowships. This movement erupted in England as large numbers of Christians left their denominational churches, and began forming into home fellowships. These groups appeared spontaneously all over England.

The pressing need at that time of exciting and rapid growth, was to discern exactly what the Holy Spirit was doing. It is not surprising that such a dynamic move of the Spirit was violently opposed by the powers of darkness. In a climate of uncertainty, it was decided that home fellowships

needed a 'covering' to protect them from falling into error. Certain people were appointed as apostles to have guardianship over groups of home fellowships. These groups gradually formed into two main factions, each presenting an independent interpretation of doctrine. The obvious danger was that this represented a return to the sectarianism of the denominational system.

This situation resulted from a common misunderstanding concerning the principle of spiritual 'covering,' which dictated that every person or group must be under the oversight of a more mature Christian. This produced a hierarchical type of oversight in which individual ministries were supervised by the pastor, and groups of churches by regional bishops or apostles, who in turn were governed by an overall leader.

The principle of covering is correct, but it must be the covering that the Lord has appointed. Christ has stipulated that the oversight of the local church is the responsibility of a team of elders, appointed from their midst. Apostles have oversight over their own ministries, but once the local church has been established, oversight is transferred to the local elders. From that point it is the elders who provide the 'covering' over local churches.

The home fellowship movement remains a valid work of the Holy Spirit. People are being called to **"Come out of her [i.e. the 'harlot' or false church], lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities."** [Rev 18:4-5].

In many cases the spirit of Antichrist has so thoroughly contaminated individual churches that apostasy predominates. In this climate the work and power of the Holy Spirit has been completely stifled. God is about to pour out His judgment on these errant churches, and prior to this happening He is calling earnest Christians to **"come out"**. They are not being called out to form another denomination. Instead they are being called out as part of the Holy Spirit's work in restoring the church to its original pattern.

SUMMARY

The bible recognizes only two forms of the church. They are the Universal Church, or the world wide body of Christ, and the local church of a town or city.

Local churches were autonomously governed by a team of local elders, and each expressed its own unique character.

Denominational churches are the invention of man, and have done much to cause disharmony to the body of Christ. All that has been initiated by man will be cast down when God **"arises to shake the earth mightily."**

Home fellowships are scriptural, and there is a resurgence of home fellowships occurring in local churches as people respond to God's personal command to **"Come out of her My People."**

In the next chapter we will look at the pattern of leadership in the early church.

LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

KEY BIBLE READING

"And He [Christ] Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;" (Ephesians 4:11-13).

MINISTERIAL LEADERS ARE A GIFT FROM CHRIST TO HIS CHURCH

A close examination of the Key Bible Reading reveals that Christ Himself has undertaken to provide prepared and anointed leaders for the church. The four basic leadership positions mentioned are APOSTLES, PROPHETS, EVANGELISTS, and PASTORS AND TEACHERS. These leaders are given to the church by Christ "**for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying [or building up] of the body of Christ...**"

The last two titles, "**pastors and teachers**" are combined because each forms a part of one ministry - that of ELDERSHIP. In this reading the Greek word is translated by the old English word 'pastor,' but in every other instance of its use in the New Testament it is more correctly rendered "**shepherd**." A shepherd is one who tends and feeds his flock, and so the function of 'teaching' is also closely associated with the ministry of eldership.

In practical terms, it is the office of the ELDERS that has the most immediate relevance for the normal operation of the LOCAL CHURCH. For this reason we propose to deal with it first, before returning to look at the other three leadership positions later in the chapter.

ELDERS

In the bible, certain Greek words associated with eldership have been translated in different passages with alternative English meanings. For example:

The Greek word '*presbuteros*' has been translated in English as "**elders**" or alternatively as "**the presbytery**."

Similarly, '*episkopos*' (Greek) has been translated "**overseers**" or "**bishops**"

And '*poimen*' (Greek) has been translated "**shepherds**" or "**pastors**."

An important key to understanding the nature of eldership is to recognise that these alternative English words (elders or presbytery), (overseers or bishops), and (shepherds or pastors) are interchangeable.

However it should also be noted that the English words "**elders**," "**overseers**," and "**shepherds**," are preferable to the older terms of "**presbytery**," "**bishops**," and "**pastors**." The meanings of the former are more clearly understood whereas the latter have been corrupted by centuries of denominational misuse. For many people in the church a 'presbytery' is the house the parish priest lives in, a 'bishop' is the regional ruler of many churches, and a 'pastor' is the paid minister in charge of one church. There is no scriptural warranty for any of these misconceptions.

The three words 'elders,' 'overseers,' and 'shepherds,' are interrelated in the New Testament because they all refer to the same group of people. For example Peter writes, **"The elders [presbuteros] who are among you I exhort, ...Shepherd [poimen] the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers [episkopos]..."** (1 Pet 5:1-2).

And similarly when Paul **"sent to Ephesus and called for the elders [presbuteros] of the church,"** he said to them, **"take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [episkopos], to shepherd [poimen] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."** (Acts 20:17, 28).

To put it simply, **"elders"** refers to the group of people who hold the office of eldership, **"overseers"** refers to the authority they have as elders, and **"shepherds"** refers to the function they perform. And, as we have seen from the Key Bible Reading, teaching forms a vital part of the shepherding function.

ELDERS *should be* TEACHERS

In the list of leadership positions presented in Ephesians 4, elders are given the dual title of **"pastors [ie 'shepherds'] and teachers."** In outlining the necessary qualifications of an elder to Timothy, Paul includes teaching. **"A bishop [ie 'overseer'] then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour, hospitable, able to teach; ..." (1 Tim 3:2).**

Similarly, in instructing Titus to **"appoint elders in every city,"** Paul writes **"For a bishop [i.e. 'overseer'] must be blameless, as a steward of God, ...holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able to, by sound doctrine [literally 'by sound teaching'], both to exhort and convict those who contradict."** (Tit 1:5, 7, 9).

The attribute of teaching is so desirable in an elder that Paul says, **"Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine."** (1 Tim 5:17).

The ELDERS *are* SHEPHERDS

While the elders have the responsibility of watching over the spiritual life of the whole local church, they are also required to provide for the spiritual progress and well-being of each individual member of the body. The writer of Hebrews encourages the saints to **"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account."** (Heb 13:17).

Elders must be prepared to discipline, exhort, encourage, or admonish, in the wisdom and love of the Lord. This may be extremely arduous, so Paul urges the church to honour their ministry. **"And we urge you, brethren, to recognise those who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake."** (1 Thess 5:12-13).

A natural part of the shepherding function is to 'tend the sick' and minister in healing. James asks **"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up."** (Ja 5:14-15).

When the Lord heals in these cases, He is not so much responding to the faith of the elders, as He is upholding them in their obedient use of the authority that He has placed in their hands.

The ELDERS are OVERSEERS

The two primary roles or functions of an elder are shepherding (which includes teaching) and oversight. Of these the most critical responsibility is that of oversight.

When Paul "**called for the elders of the church**" and said them, "**take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,**" he was addressing a team of elders who had oversight of the church at Ephesus. This illustrates an important point. Nowhere in the Scriptures is there any reference to a single elder or 'pastor' having oversight of a local church.

The Bible always refers to the elders (plural) of a local church. This plurality of elders is a necessary safeguard against heretical teaching, or a church being directed down a wrong path by one dominant leader. For this reason it is unscriptural for a single 'pastor' or 'minister' to be appointed as the head of a local church. The current concept of a 'pastor' being an academically qualified clergyman, who is employed to preach to and govern over a particular church, has its origins in man rather than God.

The conventional practice of a 'pastor' ministering to the needs of the whole congregation is also unscriptural. The biblical record shows that it is God's will for each member of the body of Christ to minister to the needs of others. In describing the body-life of the church, Paul writes "**...God composed the body, ...that the members should have the same care for one another.**" (1 Cor 12:24-25). The apostle Peter makes the same point. "**As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.**" (1 Pet 4:10).

Elders are required to exercise oversight over the work of the church, but this does not mean that they then do the work on behalf of the brethren. Rather their responsibility is to provide oversight over the church body as its members minister to the needs of one another.

ELDERS are SPIRITUAL WATCHMEN

In keeping with their duty as overseers, elders were also charged with the responsibility of being spiritual watchmen.

In his final address to the elders of the Ephesian church, Paul warned of the dangers that would confront their flock in the near future - "**For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among you men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.**" (Acts 20:29-31).

Paul was not alone in sounding the alarm. Our Lord Jesus Christ warned that "**false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect.**" (Matthew 24:24). And Paul's brother apostle Peter also gave notice of a coming tide of deception, declaring "**...there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.**" (2 Pet 2:1-2).

There is an obvious need for the local church to have the covering oversight of anointed elders. Throughout the New Testament the warning is sounded to "**Test all things...**" (1 Thess 5:21). For example, the apostle John cautions the young church, saying "**Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.**" (1 John 4:1). And in the book of Revelation, Christ commended the Ephesian church

because they "**...tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them to be liars...**" (Rev 2:2).

The role of elders as spiritual watchmen over the church has almost completely disappeared. This explains why the church has so easily fallen prey to the deceptions of Antichrist. Real eldership provides a protective covering over the flock, because it is their task to guard the doorway and keep the predators out. But when that post is left vacant, "savage wolves ... come in ... not sparing the flock."

ELDERS *should be* SPIRITUAL WARRIORS

As watchmen over the flock, it is critically important that elders are in a position to wield their spiritual authority against the attacks of Satan. In recent years, people well versed in spiritual warfare have been warning the church of certain 'controlling powers' of darkness, set in place over our cities by Satan. Whole centres of population are brought into bondage in this manner, stifling and distorting the spiritual growth of their citizens.

Cities are vulnerable to this type of attack by the power of the enemy because their spiritual leadership is fractured and disjointed. This means there is no legitimate authority in place to withstand the onslaught of Satan. However if the Lord's appointed elders of a city were to meet together as one entity - acting in one accord and wielding their authority as spiritual overseers in the name of Jesus - then tremendous power would be released by the Lord and the strongholds of evil cast down.

The Lord upholds the positions of authority that He has instituted. In this case He has decreed that the elders of a city, rather than the denominational clergymen, have the authority of oversight for the local church. This does not discount the possibility that some denominational ministers may indeed be legitimate elders. But their authority as elders is derived solely from their preparation by the Lord, and not from any theological qualifications or religious status they may have acquired.

The Lord will not fall short in upholding the authority of His elders if, in unity, they contend with the 'controlling powers' over their city.

OVERSIGHT *of* WORSHIP

At one stage Paul admonished the Corinthian church for speaking in tongues in a disorderly manner during their public fellowship meetings. His direction to them was, ` "**If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. ... Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.**" 1 Cor 14:27-28, 39-40).

Disorderly speaking in tongues is only one example of charismatic lawlessness needing to be contained within a local church situation . The responsibility for maintaining an orderly atmosphere in church meetings rests on the shoulders of the elders.

OVERSIGHT *of* MINISTRIES

The charge given to Christ's leaders in the Key Bible Reading is to "**...equip the saints for the work of ministry...**" Elders are therefore responsible for recognising and anointing emerging ministries within the local church, and then providing them with a covering of oversight.

Paul's first letter to Timothy provides an illustration of this principle, when he writes **"Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery [i.e. eldership]."** (1 Tim 4:14).

In addition to recognising and encouraging those ministries that emerge from the fellowship, elders should also provide avenues for their operation, and ongoing supervision and support.

The SELECTION of ELDERS

In the early church, apostles selected elders as part of their ministry of establishing new churches. Paul assisted both Timothy and Titus in this task by writing to them and outlining the qualifications required for eldership.

He wrote, **"A bishop [ie overseer] then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence ... not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he should fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."** (1 Tim 3:2-4, 6-7, and similarly Tit 1:8-9).

These first apostles chose elders under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This was acknowledged by Paul when he talked to the elders of the Ephesian church, saying to them **"...take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers..."** (Acts 20:28). And this principle continues to apply once the local church is established and authority is surrendered to the oversight of elders. While it then becomes part of the function of eldership to recognise and anoint new elders who emerge from within the fellowship, it is always the Holy Spirit who makes the choice.

Whereas man tends to choose according to personal reputation or professional standing in the community, the Lord knows what is in man. **"For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."** (1 Sam 16:7). The Holy Spirit is the only reliable guide in selecting those who are elders approved by Christ.

The selection and role of elders in the modern church bears little resemblance to the New Testament pattern. In the current age it is common for elders to be elected by a popular vote involving the whole congregation. Their tenure of office is usually limited to a period of three years, rather than the life-long commitment required from their early church counterparts. In reality their ministry has been minimised to a nominal position - stripped of authority in the government of the local church - reduced to the status of administrative assistants to the 'minister'.

This study of eldership over the last few pages is sufficient for us to grasp the critical importance of the role of elders to the spiritual well-being of the local church. Elders are the Lord's designated overseers and therefore vital channels for the exercise of His authority. We need to go on from this and recognise that by restoring the true authority of elders, we would actually be doing a great deal towards restoring the real authority of our Lord Jesus Christ as the head of His church.

APOSTLES

The words 'apostle' and 'missionary' both have the same meaning, and that is 'the sent one.' The apostle's ministry is basically the same as that of the missionary, in that they are both sent out from a home base to found and establish new churches.

Of the four offices of spiritual leadership mentioned in the Key Bible Reading, that of apostle is deemed to be the most important in regard to the universal church (or church as a whole). Paul makes this point in his first letter to the church in Corinth, when he lists the ministerial gifts in order. **"And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that"** (1 Cor 12:28).

Apostles are considered to be the most important because they lay the foundation on which the church is built. While on earth Jesus chose and prepared a select group of **"twelve disciples,"** who were later to be called "the twelve apostles." (Matt 10:1-2). This original twelve held a unique place in the purposes of God because they were direct witnesses of the teaching and resurrection of Christ, and as such they had the weighty responsibility of laying the doctrinal foundation of the universal church.

Paul also held a unique position in establishing the early church, firstly as **"an apostle to the Gentiles"** (Rom 11:13), and secondly because he received revelation directly from Christ. **"But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Christ."** (Gal 1:11-12).

After having his doctrine proved by the apostles in Jerusalem, Paul established many churches throughout the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. Through his personal ministry and by his letters to the young churches, he produced a Scriptural record that continues to provide us with the foundational keys to Christian doctrine.

The apostle Paul likened himself to a master builder laying the foundation of God's temple. **"According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation ... no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."** (1 Cor 3:10-11).

He told the Ephesian believers that their local church had **"been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord..."** (Eph 2:20-21).

A WIDER BODY of APOSTLES

The record in the Book of Acts and the Letters of Paul indicates that there were many more apostles in the early church than Paul and the original twelve. Paul and Barnabus are mentioned in Acts 13:2-4, Silvanus and Timothy are included with Paul in 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2:6, and James the brother of Jesus is acknowledged in Galatians 1:19.

In other references there are suggestions of an even wider body of unnamed apostles. For example Paul greets **"Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me."** in Romans 16:7. And in 2 Corinthians 8:24 he says **"...if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers [literally 'apostles'] of the churches, the glory of Christ."**

These other less well-known apostles were also selected, anointed, and sent out to do the missionary work of founding and establishing new churches. They too are the apostles of the Key Bible Reading - gifts of the Lord to His church.

The EQUIPPING of APOSTLES

The great scope of work involved in founding and establishing new churches meant that apostles needed to be fully prepared and equipped in a wide range of ministry functions. For example,

Paul by his own account "**was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher to the Gentiles.**" (2 Tim 1:11).

We know too that he prophesied concerning events to occur at the end of the age, he healed the sick, he cast out demons, and he raised the dead. Of his own ministry Paul was able to say, "**Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.**" (2 Cor 12:12).

In addition he gathered around him an effective support team of fellow apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, preachers, and other helpers. He then directed those ministries into various infant churches to assist in their establishment.

At first glance it might appear that Paul was completely equipped for his apostolic ministry at the time of his commissioning, when his brethren at Antioch laid hands on him. However it would be more accurate to say that he was thoroughly prepared by the refining work of the Holy Spirit during many privations, and long periods of isolation and waiting on the Lord. The end result was that his carnal nature was gradually purged out, and Christ was formed in him.

Paul describes this process as follows: "**But we [who are the apostles] have this treasure [which is the presence of Jesus Christ] in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed - always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus [as we identify with Jesus in allowing our self-lives to be put to death], that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.**" (2 Cor 4:7-11).

The apostle is saying that as his self-life is put to death, so the life of Jesus is manifest through him, and it is this life that flows out to bless those around him. "**So then death is working in us, but life in you.**" (2 Cor 4:12).

Paul realised that the Lord's indwelling presence was the sole basis for his ability to accomplish fruit-bearing work. Consequently he sought and received continual anointings from the presence of the Lord as each need for ministry arose. As far as Paul was concerned, it was not him doing the work, but Christ working through him. He wrote, "**To this end I also labour, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.**" (Col 1:29). And again, "**For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me.**" (Rom 15:18 NASB).

The one essential qualification for an apostle is not a multitude of 'the gifts of the Spirit,' but a nature purged from the power of the flesh, so that Jesus is able to work His sovereign will and power through him. Those who have not undergone this preparation are not true apostles, but rather false apostles who seek their own glory.

The APPOINTMENT of APOSTLES

In Chapter 5, we examined the selection of Paul and Barnabas as apostles. Their selection was preceded by certain prophets and teachers waiting on the Lord with fasting and prayer. In response to this, "**...the Holy Spirit said, 'Now separate for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'** Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there sailed to Cyprus." (Acts 13:2-4).

This reading indicates the essential nature of apostleship. Paul and Barnabas were chosen and sent out with a commission from Christ, who was directing them through the Holy Spirit. Of necessity, their carnal natures would have been dealt with to a considerable extent before their selection, and no doubt they were aware that this process would continue throughout the course of their ministry.

Thus prepared, they were selected by the Holy Spirit - who then made His choice known to the church through a group of mature Christians as they waited on the Lord. Following this they were prayed over with the laying on of hands, and then sent out to fulfill their commission. It should be noted that each step of this divine pattern must be honoured if the Lord's headship over His church is to be maintained.

The MINISTRY of the APOSTLE

The basic ministry of the apostle, as outlined in the Book of Acts, is the founding of new churches. The New Testament apostles embarked on missionary journeys under the direction of the Holy Spirit, starting a church in one locality, and then moving on to another.

On their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas visited Salamis and Paphos in Cyprus, Perga in Pamphylia, Antioch in Pisidia, and the cities of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe in Lycaonia. Along the way they founded churches through the teaching of the gospel, **"...speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands."** (Acts 14:3).

On their return journey to Antioch in Syria, Paul and Barnabas revisited the churches that they had founded, **"...strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith..."** (Acts 14:22). It was on this return journey that they **"...appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting..."** (Acts 14:23).

Although the basic commission of the apostles was to found new churches, in general terms they were sent out to do **"...the work to which I [the Holy Spirit] have called them."** (Acts 13:2). In the case of the apostles ministering to the early church, this work was wide-ranging. It included preaching the gospel, teaching in synagogues, healing the sick, distributing the gifts of the Spirit by the laying on of hands, settling matters of doctrine, and strengthening the souls of the saints.

These examples can serve as a guide to us in determining the function of an apostle. However we cannot limit the full scope of an apostle's work to them. The essential nature of the apostolic office is separation from the local church, in order to fulfil a commission that is initiated and directed by the Holy Spirit.

RELINQUISHING *the* HEADSHIP to LOCAL ELDERS

The scriptural record makes it evident that even though the apostles were sent out to found and establish new churches, they were not responsible for the individual oversight of those churches after they had been fully established. Instead this ongoing task was delivered into the hands of the elders, who they had appointed for this purpose.

The principle of relinquishment is illustrated in Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders, when he committed the responsibility of overseeing the local church into their hands. **"And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more... Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, ...And now brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace..."** (Acts 20:25, 28, 32).

The apostles were responsible for the work of their own ministries in different places, but after the foundation of each church had been carefully laid, then its oversight was entrusted to the local elders.

PROPHETS

The Key Bible Reading tells us that "**He [Christ] Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists,...**" Before discussing the Lord's gift of prophets to His church, it is necessary to recognise the distinction between 'the gift of prophecy' and 'the office of prophet.'

The gift of prophecy is listed among the nine basic gifts of the Spirit mentioned in Paul's first letter to the Christians in Corinth - "**...the word of wisdom, ...the word of knowledge, ...faith..., ...gifts of healings..., ...the working of miracles..., ...prophecy, ...discerning of spirits, ...different kinds of tongues, ...the interpretation of tongues.**" (1Cor 12:8, 9, 10).

The gift of prophecy is used to speak a word of exhortation from the Spirit to an individual, or to edify a whole assembly. Paul explains that "**...he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. ...he who prophesies edifies the church.**" (1 Cor 14:3-4).

By comparison, Christ's gift of "**some prophets**" in the Key Bible Reading is a reference to the office of prophet. The ministry of 'the prophet' involves the use of the word of God in preaching or teaching under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of this ministry is to reveal what God is doing now, and what He is going to do in the times to come - "**Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.**" (Amos 3:7).

The ROLE of the PROPHET at the CLOSE of the AGE

Jesus was referring directly to the office of prophet when He told His disciples that Elijah would return at the close of the age. The disciples had asked him, "**Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?**" (Matt 17:10). The background to their question is found in an Old Testament prophecy from the Book of Malachi - "**Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.**" (Mal 4:5).

Jesus answered their question by saying to them, "**Elijah truly is coming first and will restore all things.**" (Matt 17:11). The Lord was not suggesting that Elijah the man would return to earth in a physical sense. Rather he was using Elijah, who was the first major prophet, as a symbol of the role or office of prophet. Christ is promising here that the anointed office of prophet would be reinstated to prepare the way for His second coming (just as it had been manifested in the person of John the Baptist to prepare for His first coming).

In the end-time, the ministry of 'the prophet' will be directed towards exposing the apostasies of 'the church,' and warning of the judgment that is to about to fall. This prophetic warning, and the purging judgments to follow, are integral parts of the restoration process.

EVANGELISTS

The basic ministry of the evangelist is to preach the gospel to the unsaved. This involves the evangelist travelling beyond the boundaries of the local church. It is written of "**Philip the evangelist,**" who was one of the seven original deacons in the church at Jerusalem, that "**...he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.**" (Acts 8:40).

The evangelistic gift is not dependent upon the eloquence of man, but rather the anointing presence of the Holy Spirit. When the evangelist speaks and preaches, the whole audience is then immersed in the Spirit, and confronted by His power to convict them of truth. For example, "**...Philip**

went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. ..[And] when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptised." (Acts 8:5-6, 12).

On the day of Pentecost Peter proclaimed the gospel to a previously hostile crowd of Jews and proselytes. But by the end of his address, the convicting power of the Holy Spirit was clearly manifest. Peter finished by saying, **"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.' Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'"** (Acts 2:36-37).

They were cut to the heart because the Holy Spirit had overshadowed them and convicted their hearts of sin. Peter then went on to complete the normal ministry of an evangelist, by directing them to repentance and baptism. **"Repent, and let everyone of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..."** (Acts 2:38).

Although the gift of evangelist is a ministry to the unsaved, this does not mean its operation should be restricted to distant or overseas 'mission-fields.' In fact Christ's gift of the evangelist should also be evident in the local church, reaching out to 'the lost' in the surrounding community.

DEACONS

The office of deacon is not specifically mentioned in the Key Bible Reading. Nevertheless the Book of Acts records that deacons were selected by the congregation to undertake the various tasks of administration and organisation. These tasks were part of the normal day-to-day practical operation of the church.

"Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business..." (Acts 6:2-3).

The words **"seek out from among you"** suggest that deacons were nominated by the whole congregation. The subsequent phrase **"whom we may appoint"** implies that the elders ratified these nominations, and then commissioned the deacons with the usual practice of anointing with prayer and laying on of hands.

There is also sufficient evidence to indicate that the office of deacon was open to women. For example the apostle Paul wrote, **"I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea..."** (Rom 16:1). The word **"servant"** is translated from the Greek 'diakonos,' which is translated as 'deacon' in other parts of the New Testament. **"Phoebe our sister"** was therefore engaged in the Lord's service, performing the many tasks allotted to deacons.

SUMMARY

The Lord has undertaken to provide gifts of prepared and anointed leaders to His church. They are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers, or elders.

Elders have the responsibility for oversight and shepherding of the local church. Because they are the Lord's direct link of authority to each church, their ministry is vital to the establishing and maintaining of His headship over the body.

The ministry of the apostle is deemed to be the most important to the church as a whole, because it is this ministry which lays the doctrinal foundation.

Evangelists have a commission to travel beyond the boundaries of the local church to preach the gospel to the unsaved.

The ministry of the prophet involves the use of the word of God, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, to reveal God's purposes. Reinstatement of the prophetic ministry to the end-time church is critical to the process of unmasking the deceptions of Antichrist and restoring Christ's headship over His church.

In the following chapters we will explore the nature of spiritual authority and its restoration to the church.

SECTION 4

RESTORATION OF CHRIST'S AUTHORITY

Chapter 8

RESTORATION OF SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY AND OBEDIENCE

KEY BIBLE READINGS

Philippines 2:5-11 "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on the earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Ephesians 1:15,16,18,19,20-23 "Therefore I [Paul] ... mak[e] mention of you in my prayers ... that you may know ... what is the exceeding greatness of His power ...which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

In explaining the nature of spiritual authority, it is useful to examine the difference between the words 'authority' and 'power,' as they are used in the following statement made by Christ - "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you." (Luke 10:19).

The Greek word translated as 'authority' here is '*exousia*,' and its basic meaning is to have the right to rule or govern, as one whose will and commands ought to be submitted to and obeyed.

In contrast the Greek word translated 'power' in this reading is '*dunamis*,' which means to have the inherent strength or actual ability to bring about a desired purpose.

A modern illustration of these two different meanings is provided by the roles of a road transport driver and a traffic officer. A road transport has inherent strength and so its driver has direct or '*dunamis*' power at his disposal to perform his task. While a traffic officer has insufficient physical power to stop a road transport, he does have delegated or '*exousia*' authority at his disposal. When the traffic officer puts up his hand the transport driver stops his vehicle, because behind that gesture lies the whole weight of the Police Department.

This distinction between the two Greek words is not always made clear in English translations. For example the Authorised or King James Version renders the above reading as, "**Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.**" In order to discern the true meaning of the word translated as 'power' in the King James Version, it is necessary to be aware of which Greek word is actually being translated - whether '*exousia*' or '*dunamis*.'

WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE AUTHORITY TO USE JESUS' NAME

When the statement in Luke's gospel is correctly translated, it becomes clear that Christ has not given us direct or '*dunamis*' power to overcome the power of Satan. Instead He has entrusted us to wield the authority that is attached to His name, the name which His Father has decreed is the greatest in all creation.

"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Key Bible Reading).

We are entitled to exercise the authority contained in the name of Jesus over the power of Satan as those who must be obeyed. For instance we may, in the name of Jesus, cast out demons, or bind the powers of darkness away from our circumstances, or loose those who are held in bondage to the enemy.

However it is important to see that our authority to use the name of Jesus is closely linked with our spiritual state of union with Him. Just as the traffic officer in our example is stripped of his authority if he steps outside of his jurisdiction, so too we lose our authority when we are no longer in an abiding relationship with Christ our Lord.

Jesus said, "**Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.**" (John 15:4-5).

Before we can wield the authority of the name of Jesus we must be united and one with Him - so bound and yoked to Him that we are of one mind and one heart with Him. He must initiate, and we must respond in obedience. He then confirms our legitimate use of the authority of His name by instructing the Holy Spirit to perform the works that we have commanded.

Satan understands the real basis of our authority. He therefore knows that he does not have to submit to any lawless or presumptuous wielding of the name of Jesus. In fact those who are lawless in this matter may place themselves in extremely hazardous circumstances, as did "**some ... itinerant Jewish exorcists**" reported in the book of Acts (19:13). They "**took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, 'We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.'**"

But because they were not united and one with the Lord Jesus, their lack of real authority was obvious to the demons they were attempting to cast out. "**And the evil spirit answered and said, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?' Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.**" (Acts 19:15-16).

A CHAIN OF AUTHORITY

God is the supreme head of all authority and power. Beneath Him exist many different levels of delegated spiritual authority, which when joined together in descending order, make up what is called 'a chain of authority.'

An example of such 'a chain of authority' is provided by the Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians: **"But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."** (1 Cor 11:3).

The case of the centurion who sought healing for his servant provides a more detailed example of a chain of authority in operation. **"And Jesus said to him, 'I will come and heal him.' The centurion answered and said, 'Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, "Go," and he goes; and to another, "Come," and he comes; and to my servant, "Do this," and he does it.' When Jesus heard it, He marvelled, and said to those who followed, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!'"** (Matt 8:7-10).

When the centurion said, **"For I also am a man under authority,"** he was identifying his position with that of Jesus, in that both of them were part of a chain of authority.

He knew what it was like to be under authority. Above him was the Tribune of the Legion, the Governor of the Province, and above them all, Caesar. Below him was a company of soldiers and various household servants. And when the centurion gave an order to those below him he knew it would be obeyed, because he spoke with the authority of those above him. His words were upheld by the weight of the entire Roman Empire.

The centurion was also acknowledging Christ's position in a chain of authority. He understood that above Jesus was Almighty God, and that the Father would uphold the authority of His Son. He knew that Christ had to **"only speak a word"** and his servant would be healed.

And so it was. **"Then Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.' And his servant was healed that same hour."** (Matt 8:13).

AUTHORITY IS INEFFECTIVE WITHOUT OBEDIENCE

Obedience is the key to successful operation of a chain of authority. If there is obedience throughout the chain, then each link is upheld by the authority of the links above it. However if one link in that chain is disobedient, then its authority can no longer be upheld by those above it, and the chain is effectively broken.

The authority of Christ was always upheld because He was always one with God the Father, and He was perfectly obedient to His will. Jesus was therefore able to say to Philip, **"Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works."** (John 14:10).

Jesus commanded as the Father directed Him, and His Father verified those commands by doing the works that fulfilled His words. Similarly, if we use the authority of the name of Jesus only as He directs us, then we can be assured that He will respond by performing the appropriate works.

Now compare the operation of a chain of authority in obedience, to the general climate of lawlessness predicted by Jesus in Matthew's gospel. Christ prophesied, **"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 practice lawlessness!'" (Matt 7:22-23).

Notice that Jesus is addressing those who consider themselves to be Christians. They had **"prophesied," "cast out demons,"** and **"done many wonders,"** and all in the name of Jesus. But one thing was missing. They had in effect denied the sovereign Lordship of Christ by failing to seek, and then be obedient to His will. Instead they had presumed that works initiated by their flesh would meet with His approval.

The Lord's condemnation of their presumption is severe. It does not matter that 'prophecy,' 'deliverance,' and 'miracles,' appear worthy ministries in themselves. The point is that they have used His name to do their works. So He disowns them and their works. **"I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"**

God the Father is the supreme head of all authority. His ultimate omnipotence cannot be disputed. The words of King Jehoshaphat clearly express this: **"O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You?"** (2 Chr 20:6).

God is invincible, and no one can withstand His purposes. Despite this fact, it is necessary to recognize that His authority is not upheld by force, but by willing obedience. And since all authority hinges on obedience, where there is no obedience there is no real authority in a practical sense.

In order to appreciate how disobedience has diminished God's practical authority over man, we shall go on to explore the significance of mankind's initial disobedience in the Garden of Eden.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FALL

A direct consequence of 'the fall' is that in choosing to obey Satan rather than God, Adam and Eve unwittingly gave Satan a legal right to contest God's authority over mankind.

God gave man a clear command in the Garden of Eden. **"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'From every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat the fruit of it you shall surely die.'"** (Gen 2:16-17).

Satan, in the guise of a serpent, then seized the opportunity to entice Eve to disobey God. **"And the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'"** (Gen 3:4-5).

Eve had a clear choice. She could obey God, or she could obey Satan. She chose to eat the forbidden fruit, and Adam consented to join her in disobedience.

In this crucial episode which decided the fate of mankind, Adam and Eve represented mankind. At issue here was whether man would consent to obey God his Creator, or use his free will to rebel and submit to Satan. The tragic outcome is that when given a clear choice, man chose to obey Satan rather than God. And because authority hinges on obedience, when man obeyed Satan, he gave him a legal right to impose his evil influence on human life.

Although Satan's authority over mankind is not absolute, it is proportional to the degree to which man chooses to disobey God. Because of the depravity and rebelliousness of fallen man, the apostle John conceded that, **"...the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one."** (1 Jo 5:19). Jesus also recognized the extent of Satan's authority over fallen mankind, referring to him as **"the ruler of this world"** on at least three occasions (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11).

As a result of his continuing disobedience of God's will, man in his unredeemed state is subject to Satan's authority. Paul writes, "**And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air** [who is Satan], **the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.**" (Eph 2:1-3).

RESTORATION OF GOD'S AUTHORITY

The CENTRAL ISSUE of RESTORATION

Many Christians see 'restoration' in terms of restoring the power of the Holy Spirit to the church. Consequently there has been an emphasis on seeking manifestations of the Holy Spirit in fellowship meetings. This preoccupation with the acquisition of spiritual power has more often resulted in an explosion of lawlessness, than in any real restoration of God's authority. It is evident therefore that this approach does not address the central issue of 'restoration.'

Up until this point, the teaching of this book has focused on restoring the organizational and leadership attributes of the local church, in accordance with the pattern provided in the New Testament. But while these structural elements enable the church to function efficiently, they are still not the key component of 'restoration.'

The ultimate purpose of restoration is to restore the authority of Lord Jesus Christ as head of His church. Unless the Lord is in fact governing His church, then disobedience and lawlessness will continue to abound.

We can understand the critical importance of Christ's headship over the His church more clearly by extending our view to the eternal age to come, when only the church remains. Christ has already confirmed His complete and total obedience to God the Father, "**to the point of death, even the death of the cross.**" So it follows that restoring Christ's headship of the church is actually restoring to God His authority over man that was lost at the Fall.

Of course God has, and will always have, ultimate authority and control over all things He has created, including man. But He chose to honor man's free will, even though He knew that man would go his own way and obey Satan. And because "**Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne,**" (Ps 97:2), God recognized the legitimacy of Satan's claim over man.

Knowing the end from the beginning, God the Father purposed even before the foundations of the world to restore His sovereign authority over man through the atoning sacrifice of His Son. The significance of the crucifixion of Christ is that every one of Satan's legal claims against man has been "**...taken ...out of the way...**" and "**...nailed ... to the cross.**" (Col 2:14).

The OBEDIENCE of the SON

Since obedience is at the heart of all true authority, it was appointed to Jesus to re-establish obedience to God the Father on earth. The most perfect expression of obedience is therefore to be seen in Christ's steadfast fulfillment of God's will for Him to become a sacrificial offering, as an atonement for the sins of mankind.

God's requirement was that Christ should redeem mankind back to Himself. The Scriptures say of Christ that "**...by Him** [i.e. Christ] **all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth ... All things were created through Him and for Him.**" (Col 1:16). As the Creator of mankind, Christ was required to become their representative. In obedience He willingly agreed to

bear the punishment for the sins of mankind in their stead, allowing the full weight of all their evil consequences to fall upon Himself.

Jesus stood before the judgment seat of God as the representative of all mankind. He received their sentence and bore the fullness of their punishment until the very last demand of justice had been met. The mocking abuse, the beatings and scourging, the agonizing death on the cross, were all the price of restoring man's right relationship with God.

But before He could be mankind's atoning sacrifice, Christ had first to be a perfect expression of obedience and righteousness, witnessed by man and God, and all in Satan's kingdom. It was only then that He could truly be **"a lamb without blemish and without spot,"** (1 Pe 1:19), to be presented as a guilt offering for the sins of mankind.

The cost of Christ's obedience is beyond human understanding. We can only catch a glimpse of it as we contemplate the words in the first Key Bible Reading.

God the Son relinquished His position of equality with God the Father. He let go **"...the glory which [He] had with [God] before the world was."** (John 17:5). And He **"made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."**

Even before He took upon Himself the mantle of human flesh, Jesus knew the enormity of the sufferings that awaited Him. As the time of His crucifixion drew near He prayed, **"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 'Father, glorify Your name.'"** (John 12:27-28).

We read of His acute agony of soul in the garden of Gethsemane when, knowing the enormity of the physical suffering that faced Him and the anguish of separation from God, He prayed **"O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me..."** (Matt 26:39). But then, because of His commitment of obedience to the Father, He prayed **"O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done."** (Matt 26:42).

The perfect obedience of Jesus to the will of God the father is reflected in His parting prayer. On His last night He prayed, **"I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do ... I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world ... I have given them the words which You have given Me ... While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled ... As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world ... And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which you loved Me may be in them, and I in them."** (John 17:4, 6, 8, 12, 18, 26).

Finally, as Jesus hung on the cross, **"knowing that all things were now accomplished ... He said, 'It is finished!' And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit."** (John 19:28, 30). His task of redeeming mankind was complete - a perfect work done in perfect obedience.

By accomplishing His perfect work, Christ has laid the foundation for re-establishing God's authority on earth. And it is through His church that this restoration will be completed.

The call to obedience, and the subsequent re-establishment of Christ's authority as head of His church, is all too relevant in the current climate of 'charismatic renewal'. The obsessive quest for spiritual power, and unrestrained zeal to perform miraculous deeds in the name of Jesus, have opened the door to 'charismatic lawlessness.'

There is a catch-phrase that is currently popular in pentecostal and charismatic groups. It is, *'The 1990's, the decade of the last great harvest.'* This reflects the yearning of many earnest Christians to be involved in 'a latter rain' revival, with a deluge of Holy Spirit power precipitating a huge harvest of souls.

However desirable such a revival might be, the reality is that the Holy Spirit will not fall in a climate of lawlessness. Before the 'latter rain' can fall, Christ's authority as head of the church must be restored. Only the Lord as head of His church can direct such an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And He will only do this when His will is sought and then faithfully transmitted to the body by His delegated leaders. There must first be submission and obedience throughout the chains of authority the Lord has placed in the body.

POSSESSING THE GATES OF THE ENEMY

In stressing the need for absolute obedience in wielding the authority of the name of Jesus, we do not mean to imply that Christians should back off completely, but rather exercise their authority circumspectly. In fact there is ample scriptural evidence that God wants us to 'possess the gate of the enemy.'

For example, the Angel of the LORD told Abraham, **"By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the sea-shore; and your descendants [meaning us, for we are the spiritual sons of Abraham] shall possess [Hebrew 'yarash'] the gate of their enemies."** (Gen 22:16-17).

The 'gate' is a symbol of authority. The gate chamber, which usually extended on both sides of the city wall, was the meeting place of the elders. It was where judgments were passed and sentences were carried out. Often these rooms contained a throne for the king to witness proceedings.

In the reading above, the Hebrew word 'yarash' means to take possession of something after dispossessing the previous occupants. In our case 'the previous occupant' is Satan, who gained his position of authority as a result of the Fall. But at the cross Jesus has stripped Satan of this authority.

Christ partook of our nature of flesh so that, **"...through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil..."** (Heb 2:14 NASB). Having dispossessed Satan of his authority over man, Jesus now invites us to exercise His authority **"...over all the power of the enemy..."** (Lu 10:19).

But this authority must be practiced in union with Jesus Christ - in the quietness of the spirit rather than in the lawlessness of the flesh. In the next chapter we will discuss the work of the cross in destroying the power of the flesh, so that Christ's obedience can be formed in us.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In the Garden of Eden, God chose to honor man's free will by allowing him to choose who he would obey. Because authority is upheld by obedience, God's authority over mankind was greatly diminished when man chose to obey Satan. God continues to honor Satan's legal right to draw man under His control, because He is a God of justice and righteousness.

Even before the creation of mankind, God (who knew the end from the beginning) chose to restore His authority on earth through His Son. Jesus first manifested perfect obedience to God the Father, even to accepting the horror of the cross. He then established His, and therefore God's authority through the church.

However during the long centuries of the church age, Christ's authority as head of the body has been eroded away, and replaced by the false authority of man.

The central issue of the restoration of the church is therefore the restoration of Christ's headship, which will ultimately have the effect of restoring the authority lost to God at the Fall

RESTORATION OF SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

THE PATH OF THE CROSS

THE ANGUISH OF DISOBEDIENCE

The struggle to walk on the path of obedience is full of anguish and heartache for those who have not received teaching about the "path of the cross." Paul acknowledged the frustration encountered in such a walk, **"I can will what is right, but I cannot perform it [I have the intention and urge to do what is right, but no power to carry it out] For I fail to practice the good deeds I desire to do, but the evil deeds that I do not desire to do are what I am [ever] doing."** (Romans 7:15 Amplified Bible).

It seems almost inevitable that as new Christians we start on our spiritual pilgrimage by attempting to live up to the standards of God's law in our own strength. We attempt to overcome the inherent corruption of our human nature with determination and perseverance. Time and again we set out to overcome this or that flaw, but fail abysmally.

Many people become resigned to accepting this as the normal Christian walk. Knowing what is right, they try to live up to it, and when they fail, they pray for forgiveness--time and time again. While it is true that **"the blood of Jesus Christ"** continually **"cleanses us from all sin"** (1 John 1:7), this is still a mediocre walk of continuing failures.

It seems that we as Christians must come to an end of ourselves, before we can be brought by the Spirit to see the impossibility of taming our natures through our own personal effort.

In his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul explains why it is impossible for us to be obedient to God's will in our own strength. He says that we have (1) a carnal nature bound in fleshly desire, and (2) an inherent legacy of sin from fallen man that that compels our carnal natures to commit sins--a force so strong and insistent that it becomes to us a law of sin in our members.

Paul concludes, **"...with the mind [ie with my reasoning and determination] I myself [in my heart] serve [or choose to honour] the [whole moral] law of God, but [the reality is that] with the flesh [I honour instead] the law of sin."** (Rom 7:25).

Before proceeding any further, it is important to establish the difference between the terms 'sin' and 'sins.' In the context of this study, SIN is the nature or character of sin. In general terms, it is that which opposes God. It is out of the nature of SIN that individual SINS are conceived and committed.

Now let us go back and look more deeply into Paul's description of the Christian's dilemma. **"Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, BUT SIN THAT DWELLS IN ME. I find then a law, that evil is present WITH me, the person who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."** (Romans 7:20-23).

In summing up our experience as Christians, we find that our renewed spirits approve and even delight in the moral precepts of God's law. But despite this, we continually fall short in obedience.

Paul attributes our constant failure to a power or 'law of sin' which acts upon our carnal natures, compelling us to commit sins.

The important thing to note here is that Paul says, that this law of sin is not of ourselves--that is, it is not of our own carnal natures. He states, "Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, BUT SIN THAT DWELLS IN ME."

The ORIGIN of the LAW of SIN

The power or law of sin is an implantation of Satan imposed on man as a result of the Fall.

The prophet Jeremiah tells us that God **"...search[es] the heart, [and] test[s] the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings."** (Jer 17:10). When tested in the Garden of Eden, man chose to obey Satan rather than God. Since sin is that which opposes God, and man chose sin rather than obedience, he received **"according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings."** Satan, who is the epitome of sin or opposition to God, was granted the authority to implant a law of sin in fallen mankind. It is an inherent part of what Paul calls our **"old man."** (Rom 6:6, Eph 4:22, Col 3:9).

What Constitutes the OLD MAN?

The "old man" is all that we were before our salvation and regeneration in Christ. Characteristics associated with the "old man" are:

(1) A spirit that is virtually dead to the spiritual things of God. Part of the salvation process is the regeneration of our spirits.

(2) A carnal nature with fleshly desires that entice us to commit sins. In Colossians, Paul describes the old man plagued by this carnal nature in terms of **"...the body [or the whole person] of [or who is under the sway of] the sins of the flesh..."** (2:11).

(3) A power, or law of sin, which imposes further pressure on our carnal natures, compelling us to commit sins. In Romans, Paul describes the old man held captive by the law of sin in terms of **"the body [or the whole person] of [or who is held in the power of] sin."** (6:6).

(4) The old man is held captive by the spirit of the world. It is by the operation of the power of sin over fallen mankind that Satan has become **"...the ruler of this world..."** (Jo 12:31, 14:30, 16:11).

(5) The old man is under the curse of the broken Law, the end result of which is eternal damnation.

Paul acknowledges the hopeless state of the old man when he says, **"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"** (Rom 7:24). But this statement of despair is quickly followed by a triumphant cry. **"I thank God--[my deliverance comes] through Jesus Christ our Lord!"** (Rom 7:25).

In the following verse (which is the first verse of Chapter 8) Paul explains the foundation for his, and our, victory. **"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus [i.e. those who have received unto themselves the blessings of His cross], who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."** (Rom 8:1).

To walk **"according to the flesh"** is to try and overcome the legacy of sin from fallen man by our own will power and effort; by trying to earn our salvation; by trying to tame our sin-controlled

fleshly natures, and so on. To walk "**according to the Spirit**" is to receive and walk in the light of the victory of Christ's cross. This walk of victory is called 'the path of the cross.'

THE PATH OF THE CROSS

Paul's commission to the Gentiles was to reveal the truth of the cross and its victory over sin--"**to open their eyes [in order] to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power** (Lit: authority) **of Satan to God.**" (Acts 26:18). He did this by teaching how, through His cross, Jesus removed Satan's authority to hold us in bondage to sin, along with all of its dire consequences.

"And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements [as in a bill of debt] that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." (Col 2:14).

VICTORY over our FLESHLY NATURE and the POWER of SIN

In this study, the primary emphasis is in dealing with (1) the carnal nature of flesh, and (2) the power or law of sin.

Even though Jesus has taken away Satan's legal authority to inflict us with a power of sin, Satan does not remove it. What Paul expresses in Romans 7 is that the law of sin remains with us until we specifically refute and reject it. Like every other benefit of the cross, we have to claim Christ's victory over sin by faith. To a Christian, this imposition of a nature of sin by Satan is illegal. It must therefore be rejected on the grounds of Christ's finished work on the cross.

Since we were not created to live a life of continuous and unending failures, God has ordained a method, or pathway, by which we may overcome both our carnal natures and the law of sin in our members, and thereby live a victorious life. This pathway, generally referred to as 'the path of the cross,' is outlined in Chapter 6 of Paul's letter to the Romans.

The first ten verses of this chapter describe how we as Christians have been brought into a vital union with Jesus Christ and His experience on the cross. When Jesus submitted Himself to the penalty of the cross, He was more than a representative of mankind. In God's eyes He was 'corporate man,' incorporating within Himself and His experience, the whole of mankind. That is why Paul is able to say that in being baptised into Jesus Christ, we are made one with Him in His whole experience--His death, His burial, and His resurrection.

"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." (Rom 6:3-6).

UNION with CHRIST in HIS DEATH

God's solution to our untameable fleshly nature under the power of sin (called here "**our old man**" and "**the body of sin**"), is to incorporate it in Christ's death on the cross. Everything to do with the old man--the carnal nature held captive by the power of sin and the spirit of the world and subject to the curse of the law--was included in Christ's death on the cross. And because we are incorporated into Christ's death, Paul says that we are to consider every part of our old man put to death in Him.

THE FLESH

We are to reckon that we, including our carnal nature, are crucified with Christ. **"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 KJV).

DEAD TO THE WORLD

We are crucified to the world—"...by [**'our Lord Jesus Christ'**] the world has been **crucified to me, and I to the world...**" (Gal 6:14).

DEAD TO THE LAW

We are crucified to the Law—"But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by..." (Rom 7:6).

DEAD TO SIN

And Paul asserts that we are dead to the power of sin. **"For 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 [as an accomplished fact] yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Rom 6:10-11).

Our RIGHTEOUSNESS in HIM

We receive additional light on Christ dealing with our sin by studying a key verse in 2 Corinthians: **"He [God] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** (2 Co 5:21 NASB).

This verse begins by emphasising Christ's sinless nature: He **"who knew no sin."** This is followed by the statement that God made Jesus **"to be sin."** In 'Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament,' the words *"to be sin,"* are explained as follows; *"Not a sin offering, nor a sinner, but the representative of sin. On Him, representatively, fell the collective consequence of sin..."* (vol3, p321).

The fact that God made Christ **"to be sin"** does not imply that Christ's own nature underwent corruption. Mankind's sin was laid upon Him as a burden, but it was not incorporated into His sinless nature. Whilst He Himself remained perfectly sinless, as the representative of sin He bore the full responsibility for the power of sin that had been laid on mankind at the Fall.

And having taken upon Himself this identification with sin, He was then required to bear all of its evil consequences. This involved all the curses of the broken law--sickness, pain, infirmity, poverty, rejection, separation from God, and finally, death. Now that Christ has already borne God's judgment and the penalty of sin on behalf of mankind, we as Christians are no longer required to bear it.

The PARADOX of OUR DEATH to SIN

In his letter to the Romans, Paul states that **"our old man was crucified with Him [i.e. Christ]."** When He died, our **"old man,"** or **"body of sin,"** was taken to death in Him. But a few verses later, Paul urges Christians, **"...do not let sin reign in your mortal body..."** [Rom 6:12].

Here we have a paradox. Firstly we are told that God destroyed our body of sin by the power of the cross, but then we are commanded not to let sin reign in us. This means in effect that it is still

in us. The fact is that the law of sin inherited from Adam, and our nature of fleshly appetites and lusts, both remain active in us--until they are conquered by the application of the cross of Jesus.

Before our conversion, we were held captive by the power of sin. Acting on our carnal nature, it compelled us to sin. The law of sin in our members brought us in to sin over and over again, and we were powerless to withstand its persistent demands.

But when Christ accepted upon Himself the full weight of God's punishment for the sin of mankind, Satan's legal right to imprison us under the power of sin was removed. This was made evident to some degree at our conversion, when the desire to sin habitually was removed from us, and replaced with a yearning to live righteously before God.

And now, because of the cross of Christ, we have the means to walk in victory over sin—that is, if we walk in the light of the truth.

UNION with CHRIST in His RESURRECTION

At the same time that he declares our death in Jesus Christ, Paul emphasises the positive side of our identification with Him in His crucifixion. **"For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live [in union] with Him."** (Romans 6:5-6, 8).

Note that the **"also shall be"** is not predictive future in relationship with time, but a logical consequence of fulfilling the previous conditions. That is, IF we willingly partake of union with Him in His death, then we shall be united with Him in His resurrection, and therefore partakers of His risen life. So we now have the divine life of Jesus planted in us, and it is through this life that we establish our personal victory over sin.

PUTTING ON--and PUTTING OFF

Paul adds more light on this walk on the path of the cross, by using the illustration of putting on and taking off clothing. First of all, reckoning ourselves dead to sin, requires us to 'put off' the sin nature. The apostle urges Christians to **"put off the old man with his deeds"** (Col 3:9), and to **"put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts."** (Rom 13:14).

To **"put off"** is to make a conscious decision to reject the demands of sinful flesh, and testify to the death of the **"old man"** through the cross of Jesus. The reality of our Christian walk is that when the sin nature is 'put off,' Christ is enthroned in our hearts. If we revert to yielding to the demands of sinful flesh, then Christ is dethroned and our old man occupies His place. This need not happen, because the power of the 'body of sin' was destroyed by the cross.

In regard to the command to **"put on the Lord Jesus Christ,"** the Greek word *'enduo,'* which is translated here as **"put on,"** has the additional meaning to 'array' or to 'clothe, in the sense of 'sinking into a garment.' Not only do we believe that we are 'clothed' with Christ, but we also agree to allow our own lives to be submerged or hidden in Christ. **"For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."** (Col 3:3).

His presence and life are in us, and encompassing us in all our circumstances. From now on we are to do all things **"according to His working which works in [us] mightily."** (Col 1:29). Our whole Christian walk should be set on the foundation of our unity with Christ in His death, and consequently our new life united with His resurrection life--hidden away in His abiding presence.

The question arises: How often is it necessary to **"put off the old man"** and to **"put on the Lord Jesus Christ"**? It is important to recognize that man is not entirely released from the curse of the Fall--even by the cross. The flesh never fully retires or relinquishes its demand to be satisfied. In this respect it constantly opposes the Spirit. **"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."** (Gal 5:16-17). Both the flesh and the Spirit "lust" after, or desire to take possession of man's heart. Therefore they are **"contrary,"** or constantly opposed to one another.

Because the flesh and the Spirit are constantly warring for the possession of our souls, the path of the cross is a daily walk. In the same way that we prepare for the day by taking off our pyjamas and putting on our clothes, it should be a normal part of our spiritual preparation for the day to **"put off the old man,"** and to **"put on the Lord Jesus Christ."** Jesus said, **"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."** (Lu 9:23).

The TESTIMONY of the SPIRIT

In the eighth chapter of Romans, Paul writes, **"For if you live according to [the desires of] the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds [or habitual practices] of the body [of sin], you will live."** (Rom 8:13). Note that it is the Holy Spirit who puts to death **"the flesh with its passions and desires"** (Ga 5:24), and who establishes us in union with Christ's life.

The catalyst which causes the Holy Spirit to act is our testimony to the Word of God. The Holy Spirit will always respond in living power to **"the word of [our] testimony"** (Rev 12:11), particularly when it is to 'the word of the cross.' However there is one condition. We must really want the passions and desires of the flesh put to death, for the Holy Spirit will only respond in accordance to the true state of our hearts.

THE DEEPER WORK OF THE CROSS

The path of the cross we have described should be the normal walk of all Christians. However there is another dimension to the path of the cross which is more penetrating and profound. And that is to put our carnal nature to death permanently, which requires a much deeper work by the Holy Spirit. This deeper work takes place on a pathway of suffering and refinement. It involves the Holy Spirit progressively purging out the old nature and replacing it with the very nature of Christ.

Suffering is the necessary catalyst required to break down the stronghold of flesh. The apostle Peter wrote, **"Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God".** (1 Peter 4:1-2).

Drinking Christ's cup of suffering is not a popular teaching. In fact few Christians embark on this deeper path of the cross, requiring as it does our complete submission to the Holy Spirit's cleansing and purifying work in us. This means being prepared to have the old nature stripped away by the purging of suffering, so that it can be replaced by the nature of Christ.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul describes his willingness to suffer the death of his own sinful nature, in order to receive in its place the divine nature of Christ. He begins by discounting the reliability of his own nature. **"For we are the [true spiritual] circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."** (Phil 3:3). Then he lists his natural attributes: **"...circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal,**

persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." (Phil 3:5-6).

Even though these attributes were admired by traditional Jews, Paul willingly lays them aside. Instead he has come to a settled conviction that anything that stands in the way of him being one with the Lord, is to be counted as loss and as rubbish to be discarded. **"..I also count all things loss for the excellence of the [intimate and personal] knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him."** (Phil 3:8-9).

Paul then declares his willingness to identify with Christ's sufferings, so that he might attain a new nature, resurrected out of the death of his 'old man': **"...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."** (Phil 3:10-11).

When Paul says that he wants to know **"the power of His resurrection,"** he means that he wants to experience the same power which raised Jesus from the dead--and that power filling his whole being, overcoming his sin nature, and producing in its stead the divine nature of the Lord.

In saying that he wants to be **"conformed to [Christ's] death,"** Paul makes it clear that he is not talking about his physical death, but rather the death of his old nature.

He continues, **"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."** (Phil 3:12-14).

Who shall tread on this deeper path of the cross? Paul says that only the spiritually mature have the state of mind and heart necessary to submit to this deeper work by the Holy Spirit. **"Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you."** (Phil 3:15).

THE PURPOSE OF THE DEEPER PATH OF THE CROSS

The basis of all fruitfulness in ministry is resurrection life. This resurrection life must by definition be preceded by death. Jesus said, **"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless an ear of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much fruit."** (John 12:24).

The old nature is destroyed through suffering, so that it can be replaced by the life of Jesus. The deeper work of the cross releases the new nature of Christ, which then ministers spiritual life to the rest of the church. When the "old man" has been dealt with to such a degree that it has lost its power and 'dies', the life of Jesus may flow freely in ministry without any interference from fleshly intrusion. The Lord is able to use such a person to minister His life to the church, producing **"much fruit."**

Paul relates this process to the Corinthians. **"We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed-- always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you."** (2 Cor 4:8-12).

THE PREPARATION OF GOD'S ANOINTED MINISTERS

The Lord's preparation of spiritual leaders is a completely different process to that which is used to prepare worldly leaders. In the world, the prospective executive is equipped with intellectual skills, academic qualifications, and self confidence. On the other hand, the Lord's preparation of leaders involves the stripping away of all such independence and self assurance, leaving in its place an absolute reliance on Him. Thus prepared, the Lord's servants **"have no confidence in the flesh."** They turn continually to the Lord, doing all things in the strength and ability that He supplies.

Of the two methods of preparation described, the worldly one is the most frequently chosen in the twentieth century church. Prospective ministers attend a bible college and receive tuition enabling them to preach fluently. With commendable effort they pass the required examinations and receive recognized qualifications, which in turn authorises them to take up a leadership position in 'a church.' Despite the zeal and effort required to obtain these qualifications, this process is still a poor substitute for the preparation and anointing of the Holy Spirit.

OBEDIENCE IS FULFILLED THROUGH THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ was, and will always be, perfect in obedience. When we allow His life to reign in us, we become partakers of His obedience. The obedience of Christ becomes a spontaneous part of our experience. But since our sinful nature is naturally opposed to the Spirit of Christ, obedience is negated when our flesh is not put to death by the power of the cross--hence the importance of the path of the cross.

OBEDIENCE in the CHURCH

At one time Paul was confronted by some members of the Corinthian church who were exalting themselves, and belittling his apostolic authority. In writing to the church, he reminded them that his position as a genuine apostle was supported by his authority to use the name of Jesus, and therefore the power cast down every obstacle which opposed obedience to Christ.

"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled." (2 Cor 10:4-6).

Two things stand out in this reading. The first is the authority and power Christ had entrusted to Paul. Using a military metaphor, he warned that he was ready to cast down every false thought and imagination that opposed obedience to Christ, and furthermore, to punish all disobedience.

Due to his perseverance on the path of the cross, Christ could trust him with such authority. Paul had reached a stage or level of refinement that ensured he would not engage in any unauthorized fleshly warfare against his brethren, no matter how much he was provoked. As an obedient servant, Paul truly was Christ's instrument in these circumstances. In effect it was Christ who was admonishing and disciplining His church, rather than Paul.

The second thing highlighted is the possibility of the church as a whole being brought into obedience to the truth. The purpose of Paul's warfare for the saints was to bring **"every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your [ie the whole church's] obedience is fulfilled."**

The Greek word '*hupakoe*,' translated 'obedience,' means 'to obey what is heard,' or 'to be obedient (to Christ) in their listening.' Paul was ready to "punish all disobedience" in their midst

when they as a church had been brought to a readiness to hearken to the truth, and respond to it with acceptance and cooperation.

An essential part in the restoring of Christ's authority as head of the church is the restoration of spiritually prepared leaders, who have had obedience perfected in them through the path of the cross. Like Paul they will be the Lord's instruments through whom He will be able to discipline and refine and cast down strongholds, to the end that He might bring His church into obedience to the truth.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Without knowledge about the path of the cross, it is almost impossible to be obedient to God's moral precepts. This is because of the compelling power of sin in our natures. When Jesus became the representative of the sin of mankind, and received in His own body the full measure of punishment for our sins, Satan's legal power to hold us captive to sin was brought to nothing.

Effectively our 'old man' was laid on Jesus and taken to death on the cross. The path of the cross is one of walking in the light of our union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, and by faith receiving the full measure of the blessings He procured for us by the cross.

This involves appropriating the death of our 'old man,' and receiving and walking in the power of the risen life of Jesus already implanted within us. When our life is replaced by the life of Jesus, His obedience is manifested through us, and He is able to use us to minister His life to the church.

Obedience is crucial to the operation of the Lord's authority in the church. The path of the cross is therefore an essential part in replacing the lawlessness of flesh with the obedience of Christ. It is particularly important for leaders to have experienced the deeper work of the cross, and to have had Christ's obedience established in them. Only then can they be used as His instruments to bring His church into truth and obedience.

In the next chapter we will examine the Lord's authority structure as it applies in the family. This chain of authority has been deliberately instituted by God to provide spiritual protection for each member of each household within the local church.

THE ROLES OF MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

KEY BIBLE READING

1 Corinthians 11:3-5, 7-12 "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonours his head [who is Christ]. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head [who is her husband]...For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God."

THE AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

To be really worthwhile, any study on this contentious topic needs to rest on the assumption that all Scripture is God's word, as directed to His servants by the Holy Spirit. Scripture possesses an authority which commands obedience by all Christians, regardless of place or time. This means that interpretation of the Bible should not be subject to the social conditions of the day. Rather, social conditions should be reviewed in the light of the Bible. A second requirement is that the Scriptural interpretation of the roles of men and women must be viewed in the context of what the whole of the Bible has to say on the topic, and not just one or two isolated verses. On this basis then, we will attempt to show how God has set forth a pattern of male leadership. This pattern is consistent throughout the whole Bible and it is meant to apply in all ages of history, no matter what social background.

THE DIVINE ORDER OF CREATION

The Scriptural record in Genesis shows that man was created before woman. "**And the LORD God formed man [Adam] of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man [Adam] became a living being.**" (Gen 2:7). In God's divine order of things, those who are brought into being first, generally have authority over those following. This pattern was adhered to in Jewish culture for instance, with the succession of first-born males as leaders of tribes, heads of families, and later as kings of nations. After creating Adam, God sanctioned his headship by making him responsible for tending the Garden of Eden, and then giving him authority to name all of the animals. "**Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it...Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name.**" (Gen 2:15, 19). And it was to Adam that the key instruction relating to obedience was given. "**Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.**" (Gen 2:16-17). Note that every one of these charges were committed to Adam before Eve was formed.

EVE was FORMED to be ADAM's HELP MEET

Next in the divine order, God created woman to be man's '*help meet*.' **"And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."** (Gen 2:18 KJV) The word "**help**" means 'to aid,' or 'to supply that which an individual cannot supply for himself.' It is used frequently of God in His capacity of supplying the needs of Israel, so it is clearly not a demeaning position. The word "**meet**" comes from a Hebrew word meaning 'opposite.' Literally, it is 'according to the opposite of him,' meaning that her attributes are 'the opposite' of his. As man's helpmate, her attributes complement his by providing all that is missing in his makeup, but still needed for humanity to function as God intended. Together their attributes complete each other, so that together, they form an effective and harmonious partnership in the Lord. In Christian ministry, a unified 'husband and wife' team is also to be highly commended. It is common for the 'spiritual gifts' of one to dovetail with the other, bringing balance and completeness to spiritual discernment. In those cases where the headship of the husband is honoured by the wife, and the husband is in turn truly submitted to Christ's headship, such a ministry has the full sanction and blessing of the Lord.

EVE'S POSITION IN THE FALL

It is significant that in the course of the Fall, God's divine order was reversed. In the Garden of Eden it was Eve, typifying 'woman,' who took the initiative and headship. Without the covering of Adam's authority, she was beguiled and enticed by Satan to sin against God. When God pronounced His judgment on Eve, His decree was directed to all women of all ages. **"To the woman He said: 'I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.'"** (Gen 3:16). The Hebrew meaning of the phrase, "**your desire shall be for your husband**" is that she (referring to women in general), would always harbour an ambition to control or manipulate her husband, in reality seeking to take over his position as head. But despite her desire to have control over her husband, God's judgment was that **"He [i.e. her husband] shall rule over you."** In other words, man will exercise dominion over woman--he will be her head. Some would argue that Christians have been redeemed from the curse of the Fall, and that therefore God's judgment against Eve need no longer apply. This argument is based on a misunderstanding of our spiritual position in Christ. The fact is that, while we have been redeemed from the curse of the Law, we have NOT been redeemed from the curse of the Fall. This distinction is made evident when we recognise that man still bears his share of God's judgment after the Fall. **"Then to Adam He said...'Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.'"** (Gen 3:17-19).

The APPARENT INCONSISTENCY of GENESIS 1:26

In Genesis 1:26, **"...God said, 'Let Us make man [or 'mankind'] in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'"** The phrase "**in Our image**," does not refer to physical resemblance, nor does it suggest that man has been given the mantle of deity. Instead it refers to man being created with a spirit, and secondly, as having dominion over all earthly creatures. God, who created all things and therefore had dominion over all things, said first, **"Let Us make man in Our image,"** and then, **"let them have dominion over...all the earth.."** In other words, God delegated His authority and dominion over all other living creatures to mankind. It was in this respect that mankind was made in the "**image**" and "**likeness**" of God. Because God said, **"Let Us make [mankind]..."** which included both men and women, and then declared **"...let them have dominion..."** this reference is often used to argue

that women have equal rights to leadership with men. However it would be wrong to draw that conclusion. The essence of this reading is that God made mankind in general as a superior species to reign over the rest of His creation. As far as allocating the respective positions of men and women in their joint dominion, it should be remembered that overall headship was delegated to Adam before Eve was created.

GOD's ORIGINAL DECREE *Applies To ALL HISTORICAL AGES*

The main argument used against applying the biblical principle of male leadership, asserts that modern society is totally different to the form of society prevailing at the time of the New Testament church. It is claimed that social customs have changed radically since then, and that almost every human society in the world now recognizes 'equal rights for women' in their national constitutions. This is considered sufficient justification to vary the divine order. However the Bible itself testifies to a different conclusion. For instance, both Paul, (in 1Cor 11:8-9 [Gen 2:18,21-22] and 1 Tim2:13-14 [Gen 2:21-22, 3:13]) and Peter (in 1 Pet 3:5-6 [Gen 18:12]), referred back to the Old Testament pattern as authority for their instructions on the status of women in the early church. In doing so, the apostles are clearly implying that God's divine order applies to all ages.

THE CONSISTENCY OF MALE HEADSHIP THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE

The POSITION of MEN and WOMEN in the OLD TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament period, Israel was a patriarchal society. The patriarchs, prophets, kings, priests, and elders who led the nation were, almost without exception, male. The tribes and nation-states of the Jews were numbered using the criteria of men who could wage war. Their abhorrence of a society ruled by women is reflected in one of Isaiah's prophecies. **"As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people! Those who lead you cause you to err,...[Isa 3:12].** Despite the fact that leadership was considered the responsibility of man, women in Israel held a position of honour and respect. This is particularly evident when their status is compared with that of pagan women in surrounding nations, who were often harshly repressed by their husbands. Jewish women on the other hand, mingled freely at home and abroad, and frequently played a prominent role in the spiritual life and affairs of the nation. We need only recall the notable influence of Sarah, Miriam, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, Deborah, Esther, Abigail, Huldah, and Ruth, upon the history of Israel. In Proverbs 31, King Lemuel describes the excellence of a virtuous wife: **"...her worth is far above rubies." "...her husband safely trusts her;" "She...provides food for her household..." "She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard." "She extends her hand to the poor..." "Her husband is known in the gates [which is a position of headship], when he sits among the elders of the land." "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness." "Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:"** (31:10,11,15,16,20,23,26,28). This is hardly the picture of a downtrodden, or even housebound, victim of society.

The POSITION of MEN and WOMEN in the NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus does not Himself provide us with a direct teaching about male leadership, and so we are left to draw our conclusions from His own position and from His subsequent actions. First of all, Christ was God incarnate as a male. Secondly, He chose twelve male disciples, and the people He sent out were all males. Thirdly, the ongoing apostles and elders were all male. Finally, He chided His own mother for using her maternal authority in an inappropriate way, saying, **"Woman, what do I have to do with you? My hour has not yet come."** (John 2:4 NASB)

Nevertheless, women played a prominent part in His life and ministry. Both Elizabeth and Mary were used by God to prophetically announce the forthcoming births of their sons, John and

Jesus. And whereas the Pharisees would never be publicly associated with women, Jesus was nearly always accompanied by a group of female disciples who ministered to His needs and received from His ministry. Jesus treated women with the utmost courtesy and respect throughout His earthly life--forgiving the woman caught in adultery, and receiving Mary's anointing of his body for burial with oil of spikenard. After His crucifixion, both men and women waited in Jerusalem for the promise of the Holy Spirit, who fell upon them all.

THE CONTROVERSIAL TEACHINGS OF PAUL

In his letters to the young churches, Paul provides us with a considerable amount of teaching about the relative positions of men and women in the church, and in the family. Because he assumed his teaching would be contested, the apostle made it plain that his instructions were **"...the commandments of the Lord."** (1 Cor 14:37). Paul has been the target of much criticism because of his forthright teaching about male leadership. His reputation has been reduced in the eye of some feminists to that of a bigoted old bachelor and a 'woman-hater.' But since this apostle provides us with by far the most biblical teaching on this subject, it is important to analyse his most controversial statements. This is particularly important since he claimed that his conclusions were given to him by divine inspiration.

(1) 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 **"The Head of Woman is Man"**

The Key Bible Reading begins by presenting a clear-cut chain of authority - **"...the head of Christ is God...the head of every man is Christ...the head of woman is man..."** In explaining this, Paul compares the 'head-coverings' which he considered were appropriate for men and women attending a public worship meeting. It was a custom at that time for women to wear a covering on their head, to honour the authority of their husband. Some women had discontinued this custom on the grounds that they now had equality with their husbands. Paul disagreed with this practice, saying that, **"the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels."** The covering itself was not the important issue--rather it was the woman's attitude which had caused her to remove it. A covering on the head spoke of submission to authority, and removing that covering reflected an attitude of rejecting the husband's authority. The words *"a symbol of"* have been added by translators, and we have a better sense of the meaning if we revert to the original text - **"the woman ought to have authority [the authority of her husband] on her head [as a protective covering] because of the angels."** When a woman wore a covering on her head, it was to acknowledge that she had the covering of the authority of her husband. The covering was a sign of her willingness to submit to her husband's headship. The essence of Paul's teaching is that, by their general demeanour, women should display a respectful and submissive attitude towards their husbands. This doctrine is repeated by the apostle Peter. **"Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands...Do not let your adornment be merely outward...--rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord..."** (1 Pet 3:1, 3,-6).

Submission to Authority Provides a Covering

Paul advises that women should publicly show their submission, **"...because of the angels."** On the one hand, God's angels have been assigned to protect us and carry out God's designated purposes for us. But on the other hand, Satan's angels are always poised to take advantage of any disobedience that removes our spiritual covering. When a woman rebels against her husband's headship, she removes the covering provided by his position over her in the chain of spiritual authority. Firstly, this removes a woman from the protective care of God's angels, and secondly, it opens the door for attacks upon her by Satan's fallen angels.

Man's Acceptance of the Responsibilities of Headship

Whilst women were instructed to cover their heads (in order to convey their submission to their husband's authority), Paul said that a man **"...ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God;"** and that **"Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonours his head."** Paul gave two reasons for his instruction.

(1) **"...since he is the image and glory of God;"** When Paul said that man should not cover his head because he "is the image and glory of God," he was referring to men as males, not mankind in general. Man as a male is in God's image because he was placed in a position of authority before Eve was formed. Whereas women were to uncover their heads to show their submission, men were to uncover their heads to acknowledge their authority.

(2) **"Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonours his head."** Paul argues that if men covered their heads, they would dishonour their head (i.e. Christ, who is above men in the chain of authority), because they would then be seen to have rejected the position of authority entrusted to them. Using the same symbolism, a man who leaves his head uncovered signifies to all that he accepts the responsibilities of headship in the biblical chain of authority.

Ephesians 5:22-33 "The Husband is Head of the Wife"

This passage reads in part, **"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her...So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church...' For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'... let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."** God has ordained that the husband is Christ's delegated authority in the family. The husband is a type of Christ (the 'bridegroom'), and the wife is a type of the church (the 'bride'). Just as Christ loves and nurtures the church, so the husband should love and care for his wife. And just as the church should be subject to Christ her head, so the wife is called to be subject to her own husband. It is also important to note that when this chain of authority is fully extended, children are required to be obedient to their parents. **"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord...Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord."** (Col 3:18,20). Two things are necessary for this chain of authority to operate in the family. The first is that there must be obedience by all members of the chain to the authority placed above them. The second is that the husband, as Christ's delegated authority, must exercise his authority as head of the family; believing that Christ, as his head, will guide and uphold him. This also applies to parents, both husband and wife, who must be prepared to exercise a responsible headship over their children. When the role of headship is accepted and exercised under the Lord's direction, He is able to uphold those in the position of authority by instilling obedience throughout the chain.

We can take comfort in the fact that, aligned with the promise of the restoration of the prophetic ministry at the close of the age, there is also a promise of the restoration of parental authority--particularly the role of the father as head of the family. **"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he [representing the prophetic teaching ministry] will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."** (Mal 4:5-6).

(3) Galatians 3:26-29 **"There is neither Male nor Female"**

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Some use this passage to assert that men and women are equal, and should therefore have equivalent roles of headship. However this passage refers to mankind's vertical relationship with God, and not the horizontal relationship between men and women. In relation to God, both men and women are entirely equal. They have exactly the same potential for spiritual maturity, and identical rights to draw near to God's throne. We are **"...all sons of God..."** in that sense-- both men and women are **"...prepared as a bride adorned for her husband..."** in order to become **"the bride, the Lamb's wife."** (Rev 21:2,9). Man's headship over woman is not a matter of he being superior and she being inferior. In fact, according to the Lord, to be placed in a position of headship is to be assigned the task of a servant. In Christ's realm, headship means to be held responsible, and therefore accountable for those who are under your charge. Husbands must love their wives **"...just as [or in the same manner as] Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her."** (Eph 5:25). Of His own ministry, Jesus said that **"...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..."** (Mat 20:28).

(4) 1 Tim 2:11-15 **"Let a Woman Learn in Silence"**

"Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control. Because this passage has caused so much distress to both men and women, we will break it down into its component phrases, and carefully examine each one.

· **"Let a woman learn in silence with all submission."** The context in which this is written is shown by the preceding verses, where Paul appeals to women to dress modestly and show moderation in all things, as befitting those who should display godly conduct and good works (1 Tim 2:9-10). The Greek word translated **"silence"** in this case is *'hesuchia,'* which means **'stillness,'** or **'quietness.'** It is a word used to indicate **'tranquillity arising from within,'** and is in contrast to a similar Greek word *'eremos,'* which is used to express a quietness imposed from without (1 Tim 2:2). Paul's command is therefore not a command that women should be absolutely silent, but rather, in harmony with the context, that they should have a quiet disposition in public meetings. Women are to learn with an attitude of quietness and submission, honouring their husbands as well as the operating ministry of teaching.

"I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man". The Greek word for authority used here is *'authenteo,'* which means **'to seize and hold in possession by force or without right.'** It is to usurp another's authority--as the Authorised Version renders this verse, **"...I suffer not a woman...to usurp authority over the man..."** This is therefore not an absolute decree that women should not teach. Paul himself instructed older women to teach younger women, and commended Lois and Eunice for teaching a young Timothy. Priscilla is mentioned with Aquila in teaching Apollos. In the history of the church, women like Jeanne Guyon and Jessie Penn Lewis have taught under authority, and have had a profound influence on later teaching ministries. Paul was saying that women must not engage in an illegal teaching ministry; which is ministry without male oversight, and so without legitimate authority.

"For Adam was formed first, then Eve." Here Paul refers back to Genesis and the divine order of creation, to remind his readers that it was God who placed man in authority over woman.

"Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression." The Greek word *'apatao'* which is translated here as **'deceived,'** is rendered **"beguiled"** in the Authorised Version. Because Eve was acting from a position of false authority without Adam's protective covering, she was easily deceived by Satan, and fell into sin.

"Nevertheless she will be saved in child-bearing" The role of mother and home-maker--i.e. being responsible for the care and nurture of godly children--has divine approval, for it exercises the essence of womanhood. If a woman accepts this primary role in her heart, she will be saved from grasping at false authority, and consequently from falling into sin because of Satan's deceptions.

(5) 1 Corinthians 14:34-37 "Let Your Women Keep Silent in the Churches"

"Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord." Paul begins by telling women to be silent in public assemblies. To take this literally as meaning not to utter a sound, would contradict his earlier teaching that women in public assemblies are to pray and prophesy with their heads covered. (1 Cor 11:5). The spiritually discerning will therefore consider the apostle's instruction in the context in which it is found. The central theme of the fourteenth chapter of this letter to the Corinthians is the maintenance of order in public worship meetings. The same word for silence is used by Paul to warn prophets and those speaking in tongues about speaking out of order. **"If anyone speaks in a tongue...[and] there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church...Let two or three prophets speak....But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first [prophet] keep silent."** (vv 27-30)

In order to be consistent, we should associate Paul's command to women with the general theme of orderly conduct in church. Men and women were generally segregated, and apparently some women were disrupting meetings by speaking aloud in tongues, asking questions, or talking in general. In suggesting a precedent **"...as the law also says..."** to support his statement Paul again reverts back to Genesis and the divine order of creation. Expecting a hostile response from some quarters, Paul challenges the more spiritual members in the assembly to acknowledge that his command was from the Lord.

THE MINISTRY AND POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

Having studied the derivation of male leadership from the divine order of God's creation, to its expression in the Old Testament patriarchal society, and onto its clear enunciation in Paul's teachings, it is now time to examine its practical operation in the church. At first it may appear that women should have little or no part in the work of the church. But such a conclusion would be based on a misunderstanding of the essence of Paul's commands - that women are to maintain an attitude of submission, and minister under authority. To **"be in silence"** is to have a quiet disposition. To **"keep silent"** is to not speak in a manner which dishonours her husband. This is in keeping with Paul's previous instruction that, **"...every woman who prays or prophesies [in church] with her head uncovered dishonours her head [who is her husband]..."** (1 Cor 11:5)

Paul's warning that women should not to teach or have authority over a man, may be translated, "to teach over a man or take authority over a man." A woman must not usurp a man's authority, or engage in an illegal teaching ministry. She is permitted to teach only if she herself, and her teaching, are under the authoritative oversight of an appropriate male. The Book of Acts provides us with the example of Priscilla combining with her husband Aquila to teach Appolos. **"So [Appolos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately."** (Acts 18:26). Elsewhere in Paul's letters to the young churches, we see that women had a prominent role in the work of the church. For example Paul acknowledges the ministry of deaconess that was performed by Phoebe. **"I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant [translated elsewhere as 'deacon'] of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also."** (Rom 16:1-2)

Paul also mentions, **"...Mary, who laboured much for us..."** and **"...Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord."** (Rom 16:6, 12). In addition Paul implores the Philippian church to **"...help these women [Euodia and Syntyche] who laboured with me in the gospel..."** (Phil 4:3).

As we have already noted, it was acceptable in the New Testament church for women to pray or prophesy in church, provided that they did so under the covering of submission of an appropriate male. Confirmation of this principle is found in the household of Philip the evangelist, who **"had four virgin daughters who prophesied."** (Acts 21:9).

After studying the scriptural record of the early church, we may reasonably conclude that all ministries are open to women, save that of headship. There is no scriptural warranty for a woman to fill the office of elder, or for a woman to have oversight over a church. The current movement, which demands the right of women to assume positions of authority which are biblically designated for men, has behind it the spirit of witchcraft. Spiritual witchcraft, or the compulsion to assume illegitimate authority or power, has at its roots rebellion; **"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft..."** (1 Sam 15:23).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

From the divine order of creation, and His subsequent address to Eve after the Fall, God has ordained that **"the head of the woman is the man."** (KJV). This decree has been honoured, firstly, throughout the Old Testament; secondly, in the way that Jesus has been manifested to us; and thirdly, in the teaching of the apostles. Women submitting to male headship is not a matter of inferiority and superiority, but of differing roles and functions. In our relationship with God, there is no difference in spiritual value between male and female. God has decreed that in the church, and in the home, man is to exercise headship. The wife is to submit to her husband and honour him **"just as"** the Church is to obey and revere the Lord Jesus Christ. And the husband is to love and care for his wife **"just as"** Christ loves and cares for the church. In Christian service, every ministry save that of headship (such as being an elder) is open to women. The evidence of the early church in action shows that women played a prominent part in the life of the church. In the next chapter we will examine the intrusion of the New Age movement, and the increasing tide of humanism which has already enveloped many parts of the professing church.

SECTION 5

RESTORATION THROUGH UNMASKING AND DETHRONING ANTICHRIST

Chapter 11

HUMANISM - 666 AND THE NEW AGE

THE SEAL OF GOD -- OR THE MARK OF THE BEAST

The bible refers to two types of seals or marks, which are described as being 'engraved' on the hand or forehead. One originates from God, and the other from Satan. Although they are invisible to man, they clearly indicate to the spirit world the state of a person's heart toward God.

The SEAL of GOD

The first reference to man receiving a seal from God on their hand or forehead, is seen in a ritual feast initiated by God in the time of Moses. When initiating this ceremony, to commemorate the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, Moses instructed them as follows. **"Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD...And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, 'This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.' It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD'S law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year."** (Ex 13:6 & 8-10).

This ceremonial feast was initiated by God to engrave a lasting impression on His children. It became a memorial sign that it was God who had brought their fathers out of Egypt, and who had supplied all their needs in the wilderness. When the purpose of the feast was received into their hearts, it created an invisible seal on their hands, (i.e. everything they did), and between their eyes or on their foreheads, (i.e. everything they thought). This seal set them apart to God and placed them under His providential care and protection.

Those who bear the seal of God on their foreheads have a heart attitude which acknowledges that God is their Father. As "Jehovah Jireh" He is the source of all their provision, protection, and deliverance. Because He is the One who supplies all their needs, they constantly depend on Him and trust Him. They are totally consecrated to His purposes with their whole minds and hearts.

There is another picture of those bearing the seal of God in the Book of Revelation. Here its recipients stand with the Lamb, **"having His Father's name [the seal of His ownership] written on their foreheads."** (Rev 14:1). They are described as **"virgins"** [or those separated to God], **"...who follow the Lamb wherever He goes."** (Rev 14:4). Being totally consecrated to the Lord, they are always available for His work.

The MARK of the BEAST

In contrast, the Book of Revelation also describes the **"mark of the beast"** (i.e. the mark of the 'second beast' or 'spirit of antichrist'), and how it is received.

Before studying this passage however, it is important to appreciate how closely Antichrist is associated with trade and commerce, or the process of 'buying and selling.' The Seventeenth and Eighteenth chapters of the Book of Revelation are devoted to the disclosure of the **"the great Harlot,"** the false religion of Antichrist, and the fall of **"Babylon the Great,"** which is the system which he has established to bring the inhabitants of the world under his control.

Before outlining the judgment of Babylon the Great, the Word shows us the extent of her influence over mankind. **"For all the nations have drunk of [figuratively: 'have taken into their souls'] the wine of the wrath [figuratively: 'the heat' or passion] of her fornication [figuratively: 'her spiritual adultery' or idolatry], the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury."** (Rev 18:3).

Idolatry is the worship of created things, rather than God the Creator. This is the essence of 'the mark of the beast.' Antichrist entices man to covet material things and to direct all of his efforts towards acquiring them. In this way the very acts of buying and selling become tainted with idolatry, or the mark of the beast. The reading shows that mankind in a world-wide sense has been intoxicated by the heat and passion of the Harlot's idolatry.

The judgment of 'Babylon the Great' takes the form of dismantling and destroying the economic and commercial juggernaut that Antichrist has created. **"The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come. And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore:"** (Rev 18:9-11). The passage then goes on to categorise this **"merchandise"** into three basic types. The first group of items are those associated with luxury and affluence: **"merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble;"** The next group of items, **"...cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep,"** are all associated with every day household needs. While the last group, of **"horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men,"** expresses the political power under-pinning trade and commerce - and how this power is used to captivate and imprison mankind in bondage.

God's final judgment of Antichrist's world-system will be swift and conclusive. **"The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.'"** (Rev 18:15-17).

These passages reveal that Antichrist has used the process of trade and commerce, or 'buying and selling,' to bring **"all the nations,"** or all mankind, under the spell of idolatry. We must recognise that there is a power, or spirit of antichrist, associated with 'buying and selling' which so easily contaminates, or even captivates, those who give themselves to it. With this background firmly in mind, we can now begin to study the chief passage in Revelation concerning 'the mark of the beast.'

The MARK in REVELATION

13:16-18 **"And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads; And that no man might buy or sell, save [or 'except'] he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his**

name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six." (Rev 13:16-18 KJV).

A detailed examination of individual word meanings and particular phrases in this reading will help us to gain a deeper insight into its overall meaning:

"And he" - The second beast or spirit of antichrist. **"causeth"** - Creates a condition, or conditions everyone. **"all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond,"** - This is an universal all - everyone is included. **"to receive"** - Literally, **"that he might give them."** **"a mark"** - Just as slaves were branded with their owners' name or symbol, so this is an equivalent spiritual brand of ownership. Those having the mark of the beast may not have been aware of being brought under his control, but they are in servitude to him none the less. **"in their right hand,"** - Influencing the main thrust of all their doing. **"or in their foreheads;"** - Influencing the trend of their thinking.

"And that no man might buy or sell [except] he that had the mark, or the name...or the number of his name." In many bible versions, translators have inserted additional words to the original single Greek word *'ekho'* (meaning 'to have'). These additions have the misleading effect of changing the phrase to mean that no one may buy or sell without first having the beast's name or number 'engraved' on their right hand or forehead. For example, the words in brackets have been added in the following translations: KJV: **"no man might buy or sell save (he that) had the mark..."** NASB: **"no one should be able to buy or to sell, except (the one who) has the mark..."** NKJV: **"and that no one may buy or sell except (one who) has the mark"**

As well as the translation being more accurate if the added words are left out, it also allows us to view the reading from another point of view.

WITH THE ADDED WORDS, the translation reads, **"And that no man might buy or sell, except (he that) had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."** In this rendering a person cannot buy or sell unless he has first received the mark.

WITHOUT THE ADDED WORDS, the translation reads, **"And that no man might buy or sell, except having the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."** In this case having the mark is not necessarily a pre-condition to buying and selling. It can also be viewed as a result of buying and selling. Antichrist's aim is to condition all people through the process of buying and selling, to the end that **"no man might buy or sell except having the mark."**

In other words, the everyday process of buying and selling is used by the spirit of antichrist to bind people into idolatry of material possessions. That he has been largely successful is verified in Revelation 18:3 - **"For all the nations"** have become intoxicated with the heat and passion of the Harlot's idolatry.

As well as being brought under the mark of 'bondage to idolatry' of physical things, man may also receive other attributes associated with the beast's name and number - **"that no man might buy or sell, except having the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."**

"or the name of the beast," - Receiving the properties associated with the beast's name or character, in particular the self-centred independence which opposes the rule of Christ in our lives.

"or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man;" - The phrase **"the number of a man"** may also be translated **"the number of man."** In biblical numerology, the number of man is 6.

"and his number is Six hundred threescore and six." - Or 666. When a number is tripled, its symbolic meaning is taken to its fullest extent. So 666 denotes the fullest extent of man's endeavours, or HUMANISM. This is the belief that man in himself has the capacity to meet all of his own needs, and to solve all of the world's problems, without needing God. It is the blasphemous attitude that asserts man's independence from God, promoting instead a complete reliance on the power of human effort.

In conclusion, we can draw on each of the individual explanations above, and bring them together to form an 'amplified' rendering of the passage as a whole: **"And the spirit of antichrist conditions all people, both small and great, rich and poor, servants and masters, so that he might give them a mark in their right hand, influencing all that they do, and in their foreheads, influencing their way of thinking, to the intent that no one might buy or sell except having, and thereby being influenced by the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let he who understands work out the meaning of the number of the beast: for it is the number of man. And his number is 666, or independence from God."**

Whereas God first used a festal ceremony to 'engrave' His name **"Jehovah Jireh"** on the minds and hearts of His children, Antichrist uses the mundane functions of buying and selling to lure mankind into idolatry and humanism. This everyday process is used by the spirit of antichrist to condition man into believing that the source of all his provision is through his own efforts. It operates as a perpetual reminder to man that his financial security is determined by his own individual intellect and industry, rather than in the blessing of his heavenly Father.

Because of this age-old strategy, God warned the Israelites, **"Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God...lest--when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them...and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God...then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.'" (Deut 8:11, 12, 13-14,17).**

ALL Have Been CONDITIONED to RECEIVE the MARK

Jesus' warning in Revelation about the mark of the beast is not just directed to Christians at the close of the age. Antichrist has targeted the church during the whole 20 centuries of her existence, and mankind in all ages has been conditioned to receive the implanted mark.

In the Seventeenth Century the Dutch East India Company had a motto: *"Jesus is good, but trade is better."* This is just one illustration of how the potent power associated with buying and selling has been used by Antichrist to turn man's heart away from God.

It also explains why those engaged in trade and commerce have been particularly singled out in God's judgment of **"Babylon the Great."** **"The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing....Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning.."** (Rev 18:15, 17-18).

It is important to see that the spirit of antichrist **"...conditions all...so that he might give them a mark..."** All people of all ages, **"both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave,"** have been conditioned through the process of buying and selling. Before our redemption in Christ, all of us to some degree were tainted by the mark of Antichrist.

The apostle Paul describes our state before salvation in the following terms: **"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked, according to the**

course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air...among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh...and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." (Ephesians 2:1-2-3).

But even though we have all been contaminated by the mark of the beast, the bible indicates clearly that it is possible to be set free from its influence. **"And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God." (Rev 15:2 KJV).**

These overcomers standing on the sea of glass had not escaped being contaminated by the influence of the mark of the beast at some stage in their past. But since then they had **"...gotten the victory over the beast...his image...his mark, and...the number of his name."** Their victory is demonstrated by their nearness to God, actually standing on the sea of glass mingled with fire which separates man from God.

Jesus' warning in the Book of Revelation is not a declaration that at some time in the future we shall not be able to buy or sell without an identifying mark tattooed on our hand. Nor, as some have stated, is it an ultimatum that if we accept the mark on our hand we will lose our salvation. This sort of interpretation has prompted one writer to present a list of possible measures for Christians to take in order to avoid receiving the mark. Here are a few of his suggestions.

"Get out of debt." "Get rid of credit cards." "Own your own land." "Own your own home." "Have your own source of heat, light, and electricity." "Have your own food and water source and storage." "Be able to make your own clothes." "Have a means of travel without fuel (horse, bicycle, boat, etc)." "Have a supply of basic medicines." "Have a way to pay taxes." "Have a supply of gold and silver and extra tools and seeds for bartering."

Some people may consider these measures to be wise precautions. But for anyone to seriously entertain their adoption is proof in itself that the mark of humanistic independence has already been implanted. These suggestions present the idea that our provision and safety are our own responsibility - that our preservation is in our own hands. Once we have accepted that responsibility, such a list of requirements only promotes the fear of not having the means to accomplish them.

Christ's warning is not against receiving a worldly identifying mark, but against being brought into bondage to idolatry. The real danger is not one of being forced to receive a physical or electronic brand, but one of embracing the humanistic spirit of independence and self-sufficiency which is promoted by the spirit of antichrist.

THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT

The 'mark of the beast' and the New Age Movement have a common basis in humanism. They both reflect Antichrist's endeavour to entrench mankind in humanism, thereby replacing God's control over all things with that of man, and ultimately of Satan himself.

The New Age Movement is a broad-based network of social, spiritual, and political movements, which share common aims of perfecting man and society through a new found spiritual awareness. Its adherents comprise professional, business, religious, and activist groups, as well as independent spiritual leaders with their followers. Their sphere of influence has extended into science, medicine, education, religion, politics, sport, commerce, and most social sciences.

Collectively these groups have promoted feminist, ecological, spiritual, and human-potential issues. But despite their common aims of self-advancement and the creation of a utopian state of peace and harmony, the New Age Movement has no universal creed, no central organisation, and no

single world leader. As an ideology, its concepts are shadowy, constantly shifting, and almost indefinable. Its presence in society therefore goes unnoticed by most people.

And yet the consistency of humanistic philosophy and ideals propounded by its adherents, despite them having no apparent leader or central governing authority, can only be explained by the existence of a single spiritual controlling agent. It should be understood that the New Age Movement is a spiritual movement, and its controlling agent is the Second Beast, whose number is 666, the number of humanism. The New Age philosophy is a counterfeit spirituality which directly opposes God.

The BASIS of NEW AGE PHILOSOPHY

New Agers pride themselves on having an enlightened view of the nature of creation. They believe the universe and everything in existence is one essential reality without distinctions - a single organic whole without independent parts. They argue that even though objects and persons maintain a distinctiveness, they are interdependent on the unified whole.

In other words, God is not a personality, but a cosmic force that is in all, and makes up all. Everything that exists is therefore an extension of God.

This means Man is an extension of God, and has within himself an untapped reservoir of divine energy. All he needs to be enlightened is to adopt a new consciousness that allows him to see himself in tune with the cosmic energies of the universe. This, or so the argument goes, will enable him to release the energy within himself to accomplish all that his mind can perceive and personalise. Ultimately he will himself become a god.

Man is inherently good according to this view, and categories of moral good and evil are transcended by a cosmic consciousness. Experience is the final authority - anything that produces satisfaction is permissible. People's highest goals are self-enlightenment, satisfaction, and personal happiness.

Man is encouraged to set aside the limitations of Western thought and methodology, and turn to the mystical experiences of the East. Various mystic inducing techniques like yoga, martial arts, visualisation, hypnosis, etc., are practiced to attain cosmic consciousness.

The salvation of the world will therefore be achieved by mankind (rather than God) as it gives birth to the New Age, harnessing the cosmic powers of the universe to create a new utopian state of peace, order, and well being. Bringing this about will necessitate the establishment of a unified or one world government, and an all-encompassing one world church.

PRACTICES and TECHNIQUES associated with the NEW AGE MOVEMENT

Basically New Age adherents share the common belief that man's salvation is through his own enlightenment, which then enables him to harmonise with the energy forces of the universe. The techniques expounded by New Age teachers therefore aim at releasing the hidden powers within oneself, and melding them with the spiritual energies of the universe. Some New Age practices and the techniques associated with them are listed below.

Eastern Mysticism

New Age philosophy is a blend of Western humanism, and Eastern mysticism. Most New Age experiences have their roots in Eastern mysticism, following the phenomenal growth in interest in Eastern religions this century by Western societies. This interest has been intensified by the strongly held misconception that all religions have the potential to lead men to God. And it has occurred

despite the fact that Eastern religions deny the personality of God, the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrificial death for the sins of mankind, and the existence of the Holy Spirit. In reality, most Eastern religions are little more than programs of self-enlightenment, based on meditation techniques and incorporating some bodily exercises such as yoga and martial arts.

The Occult

The preoccupation with mystic experience has resulted in a widespread experimentation with occultist practices. These include things like tarot card reading, astrology, divination, pyramid power, seances, sorcery, witchcraft, shamanism, necromancy, out of the body experiences, and altered states of consciousness.

Visualisation

The use of controlled imagining, based on the belief that anything that the mind can visualise as having been personally attained in the imagination, can be achieved in reality. In other words, anything that the mind can believe, it can achieve. We as individuals have unlimited potential, the only limiting factor being faith in ourselves. Some Christians have adopted visualisation as a new faith technique.

Channelling

A channeller is one who acts as a spirit medium or point of contact between any one person and a 'spirit-guide.' The fact is that a spirit-guide is a demon spirit, who supplies 'infallible' information and direction that is supposedly beyond our human capacity to supply. Many influential and intellectually gifted members of society have become so indoctrinated and hoodwinked by their experiences of channelling, that they are reluctant to make any important decisions without first consulting their spirit guide.

Holistic Medicine

An alternative system of Health Care which supposedly assists individuals to harmonise body, mind, and spirit. Some of the many practices under the banner of 'Alternate Medicine' are acupuncture, hypnosis, iridology, naturopathy, colour therapy, psychic healing, homeopathy, and bio-feedback.

Alternative Beliefs

Other ideas linked with the New Age Movement include obsession with Extra-terrestrial Life, ancient Mythology and Legends, and the Green Movement's worship of Mother Earth.

INFILTRATION of NEW AGE PHILOSOPHIES into the CHURCH

The Church has been penetrated by New Age philosophies to a far greater degree than we might first imagine. This has occurred because often we have compromised Christian ethics by embracing and adopting anything that appears to work, without reference to its Scriptural integrity. Any miraculous happening is automatically attested to be the work of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual experience has taken precedence over sound doctrine. An all too common answer to concerned critics is, "But it works!"

In charismatic circles, the success of a church is largely equated with the degree of 'power' it exhibits, and the spiritual maturity of individuals by the number of their 'spiritual' experiences. As a consequence there has been an idolatrous hungering for spiritual power and experiences. This has produced fertile ground for the intrusion of pseudo-spiritual practices such as visualisation, positive

thinking, positive confession, false faith teaching incorporating the deification of man, prosperity 'hundredfold' teaching, hypnotism, rebirthing, calling down the Spirit without reference to Jesus or His cross, and mass hypnosis practiced in some "Toronto Blessing" meetings.

The result is just as Paul predicted. **"The coming of the lawless one [Antichrist] is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness."** (2 Thess 2:9-12).

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

The bible describes two types of seals or marks - the seal of God, and the mark of the beast. The seal of God designates a recognition and heartfelt acceptance of the fact that God is Jehovah Jireh, - He who provides for our every need.

The mark of the beast is implanted in us as we are conditioned through the process of buying and selling to idolise and covet material things, and to believe that our provision is through our own industry and effort. Through the mark of the beast we are indoctrinated into the philosophy of humanism, which asserts that man is capable of solving his and the world's problems without reference to God.

The New Age Movement is a spiritual movement whose controlling agent is the second beast, or the spirit of antichrist. New Age ideology is a mixture of Western humanism, and Eastern mysticism. It declares that God is an impersonal force, in all, and comprising all; that Man is a god, with an untapped reservoir of divine power within himself; and that through enlightenment this divine power can be released to create a utopian state of peace and order; which will in turn usher in the birth of the New Age.

Because much of the church has been preoccupied with spiritual power and experiences, it has been infiltrated with numerous New Age practices. This has resulted in false miracles and lying signs and wonders.

Before the church can be restored, it must be purged of all apostasy. Exposing the influence of Antichrist and the operation of his spirit in the church is a necessary part of the process. The next chapter will be devoted to summarising this work.

UNMASKING ANTICHRIST

KEY BIBLE READINGS

**"It was granted to him [Antichrist] to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation." (Rev 13:7 NKJ).
"...my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge." (Hosea 4:6 NIV).**

THEY DID NOT RECEIVE THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH

Both Daniel and Revelation declare that God, for His own purposes, allows Antichrist to make war on the saints, and that the saints are overcome. The reason why the saints are deceived by the counterfeits of the spirit of antichrist and overcome, is **"...because they did not receive the love of the truth..."**

"The coming of the lawless one [Antichrist] is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved." (Thess 2:9-10).

The love of the truth is an attribute of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Truth. The Holy Spirit will always impart truth to those who seek it earnestly--to all those who have received His love of the truth in their hearts. But to those who have rejected the love of the truth, the Holy Spirit is silent, and they inevitably fall prey to the deceptions of the spirit of antichrist. Even in the early church there were some who chose to reject the love of the truth and go their own way. Paul charged Timothy to, take heed and **"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." (2 Tim 4:2-4).**

The fact that the church in general has been largely overcome by Antichrist's deceptions, is an indication of the lack of **"the love of the truth"** amongst professing Christians. They have forsaken sound doctrine for the pursuit of what pleases **"their ears"** and delights their souls, or self-lives.

The end result has been that the spirit of antichrist has found fertile ground within the church, and has been able to substitute the purity of the doctrine of Christ with a lying counterfeit. The prophetic statement in the Key Bible reading, that **"[i]t was granted to [Antichrist] to make war with the saints and to overcome them,"** has already been fulfilled.

EXPOSING THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST IN THE CHURCH

The first requirement in restoring the church is to expose the presence of the spirit of antichrist in her midst. Paul writes that, **"...the lawless one [or Antichrist] will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume [or take away] with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming."** (2 Thess 2:8). Antichrist and his corrupting spirit in the church will be revealed and removed by **"the breath of [the Lord's] mouth,"** as it is spoken by His prophets and teachers. To this point in the book, we have endeavored to expose Antichrist's attack on the church in the following areas.

CREATION of a COUNTERFEIT CHURCH with a FALSE SPIRIT

Antichrist has created a false church which is governed by man. The Holy Spirit has been substituted by a false spirit--the spirit of antichrist--which has permeated all of the church's activities. Local churches have been replaced by denominational churches, which have a worldly system of leadership.

DENIGRATION of CHRIST'S AUTHORITY as HEAD of the CHURCH

This, the main thrust of Antichrist's attack on the church, has been directed through several fronts.

An Attack on the Holy Spirit.

The position of the Holy Spirit as Christ's representative in the church has been negated to a large degree, and much of His ministry to the church has disappeared. Counterfeit manifestations have caused much confusion, fear, distrust and divisiveness.

Replacement of the Lord's Leaders with Worldly Alternatives.

The Lord's gift to the church of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers, has been replaced by professional clergymen. The authority of elders as overseers of the local church has been substituted by the headship of a denominational minister.

An Attack on Male Leadership

The authority of the husband as head of the family, as well as male leadership in the church, have both been eroded by the acceptance of worldly claims of equal rights for women.

The Intrusion of Humanism.

The spirit of antichrist has conditioned all of mankind through the process of buying and selling, in order that they might be given the 'mark' of humanistic independence from God. Those things initiated by man, such as institutions, programs, customs, doctrines, etc, have taken precedence over the things of God. Humanistic philosophy has also penetrated the church in many areas. For example, the Faith Movement's "you are gods," prosperity teaching, positive confession, visualization, etc. An idolatrous seeking after spiritual experiences and power, has opened the door to false miracles and lying signs and wonders. A pragmatic approach of 'if it works it must be right,' has replaced doctrinal integrity.

Lawlessness in the Church.

Those who have been contaminated by "the image of the beast" (who is "the lawless one"), have embraced the lawless works of the flesh. They have replaced waiting on the Lord and submission to His initiation of ministry, with their own restless and impatient zeal to perform 'good works.'

DISCLOSURE—JUDGMENT—REPENTANCE---RESTORATION

Disclosure must precede judgment. Prior to His judgment falling, God has always warned His people through the voice of His prophets. **"Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets."** (Amos 3:7). The end-time judgment of the church is no exception. Even now the ministry of the prophet is being restored, and the apostasies that have plagued the church are beginning to be exposed.

The **"two witnesses,"** who prophesied **"clothed in sackcloth"** and whose **"dead bodies"** lay **"in the street of the great city,"** are now receiving the **"breath of life from God"** and standing **"on their feet."** (Rev 11:3, 8, 11).

To those who heed the warning to, **"Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues,"** God has promised that He **"will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel."** (Rev 18:4 & Joel 3:16).

But those who harden their hearts in rebellion will bear the full brunt of the judgmental plagues falling on the church. God's desire is that all may repent, either through heeding the warning, or through facing hard judgment. Without repentance, and the refining and preparation of an obedient remnant, there can be no restoration of the church.

SECTION 6

FROM JUDGMENT TO RESTORATION

Chapter 13

JUDGMENT BEFORE RESTORATION

KEY BIBLE READING

"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?" [1 Peter 4:17].

CLEANSED—PURGED---SANCTIFIED

Shortly after Pentecost, Peter inferred that the prophecies of the **"restoration of all things"** that had been **"spoken by the mouth of all [God's] holy prophets,"** would have their fulfilment in the church (i.e. amongst those who repented and had their sins **"blotted out"**). Paul confirms Peter's understanding of this in his own letter to the Ephesians, telling them that the Lord would present to Himself a bride, **"holy and without blemish."**

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, So that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, that He might present the church to Himself in glorious splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such things [that she might be holy and faultless]." (Eph 5:25-27 Amplified Bible).

The church has already been cleansed. Each Christian is made clean at conversion by their acceptance of the word of the gospel. That is why Christ could say to His disciples, **"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you."** (John 15:3).

Having already cleansed the church, Jesus will now **"sanctify her,"** to make her **"holy and without blemish,"** before He returns to claim her as His bride. Through salvation, the church is already sanctified, or 'set apart' to God. This is confirmed in the manner in which Paul addresses the Corinthian church. **"To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus..."** (1 Cor 1:2).

But the Ephesians reading speaks of a further work—one of purification, which involves being separated from the world and the flesh. In this respect Paul once prayed, **"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely..."** (1 Thess 5:23).

In order to accomplish this, the Lord must expel the corruption from the church's midst, just as He cleansed the Temple in Jerusalem by casting out the money-changers. He will purge out the apostasy and corruption of flesh and worldiness **"by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning...And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion, and he who remains in Jerusalem will be called holy.."** (Isa 4:4, 3). The glory of the Lord will not return to the church until after she has been completely sanctified by His purification of her.

JUDGMENT—REFINEMENT--RESTORATION

As well as speaking about the eventual restoration of the church, **"all of [God's] holy prophets"** warn of His children facing prior judgments and refining as a *preparation* for that

restoration. According to the prophets, refinement of the church is an essential part of the restoration process. For example, Malachi warns of a future purging judgment to purify the house of God.

"Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,' says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; he will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the LORD, as in the days of old, as in former years." (Mal 3:1-4).

Although this prophecy seems to be addressed to **"Judah"** and **"Jerusalem,"** we should not limit its application to physical Israel. The time span of the prophecy reaches from, **"I will send My messenger,"** through to **"the Lord...will suddenly come to His temple."**

The messenger who **"will prepare the way before"** the Lord, is a clear reference to the prophetic spirit of Elijah, which rested on John the Baptist. It was John the Baptist who prepared the way for the Lord's first coming, when Christ came as **"...the Messenger of the covenant.."**

However, as we have already seen, the same prophetic spirit of Elijah will return to prepare the way for the Lord's second coming. And this time Christ will come as **"a refiner's fire...as a refiner and a purifier of silver."** He **"will purify the sons of Levi,** [He has **"made us kings and priests unto God"** Rev 1:6 KJV] **and purge them as gold and silver..."**

Although the prophecy has an obvious application to the Lord's first coming, when the church was cleansed **"with the washing of water by the word,"** there remains a more complete fulfillment of it at the close of the age. Malachi himself confirms the second appearance of the prophetic spirit of Elijah in the fourth chapter of his book. But this time the spirit of prophecy is preparing the way of the Lord when He comes again to restore all things. **"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD."** (Mal 4:5). It is at this time that He will **"come [in]to His temple [i.e. not visibly],"** and **"sit as a refiner and a purifier."**

JUDGMENTS OUTLINED BY ISAIAH

The second to the fifth chapters of Isaiah outline a series of judgments which are applicable to both Israel and the church. The prophet's vision stretches from the conditions and events of his own time, to those that will materialise at the close of the age. However the main thrust of the prophecy relates to **"the latter days."**

Chapter 2 commences with the statement, **"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days** [or literally 'the latter end of days']..." The phrase **"in that day"** is then interspersed among the judgments prophesied throughout the next four chapters (Isa 2:11, 2:17, 2:20, 3:07, 3:18, 4:01, 4:02, and 5:30.) In the twelfth verse of Chapter 2, **"that day"** is called **"the day of the LORD of hosts,"** with the eleventh and seventeenth verses declaring that **"the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day."** And in the nineteenth and twenty-first verses of Chapter 2, it is associated with the final refining work of the Lord, **"when He arises to shake the earth mightily".**

Even though the prophet Isaiah's revelation is introduced by the statement, **"The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem,"** we should not limit its interpretation to the tribe of Judah, or to physical Jerusalem. In this context Judah and Jerusalem are symbolic references to the church.

We will now use the prophecies from these four chapters of Isaiah as a framework for further study of the judgments and restoration which are predicted to take place **"in the latter days."**

THE NATURE OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS

A GIGANTIC SHAKING

In general terms, the judgments which are to fall on the church, and subsequently the whole world, are likened to a gigantic shaking. This shaking is prophesied to occur at the close of the age, and its purpose is to bring about **"the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made [by man], that the things which cannot be shaken [i.e. the work of the Holy Spirit] may remain."** (Heb 12:27).

All the ministries that have been initiated by man will have to face God's judgmental shaking. All that is proud, self-seeking, and self-exalting, will be bowed down. All that gives glory to man rather than God will be abased. All institutions, organizations, or ministries, which do not have their foundations and their strength in the Lord, will fall prey to the shaking. All the workings of the church will be tested by the the Lord's shaking, and only that which is of Him will remain intact.

"The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, upon everything lifted up-- and it shall be brought low-- ...They [exalted men] shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth [i.e. they will disappear from the public eye], from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily." (Isa 2:11-12, 19).

The REMOVAL of the HEDGE of PROTECTION

In the story of Job, Satan protested to God, **"Have You not made a hedge [of protection] around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side?"** (Job 1:10). Such is the normal care and protection afforded by God to all His children. But as part of the gigantic shaking, this hedge of protection will be removed from the church.

In Isaiah's prophecy in Chapter 5, God likens Judah and Jerusalem (or the church) to a well cared for vineyard. He asks, **"What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge [of protection], and it shall be burned [i.e. face judgment]; and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it."** (Isa 5:4-6).

When the hedge of protection surrounding the church is taken away, God's providential care and covering will have been removed. The exposed church will then be subject to attack from outside forces, and even from enemies within its own ranks. **"[B]riars and thorns,"** or agents of deceit and deception, will spring up within its midst. Its cherished walls of tradition and doctrine will **"break down"** and all the proud outward show will be **"trampled down."** The pleasant rain of spiritual light and truth will be withdrawn, and the church will be confounded in a climate of spiritual darkness.

It is only in this way that the spirit of antichrist can be fully exposed. **"For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains [the Holy Spirit] will do so until He is taken out of the way [so removing the hedge of protection]. And then the lawless one will be revealed..."** (2 Thess 2:7-8). When the Holy Spirit's restraining hand is taken away, the darkness

and deception forged by the spirit of antichrist will become so obvious that all will be able to recognise it. It is in these circumstances that people will be challenged to repent, turning away from the darkness of Antichrist and towards the light of truth.

GOD'S GREAT ARMY

Who are the agents used by God to cause such devastation? In his description of the judgments to take place during **"the day of the LORD,"** the prophet Joel uses the analogy of a locust plague wreaking destruction on the land of Israel. These locusts are identical to the demon spirits of Revelation 9:3-11, loosed from the bottomless pit to harass **"those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads** [and are therefore not truly separated to Him]."

Joel evokes a startling picture of the horrific nature of their attack with highly symbolic language; **"A fire devours before them, and behind them a fire burns...Surely nothing shall escape them...Before them the people writhe in pain; All faces are drained of color...The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness."** (Joel 2:3, 6, 10).

Far from being out of God's will, these tormenting invaders are directly referred to by God as, **"...My great army which I sent among you...The LORD gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; who can endure it?"** (Joel 2:25 and 11).

By removing the hedge of protection, God allows His idolatrous children to become oppressed by the spirits that have always been behind those things which have obsessed them. Now without restraint, **"They [the demon spirits] run to and fro in the city, they run on the wall; they climb into the houses, they enter at the windows like a thief."** (Joel 2:9).

SOME SPECIFIC JUDGEMENTS

The JUDGMENT of LEADERS

God has consistently held leaders accountable for the spiritual state of their people. Consequently it is the leaders who will be the first to encounter the judgment that is to fall on the church.

The Book of Isaiah declares that it is the leaders who have led the people into error, and then pronounces God's coming judgment upon them. **"'As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths.'** The LORD stands up to plead, and stands to judge the people. **The LORD will enter into judgment with the elders of His people and His princes:** 'For you have eaten up the vineyard; the plunder of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing My people and grinding the faces of the poor?' says the Lord GOD of hosts.'" (Isa 3:12-15).

In the eighth and ninth chapters of Ezekiel, the prophet describes how the Lord showed him a vision of the apostasy committed by the leaders who were in charge of God's sanctuary. Then the Lord showed Ezekiel how He would execute judgment on the city of Jerusalem. Before judgment began, those who had sighed and groaned over the spiritual state of Jerusalem, were sealed with a mark on their foreheads. The effect of this mark was to set apart those who received it from the impending judgment.

This prophecy has its counterpart in the Book of Revelation, where the Lord's faithful are likewise 'sealed' on their foreheads, and so set apart from the ensuing judgments. We may therefore

assume, that whilst there has already been partial fulfillments of this prophecy in the various historical onslaughts on the physical city of Jerusalem, there still remains a final and complete fulfillment--in the judgment of the church at the close of the age.

In Ezekiel's prophecy, after sealing the righteous the Lord commands, **"Go after him through the city and kill [literally 'strike']; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay [or cast down] old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary.' So they began with the elders who were before the temple."** (Ezek 9:5-6).

The people here are symbolic, and the language used is figurative. Nevertheless the prophecy depicts a severe judgment falling on Jerusalem, and later the church, to bring about the removal of every trace of apostasy. The principle is clear. God's judgment starts with the church, and it will begin with the elders or leaders of the church.

Among the leaders, those who are prophets are singled out for particular condemnation. The main task of the prophet is to be the Lord's faithful instrument, presenting uncompromising truth to turn the people from their wayward paths. When the prophetic office is functioning properly, the Lord's knowledge for the peoples' circumstances (as delivered by His prophets), becomes an effective wall of protection from the powers of darkness.

In rebuking the false prophets of his day, Ezekiel said, **"You have not gone up into the gaps to build a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on the day of the LORD."** (Ezek 13:5). Instead, they **"prophes[ied] out of their own heart,"** and **"follow[ed] their own spirit."** (Ezek 13:2-3). Instead of presenting uncompromising truth, they prophesied out of their own hearts. They spoke words that they knew would be accepted. They created false walls of peace and hope instead of warning of impending judgment. Because of their infidelity, Ezekiel declared God's judgment of them.

"Because, indeed, because they have seduced My people, saying, 'Peace!' when there is no peace--and one builds a boundary wall, and they plaster it with untempered mortar [or whitewash]--say to those who plaster it with untempered mortar, that it will fall...I will break down the wall you have plastered with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation will be uncovered; it will fall, and you shall be consumed in the midst of it. Then you shall know that I am the LORD." (Ezek 13:10-11, 14).

We are reminded that our spiritual identity and history have their roots in the Old Testament. We are spiritual Israel, and from a spiritual point of view, Israel's history is our history. With this in mind, we must be prepared to see applications which are relevant to us in these prophetic warnings to Israel.

In many ways, the modern church faces the same dilemma as Israel. The majority of 'prophets' in 'charismatic' churches prophesy words of encouragement, rather than words of correction. They say **"Peace, peace! when there is no peace."** (Jer 6:14 & 8:11). They do not turn people away from their sin. Instead they **"prophesy out of their own heart[s],"** things that they know will meet with ready approval. They speak of the power of the Spirit falling, of unparalleled growth, of worldwide acclaim, and of how much God is pleased with their efforts.

Prophets in general have prophesied that the church will not have to face tribulation. Instead they say she will be conveniently 'raptured away' before judgment falls. Prophecies of judgment, suffering, and refinement, are dismissed as negative. On the other hand, prophecies of **"the latter rain"** glory are loudly proclaimed. Few are the voices that cry "Repent!", or, "The Lord's judgment

is at hand." As a consequence, liberality replaces morality and holiness, and unqualified 'unity' replaces separation from apostasy.

Hosea's warning is all too relevant: **"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."** (Hosea 4:6). In God's eyes, church leaders are held accountable. Even now His judgment is falling. Leaders and their ministries who previously enjoyed worldwide acclaim, are now having their false foundations exposed. **"The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has executed and performed the intents of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly."** (Jer 23:20).

The REMOVAL of the STOCK and the STORE

An important element of the restoration process is the removal from the church of all those worldly things that have captivated us in the past. Isaiah warns, **"For behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stock and the store, the whole supply of bread and the whole supply of water; the mighty man and the man of war, the judge and the prophet, and the diviner and the elder; the captain of fifty and the honorable man, the counselor and the skillful artisan, and the expert enchanter."** (Isa 3:1-3).

"Stock" and **"store"** are translated **"stay"** and **"staff"** in the King James Version. **"Stay"** and **"staff"** are the masculine and feminine forms of the one Hebrew word for all kinds of support. Removing the stay and the staff does not mean the complete removal of the absolute essentials to life. But it does mean the removal of all those supports or props that people turn to and depend on for security, instead of being dependant on God.

The removal of **"the stock and the store"** foreshadows a significant collapse of the international economy, exposing mankind's misguided reliance on 'financial security.' This new state of affairs will be in direct contrast to that which is portrayed by Isaiah. **"Their land is also full of silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures..."** (2:7).

Life after the removal of all but the basic necessities of life, is dramatically portrayed by the vision of the black horse in Revelation. **"So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.'"** (Rev 6:5-6). **"A quart of wheat...and three quarts of barley..."** do not speak of starvation, but reduction to the basic needs supporting life. In order to break Antichrist's control over us, God will remove all the non essential things that have cluttered our lives and captivated our hearts.

The reading from Isaiah 3 goes beyond God's judgment of luxuries and unnecessary items of life. It also includes His judgment on a number of other props and supports that man has gathered around himself. In this category are all the notable figures in society to whom man turns for help, rather than relying on God.

"the mighty man," World leaders will be unable and unwilling to lead the world out of its devastation. "When a man takes hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying, 'You have clothing [or 'authority']; you be our ruler, and let these ruins be under your power,' in that day he will protest, saying, 'I cannot cure your ills, for in my house is neither food nor clothing [i.e. 'neither knowledge nor authority']; do not make me a ruler of the people.'" (Isa 3:6-7).

"the man of war" Reliance on military strength will prove futile.

"the judge" The judicial system will prove unreliable in its judgments.

"the prophet" Highly acclaimed spiritual prophets will be exposed as false.

"the diviner" Occultist spirit guides, tarot cards, astrology charts etc. will all fail.

"the elder" Not biblical 'elders,' but trusted older persons to whom people go to for advice. They too will be as confused and perplexed as everyone else.

"the captain of fifty" Symbolizing officialdom or bureaucracy. The world's 'managers' will be unable to provide a way to overcome the dilemmas facing it.

"the honorable man" The wisdom and skills of those who are exalted and held in high esteem will amount to nothing.

"the counselor" Consultants will have no answers. Their fields of expertise will not be appropriate.

"the skillful artisan" Those internationally acclaimed entertainers and artists who are idolized by the world will prove to be empty vessels.

"the expert enchanter" The skilled orator. Eloquence, or the ability to speak on any topic, will also be seen to be useless.

Turning to the world's provision, or to the empty promises of the New Age Movement, will prove to be fruitless. In general terms, the cutting off of **"the stay and the staff"** represents the removal of all those things which turn man away from trusting in God as **"Jehovah Jireh,"** (or '*He who provides*'). It is the removal of all the man-made supports, so that man is humbled, and his heart is turned back to God in repentance.

JUDGMENT of HEADSTRONG WOMEN

Directly after pronouncing judgment on the leaders of His people, the Lord singles out militant feminists for special condemnation and judgment. **"Moreover the LORD says: 'Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with outstretched necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, making a jingling with their feet, therefore the Lord will strike with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will uncover their secret parts.'"** (Isa 3:16-17).

The women to whom this prophecy is addressed, are those who have rebelled against submission to God's delegated authorities. The **"daughters of Zion"** are described as rebellious and wanton. The judgment pronounced on them is precise: **"...the LORD will strike with a scab the crown of the head [or positions of false authority] of the daughters of Zion.."**

Figurative language is then used to describe their debasement. The manner of their humiliation will be that **"the Lord will uncover their secret parts,"** which is a reference to their self centredness and their hidden sin. In other words, He will expose their true motives, and in doing so will also "uncover" the real spiritual entity behind the 'Women's Movement'—the spirit of antichrist.

God's consistent and uncompromising judgment on women who seize illegitimate authority to themselves, is repeated in Jesus' letter to the church at Thyatira. The Lord pronounces judgment on **"that woman Jezebel,"** who in reality exemplifies the power of witchcraft. In the Old Testament account, Queen Jezebel usurped her husband King Ahab's authority when, **"...she wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters.."** (1 Kings 21:8).

In the New Testament account, the symbolic "**Jezebel**" of Thyatira is to Christ and His church, what King Ahab's wife Jezebel was to him and the nation Israel. She steals power that rightfully belongs to someone else, and then uses it to mislead and manipulate the people. So the Lord outlines in figurative language the judgment to be meted out--not only to her, but to all those who have submitted to her flaunting of false authority.

"Nevertheless [says the Lord,] I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and beguile My servants to commit sexual immorality [spiritual apostasy] and to eat things sacrificed to idols [idolatry]. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death. And all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the mind and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works." (Rev 2:20-23).

The covenant relationship between God and His Old Testament people was regarded as a marriage. Any transgression against this covenant was therefore called harlotry, fornication, or adultery. Christ uses the same symbolic language to condemn the spirit of Jezebel—a spirit which rebelliously appropriates false authority in the church and refuses to submit to the proper authorities who are designated by God. And all those who have submitted to her or accepted her will be **"cast...into great tribulation..."**

In the passage from Isaiah concerning God's judgment of **"the daughters of Zion,"** a second area is dealt with. This relates to their preoccupation with the elements of feminine "finery." Twenty one items are listed for judgment, symbolizing the cosmetic and superficial nature of outward adornment. No matter how attractive these elements may appear to be, they make a shabby substitute for **"...the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God."** (1 Pet 3:4).

The statement of God's judgment in this area begins, **"In that day the LORD will take away the finery..."** The results of this specific judgment are then represented by a number of striking contrasts: "And so it shall be:

Instead of a sweet smell there will be a stench [of exposed sin]; Instead of a sash, a rope [of servitude]; Instead of well-set hair, baldness [or debasement]; Instead of a rich robe, a girding of sackcloth [for mourning]; and branding instead of beauty... Her gates [or positions of leadership] shall lament and mourn, and she being desolate shall sit on the ground [in humility]." (Isa 3:24-26).

THE CULMINATION OF THE JUDGMENT OF THE CHURCH

Since **"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of [God's] throne,"** it is inevitable that apostasy in the church will be punished. The church must be judged, even before the rest of the world is judged. But whereas the judgment of those who have rejected God will lead to their damnation, the judgment of those in the church is directed to their refinement and sanctification.

In the twelfth and final chapter of the Book of Daniel, the prophet foretells of **"...a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time."** (12:1b). This prophecy is applicable to the tribulation of the Jewish nation at the hands of the Romans, but it also has a further fulfillment in the tribulation of the church at the end of the age. Thankfully this proclamation of tribulation contains a sure promise of deliverance for God's faithful children. **"And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book."** (12:1c).

In the vision Daniel saw, the question was asked, **"How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?"** (Dan 12:6). The answer given was, **"that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time [i.e. three and a half years or the symbolic period for tribulation]; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished."** (Dan 12:7).

The prophet Daniel is telling us something very significant here. He is saying that the shattering of the natural or soulish power of **"the holy people"** (or carnal Christians), will mark the end of judgment. That is to say that when the power of flesh is finally broken, then judgment will cease and men will turn back in repentance to the Lord. **"Many shall be purified, made white, and refined.."** (Dan 12:10).

Daniel concludes, **"Blessed, happy, fortunate, spiritually prosperous, and to be envied is he who waits expectantly and earnestly--who endures without wavering beyond the period of tribulation--"** (Dan 12:11 Amp Bib). He who **"endures"** will reap the rewards associated with restoration.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In the biblical picture of God's judgments **"in the latter days,"** it is the church that is to be judged first. This is so that she may be refined and sanctified, prepared as a bride for the return of her husband.

Judgment of the church will be precipitated by the removal of God's hedge of protection, and a gigantic shaking of all institutions will follow to test the authenticity of their foundations. Only those things founded in the Lord will survive.

Specific aspects of God's judgment will be directed towards church leaders and militant women, as well as the breaking of Antichrist's control over mankind by the removal of the stock and the store.

These purging judgments will continue until the power of flesh is broken, and the church turns in repentance to enthrone Jesus Christ as her Head.

THE FINAL CONFLICT

THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON

The ADVERSARIES

Armageddon is the Greek name for the Mountain of Megiddo, a strategic Old Testament battle site where Israel fought many of her enemies. Because of its history, Armageddon became a symbol for the last great conclusive battle between God and the forces of Satan. This final battle is prophetically depicted in Chapters 16 and 20 of Revelation.

"Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon [Satan], out of the mouth of the beast [Antichrist], and out of the mouth of the false prophet [the spirit of antichrist]. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. '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.' And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon." (Rev 16:12-16).

"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil [Satan], who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast [Antichrist] and the false prophet [the spirit of antichrist] are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." (Rev 20:7-10).

Whereas the Old Testament battles were physical in nature, the end time battle of Armageddon is a spiritual battle between Antichrist and the False Prophet, and Jesus Christ and His saints. It is a battle between light and darkness--the light of Jesus Christ against the darkness and deceptions of Antichrist. At stake are the souls of every individual person.

In the Great Tribulation of the Jews, the physical city of Jerusalem was surrounded and besieged by an invading Roman army under the command of Titus. Similarly at the end of the age, spiritual Jerusalem, which is the Church, will be besieged by her spiritual foes. She will be surrounded and attacked by the "spirits of demons," which will use those people who are already held in bondage by the deceptions of Antichrist. Those listed below are only a few of her enemies.

Those INSIDE the CHURCH

The true church has already been infiltrated, just like the field in Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares. The tares are those in the worldly church who have rejected the Spirit of Truth, and have been caught up in the deceptions of Antichrist. Although they are still in the midst of the wheat, or true believers, they have become a prey for every foul spirit of Satan. **"And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, 'Babylon [the 'harlot' or apostate church] the great is fallen, is fallen,**

and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!" (Rev 18:2).

In this following reading, the apostle Paul describes the tares in the end-time church. **"For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power."** (2 Tim 3:2-5).

The church is flooded with false ministries, false doctrines, and heresies--E.g. the false ecumenism that promotes a universal church under the power of Rome. **"Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many."** (Matt 24:11).

Lawlessness abounds and many are disillusioned as a result. **"And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold."** (Matt 24:12).

The tide of humanism engulfs the church, promoting New Age philosophies and practices. These false authorities and worldly traditions undermine the headship of Christ.

Deceiving spirits incite pseudo-spiritual experiences with accompanying lying signs and wonders.

Those OUTSIDE the CHURCH

Constant enticement by the spirits of the world draws people into the lustful pursuit of material wealth and luxury, licentiousness and sexual perversion, drunkenness and drug abuse, and other uninhibited worldly 'pleasures.'

Occultist practice becomes more prevalent and gains 'respectability.' Eastern religions gain increasing acceptance as a 'valid' approach to God. The growing number of competing sects creates a confusing religious climate.

HE WHO RESTRAINS IS TAKEN AWAY

In our first reading from Revelation (16:12-16), the River Euphrates was dried up to make way for the kings from the east. In a historical sense, the River Euphrates formed a natural barrier which separated Israel from her traditional enemies to the north east. In the context of this prophecy the language is used in a figurative way, and refers to the removal of the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit. **"For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains [the Holy Spirit] will do so until He is taken out of the way."** [2 Thess 2:7].

The following statement from the second Revelation reading (20:7-10), is also associated with this analogy: **"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations..."** The "thousand years" is the period of the church age, during which time Satan's power to deceive the nations has been bound, or limited, by the saints declaration of the truth of the gospel.

The removal of God's restraining barrier in these two readings, corresponds with the opening of the pit in Revelation 9:1-11, when hordes of deceiving demon spirits are released to torment mankind; as well as the 'death of the two witnesses' in Revelation 11:7-10, when the voice of prophecy is silenced.

When **"He who now restrains...is taken out of the way,"** the flood of spiritual darkness will renew Satan's power to accuse the nations. The release of so much Satanic activity may not sit comfortably with our human understanding of a loving God. However it is absolutely necessary to remove all the restraints on Antichrist's activities, so that he and his corrupt workings can be brought out into the open and fully exposed. This is **"...the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."** (Rev 3:10).

In both of the bible readings at the start of this chapter, a flood of deceit and deception issue forth from spirits of Satan--initiating lying wonders and heretical doctrines which directly oppose **"the testimony of Jesus Christ."**(Rev 12:17).

Those who have loved darkness rather than the light of truth, will be drawn further into the darkness of Antichrist's kingdom. The prophet Isaiah confirms that this will include much of the world's population when he says, **"For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people..."** (Isa 60:2).

Others who have been deceived by the subtlety of Antichrist's counterfeits, will repent as the extent of his deceptions become apparent to them.

THE CHURCH WILL SUFFER PRIVATION

The 'restoration' prophet Zechariah provides us with another perspective on this last great conflict. So horrendous is the shaking of the church, and so devastating is its effect on nominal Christians, that not all will survive. Again, the language used in the prophecy is figurative: **"Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst [i.e. your wealth will become the plunder or booty of others]. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem [who is the church]; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city."** (Zech 14:1-2).

The picture presented here is one of calamitous ruin. The church is overtaken by arduous trial and hardship. The nations, or all those who are under Satan's controlling influence, are arrayed against Jerusalem, or the church.

When **"the stock and the store"** is removed from worldly institutions they go into bankruptcy. Because the church has been run like any other worldly business, it too is portrayed as facing bankruptcy. Its spoil, or its accumulated wealth, is divided amongst its creditors. Under the weight of financial insolvency, its impressive organisational structure collapses. Financial ruin is followed by severe privation for those whose livelihoods were dependant on these worldly institutions.

Rebellious women, left 'uncovered' by their lack of submission to Christ's authority, are subjected to satanic attack. Half of the church (i.e. nominal Christians or those not 'grounded' in their faith), fall prey to doubt and disillusionment and are taken captive by darkness and deception.

When contemplating such a time, we are to remember the Lord's exhortation to the saints who are facing the persecution of the Beast, or Antichrist. **"If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and faith of the saints."** (Rev 13:9-10).

The wicked must bear the fruit of their wickedness. On the other hand, the saints are called to **"patience"** and **"faith."** The Greek word 'hupomone' which is translated here as **"patience,"** has within its meaning the twin elements of perseverance and endurance. Those who endure, or

persevere, in the faith of the Lord will be "[b]lessed, happy, fortunate, [and] **spiritually prosperous**" in "**...the times of restoration of all things..**" (Dan 12:11 Amp & Acts 3:21).

ANTICHRIST'S CONTROL OVER MAN Is BROKEN

In this time of utter privation and apparent defeat, Antichrist is to be dealt a deadly blow. With the collapse of the world's economy, all that human endeavour devoted to accumulating wealth and possessions will be shown to have accomplished nothing. Worldly luxuries and pleasures will have been stripped away. And famous figures and international institutions that people once turned to will prove empty vessels, offering no wisdom or comfort.

In this climate, Antichrist's weapon of using the process of buying and selling to hold mankind in bondage, will no longer have any force. Formerly, "**...the kings of earth...and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.**" (Rev17:2). But now Antichrist's control over mankind is cut off.

People who were formerly engrossed in 'getting' and 'achieving,' are now confronted with the realisation that their lives to this point have been shallow and empty. For the very first time their hearts are opened to receive the path of the Lord Jesus Christ as an attainable as well as desirable alternative.

A FAITHFUL REMNANT

In what seems to be a picture of hopelessly irretrievable devastation, the Lord has in fact created the perfect climate for restoration. Those who were previously captivated by the pursuit of worldly goods and pleasures, are now be ready to turn to Him in repentance. It is a climate in which untold numbers of lost souls will be brought into the Lord's kingdom.

The task of leading these people back to the Lord, and restoring His church, is entrusted to a prepared and faithful remnant. Note that Zechariah's prophecy said, "**Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city.**" (14:2).

Throughout Israel's history, and even in the midst of her backsliding and apostasy, there has always been a prepared and faithful remnant. It was these remnants that were entrusted with the task of carrying out God's purposes during these otherwise faithless times. It should therefore be no surprise that God has been preparing a faithful remnant for end time--a restoration army--which will act as the Lord's spiritual warriors in overthrowing the kingdom of Antichrist and restoring the church.

God's restoration army must be well prepared. Even now there are many in readiness. They are as "**polished shaft[s]...in His quiver...**" (Is 49:2). No strangers to privation and suffering, they have already submitted to the 'path of the cross' and experienced the refining discipline of the Holy Spirit. They have been taught to honour the authority and headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, and their pride and fleshly zeal has been stripped away. They have been taught to wait on the Lord, and to follow the leadings of the Holy Spirit.

When the Lord's glory re-enters the church, it will not accommodate the flesh. It will rest upon His prepared and refined remnant

End time prophets have a key role in this restoration army. The prophetic teaching ministry of "**the two witnesses**" is currently being restored to the church. God is revealing His purposes to these specially prepared vessels, who will ultimately have the responsibility of preparing the way for the destruction of the works of Antichrist, and the restoration of Christ's church.

THE LORD WILL ENTER THE CONFLICT

In continuing with Zechariah's prophecy, we find that after the initial devastation of the church, the Lord will intervene in the conflict. **"Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east."** (Zech 14:3-4).

This intervention by the Lord into the affairs of the church in its time of trouble, should not to be confused with His visible second coming. At that time, **"...the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God...Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."** (1 Thess 4:16-17).

That visible advent will be so dramatic and spectacular, that no one will be able to miss it. Jesus said, **"For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the [second] coming of the Son of Man be."** (Matt 24:27).

His FEET Will STAND On The MOUNT of OLIVES

By comparison, Zechariah's account of the Lord's intervention into the affairs of the church is described in the following terms. **"And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south."** Zech 14:3-4

The statement, **"...His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,"** should not be interpreted as literally descriptive of His physical appearance. Rather it is consistent with the same type of figurative language that is used in the rest of the chapter. Elsewhere in the bible, God 'standing', 'walking', or 'treading' in circumstances on the earth, speaks of His invisible presence as He intervenes to establish His will.

We have an example of this in the case of God 'standing' on the rock of Horeb. **"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.'** And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel." (Ex 17:5-6).

We have a similar example in Micah, where figurative language is used to describe how God will intervene in judgment. **"For behold, the LORD is coming out of His place; He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth. The mountains will melt under him, and the valleys will split like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place. All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel."** (Mic 1:3-5).

And when the prophet Ezekiel was describing the departure of the Lord's glory from the temple, or the church, he wrote, **"And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which is on the east side of the city [ie the Mount of Olives]."** (Ezek 11:23).

So when Zechariah says **"...His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,"** he really means that the Lord will 'intervene' in the circumstances, by coming to the aid of His beleaguered church. His 'intervention' will expose and destroy the works of Antichrist, and re-establish His glory in the church.

This same event is described by Ezekiel in similar terms: **"And the glory of the LORD came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east [i.e. from the direction of the Mount of Olives]...And He said to me, 'Son of man, this is the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever."** (Ezek 43:4, 7).

SEPARATION Of The WORKS Of CHRIST From The WORKS Of ANTICHRIST

In describing the nature of the Lord's intervention, Zechariah goes onto declare that **"...the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south."** (Zech 14:4). The Mount of Olives, which separates Jerusalem from the wilderness to the east, is figuratively split in two. One half is moved to the north, and the other to the south, leaving a wide valley between them. One end of the valley leads to Jerusalem, while the other leads to the eastern wilderness.

In a geographical sense, the northern half of the mountain is portrayed as moving towards the pagan nations who have been traditionally hostile to Judah, such as the Babylonian Empire. Babylon is a symbol of the worldly nations and the false church—the kingdom of Antichrist. In contrast, the southern half is moved towards Judah, which is a type of the true church of Christ.

The two mountains that are thus formed, represent on the one hand the manifest works of Christ, and on the other the manifest works of Antichrist. Their separation into two separately identifiable mountains, indicates that the Lord will clearly distinguish the works of Antichrist from the true works of Christ.

The CHURCH Will Be A SAFE HAVEN

Zechariah's prophecy continues with a vivid account of the importance of the valley that separates the two mountains. The significance of this is brought out more clearly in "Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible."

"And ye have fled to the valley of My mountains, For join doth the valley of the mountains to Azal, And ye have fled as ye fled before the shaking, In the days of Uzziah king of Judah, And come in hath Jehovah my God, All holy ones are with Thee." (Zech 14:5).

Some commentators have suggested that this **"very large valley"** is an escape route or tunnel for people fleeing from Jerusalem. But for that to be true Jerusalem, or the church, This is not a picture of people fleeing out of the church, but rather of God providing a way for people to flee back in to the sanctuary of the Lord's presence. The text says that the valley leads to **"Azal,"** which is a position adjacent to the walls of Jerusalem. Furthermore, Dr Young's translation says, **"...come in hath Jehovah my God,"** and **"All holy ones [or saints] are with Thee."**

The Lord will enter His church as a refiner and purifier. He will unmask the works of Antichrist, and purge out the apostasy, so that it will be fit for His glory to remain. Subsequently there will be a huge harvest of souls as countless thousands, even from the wilderness of the nations, flee from God's judgmental wrath into the church.

THE BATTLE IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH

We have observed in Zechariah 14 that when the presence of the Lord enters the church, **"[t]hen the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations,"** or all those who oppose Him. This battle will be fought on two fronts, one on earth, and the other in heaven. Note that the

following passage from the Book of Revelation mentions both **"...the armies of heaven..."** and **"...the kings of the earth, and their armies.."**

"Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS...And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse..." (Rev 19:11-16, 19-21).

In the battle in the heavens, the antagonists are Jesus Christ and His angels, and Antichrist and the dark powers of Satan supporting him. In the battle on earth the saints, **"...and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful,"** are opposed by those under the power of Antichrist. The Lord directs His army on earth, supplying them with the weapons they need to overcome the opposing spiritual darkness. These weapons are the blood of the Lamb, the word of God, and the sharp sword of the Spirit of truth that proceeds from His mouth.

The outcome of the warfare in the heavens is dependent upon the progress of the conflict on earth. As the Lord's army wields the weapons of light and truth on earth, Antichrist's hold over mankind becomes weaker and weaker, and his spiritual authority in the heavens is therefore diminished. Finally, **"...the beast [Antichrist] was captured, and with him the false prophet [the spirit of antichrist]...These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone."**

As commander of His restoration army, the Lord will unmask and destroy the works of Antichrist. **"And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming."** (2 Thess 2:8). Jesus Christ will be, **"KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."**

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Armageddon, the last climactic battle between Christ and Antichrist, is a spiritual battle between the darkness and deceptions of Antichrist, and the light and truth of Jesus Christ.

God will deliberately remove His restraints on Antichrist's activities, so that they are exposed and brought out into the open for all to see. When the Lord enters the conflict, His servants will present light and truth. The light of Jesus Christ and the darkness of Antichrist will be clearly contrasted.

As Christ's servants on earth wield the sword of spiritual truth, Antichrist's legal authority in heaven is stripped away, and he and the spirit of antichrist are captured and cast into the lake of fire.

During the progress of this battle, the Lord will provide a pathway for individual Christians to flee into the cleansed and restored church--into His sanctuary of perfect rest and the abiding presence of their Lord.

RESTORATION

ANTICHRIST DEFEATED

In previous chapters we have shown that the crux of restoration is in returning to the pattern of the early New Testament church, and that a key part of this process is the disclosure of all apostasy introduced into the church by the spirit of Antichrist. Once the falseness in the church's midst has been exposed, the obvious next step will be to cleanse her from all error--all heresy, all false teachings and false doctrines, all false authority, and all false organisations and structures.

The thirty-ninth chapter of the Book of Ezekiel presents us with a figurative account of this cleansing process. But first we will consider the prophet's account of Antichrist's defeat in the preceding chapter.

EZEKIEL Chapter 38

Both Ezekiel 38 and 39 provide a figurative portrayal of the last great battle between Antichrist and his confederacy, and Jesus Christ and His church. Ezekiel 38:2, 5, 6, list the church's antagonists as **"...Gog, of the land of Magog," together with "Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya...Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops--many people..."**

Gog's original kingdom was Magog, but then he acquired Meshech and Tubal, and so his title became **"...Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal..."** This barbaric horde was apparently well known in Ezekiel's time, and it subsequently became a biblical type of the great anti-Christian confederacy that would assault the true church at the close of the age.

In Revelation 20:8, we are told that Satan **"...will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea."** The **"nations"** mentioned here are more than those of Gog's original confederacy. The phrases **"...which are in the four corners of the earth..."** and **"...whose number is as the sand of the sea..."** are used symbolically, to indicate the multi-directional and many pronged attack on the church.

Again we stress that this end-time conflict is a spiritual battle between Christ and Antichrist. We should not expect to see the physical armies of the world surrounding all the members of the true church gathered together within the ancient walls of the city of Jerusalem. Antichrist's aim is to remove Christ's headship and utterly destroy the doctrinal validity of the church. We should therefore expect to see a spiritual attack where the true (and worldwide) church is enveloped by spiritual antagonists, all propagating their own deceptions and deceits.

The church has already been attacked on many fronts. Examples of this multi-faceted assault include the **"signs, and lying wonders,"** associated with the 'Toronto Blessing' and 'Brownsville-Pensacola Revival'; the fake ecumenical movement drawing large Protestant and Orthodox denominations into the thrall of Rome; the renewed 'higher criticism' of the Bible and undermining of essential Christian doctrines by liberal theologians; the heresies of the 'faith movement' and the blatant falsehood of many television evangelists; the intrusion of 'New Age' philosophies and Eastern mysticism into church 'culture' and practice; and the erosion of Christ's headship by feminists usurping male leadership positions in the church.

The instruments that Antichrist will use in this final conflict with the church are all those people over whom he has gained a measure of control--both those in the world, and those in the apostate church. But the real opponents of the church will be the demon spirits through which he has gained that measure of control. **"And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty."** [Rev 16:13-14).

The full assault will occur at the end of the church age, when the Lord has called on His true church to separate from her apostate counterfeit and the influence of the world. It is not wise to try to set these end time events into a strictly sequential order, since they will often be concurrent or overlapping one another. But it appears that even now we are witnessing a foreshadowing of the gathering storm that will eventually engulf the church.

Already we can see the beginnings of the shaking of the church, and of the world, that is prophesied throughout the bible. Ezekiel's prophecy declares, **"Surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake [literally 'a great shaking'] in the land of Israel [i.e. the church], so that the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all creeping things that creep on the earth, and all men who are on the face of the earth [i.e. the whole world] shall shake at My presence. The mountains [or exalted authority figures] shall be thrown down, the steep places [or obstacles to the work of the Lord] shall fall, and every wall [of sectarianism] shall fall to the ground."** (Ezek 38:19-20).

As the church is being shaken in this manner, apostasies are being brought to the fore and exposed, and God's judgments are being manifested. In many places Christians are coming out of the apostate church and finding shelter and nourishment in home fellowships. Others who have persisted in their involvement with Antichrist's counterfeit spiritual experiences, are suffering spiritual oppression and deadness. And some who are without strong roots in the Lord have become disillusioned and left the church altogether.

All this must happen before the Lord enters into the conflict to bring about restoration. But we can also be assured of the faithfulness of God, who has promised to preserve a steadfast remnant to be the Lord's instruments of restoration. **"For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city."** (Zech 14:2).

The vulnerability and defenselessness of the church in her present state is reflected in the way she is perceived by Antichrist. **"You will say, 'I will go up against a land of unwallled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates'"** (Ezek 38:11) Her watchmen--the prophets and elders--are asleep. No one is guarding her with saving truth.

Antichrist's attack will be relentless. **"You will ascend, coming like a storm, covering the land like a cloud, you and all your troops and many people with you."** (Ezek 38:9). However his aggression will prove futile, and God's name will be magnified by the inglorious manner of Antichrist's defeat.

"I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all My mountains, "...says the Lord GOD. 'Every man's sword will be against his brother. And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone [all symbols of

judgment]. **Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify [or 'set apart'] Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the LORD.'**" (Ezek 38:21-23).

Note the specific nature of God's judgment: **"Every man's sword will be against his brother."** Antichrist's onslaught will fall apart as his forces turn on one another in bitter hatred and division, and destroy themselves. The apostate church **"has become a habitation of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!"** (Rev 18:2). Eventually the combination of man's fleshly ego and these spirits of Antichrist which operate in the church, will cause savage disagreement and 'civil war' between the many factions.

CLEANSING THE LAND

EZEKIEL Chapter 39

For emphasis, Chapter 39 begins by repeating God's prophetic announcement of Antichrist's defeat. **"Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal; and I will turn you around and lead you on, bringing you up from the far north, and bring you against the mountains of Israel. Then I will knock the bow out of your left hand, and cause the arrows to fall out of your right hand. You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field [both symbolising demon spirits] to be devoured. You shall fall on the open field; for I have spoken,' says the Lord GOD. 'And I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in security in the coastlands. Then they shall know that I am the LORD. So I will make My holy name known in the midst of My people Israel, and I will not let them profane My holy name anymore. Then the nations shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel.'" (Ezek 39:1-7).**

Antichrist will be unmasked and destroyed by the truth, when **"..I [God] will make My holy name known in the midst of My people."** Following this disclosure of the deceptions of Antichrist and his subsequent downfall, there will be a period of cleansing and purifying the land, or church, from all of his weapons of deception and error.

"Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and bucklers, the bows and arrows, the javelins and spears; and they will make fires with them for seven years. They will not take wood from the field nor cut down any from the forests, because they will make fires with the weapons; and they will plunder those who plundered them, and pillage those who pillaged them,' says the Lord GOD." (Ezek 39:9-10).

"Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel," that is, the local churches, will have the responsibility of purging out all of the influences of the spirit of Antichrist. All of his weapons--the false doctrines and teachings, heresies, idolatries, false authorities and institutions, etc--are to be identified and destroyed.

Those who have adopted false positions are to be 'plundered' and 'pillaged,' or stripped of their authority. Antichrist's weapons are to be destroyed by the fire of truth, for only this fire will uncover their rotten core of deception. The period of seven years allotted for this task is symbolic, and represents completeness. The Lord's servants will have a zeal for purity during this time that will drive them to thoroughly purge the church from all apostasy.

At first the task of cleansing the church will be every Christian's responsibility. **"Indeed all the people of the land will be burying them, and they will gain renown for it on the day that I am glorified,' says the Lord GOD."** (Ezek 39:13). It will involve earnest self examination,

repentance, and deliverance from anything taken on board in the past. This individual process will occupy a lesser time than the overall cleansing of the church, but it will be thorough and complete. **"For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land."** (Ezek 39:12).

The longer process of cleansing and purifying the whole church will be entrusted to those with special commissions and anointings. **"They will set apart men regularly employed, with the help of a search party, to pass through the land and bury those bodies remaining on the ground, in order to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make a search. The search party will pass through the land; and when anyone sees a man's bone, he shall set up a marker by it, till the buriers have buried it..."** (Ezek 39:14-15).

The Lord has already commissioned and anointed some of His servants to examine movements and ministries, exposing all that is in reality opposed to the doctrine of Christ. Elders, and their ministries of teaching and deliverance, will be increasingly used in the process of burying out of sight all that has intruded into the church through the spirit of Antichrist.

Those who resist or reject the cleansing of the church will be expelled from her midst. They are in fact singled out for judgment by the very spirits of darkness that they have embraced.

"And as for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Speak to every sort of bird and to every beast of the field [symbolising demon spirits]: 'Assemble yourselves and come; gather together from all sides to My sacrificial meal which I am sacrificing for you, a great sacrificial meal on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood. You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams and lambs, of goats and bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan [symbolising pride and exaltation of self]. You shall eat fat till you are full, and drink blood till you are drunk, at My sacrificial meal which I am sacrificing for you. You shall be filled at My table with horses and riders, with mighty men and with all the men of war,'" says the Lord GOD." (Ezek 39:17-20). Especially singled out for **"the supper of the great God"** (Rev 19:17), are those 'dignitaries' who have wrongfully established themselves in exalted positions, and opposed the working of the true church.

Following this spiritual cleansing of the church, God will pour forth His mercy and grace, and restore to her those who had been taken captive by the spirit of Antichrist. **"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Now I will bring back the captives of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name--after they have borne their shame, and all their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, when they dwelt safely in their own land and no one made them afraid.'"** (Ezek 39:25-26).

After the church has been cleansed and purified, the glory of the Lord will return to her midst. **"I will set My glory among the nations; all the nations shall see My judgment which I have executed, and My hand which I have laid on them. So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day forward...When I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and I am hallowed in them in the sight of many nations..."** (Ezek 39:21-22, 27).

THE LORD'S GLORY WILL RE-ENTER THE CHURCH

The ultimate result of the Lord's intervention into the final conflict, is the return of His glory into the temple (which is a type of the church). Earlier on in the Book of Ezekiel, the prophet describes the glory of the Lord departing from the temple, or church, and resting on the Mount of Olives. **"Then the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub, and paused over the threshold of the temple...Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and**

stood over the cherubim...And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which is on the east of the city [i.e. the Mount of Olives]." (Ezekiel 10:4, 18, & 11:23).

Later, Ezekiel prophesies the glory of the Lord returning from the Mount of Olives to inhabit the restored church. **"And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east [i.e. from the Mount of Olives]...And the glory of the Lord came into the temple by way of the gate which faces towards the east...Then I heard Him speaking to me from the temple...And He said to me, 'Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever.'"** (Ezek 43:2, 4, 6, 7).

THE POURING FORTH OF THE SPIRIT

Zechariah prophesies that one outcome of the Lord separating the works of Antichrist from the true works of Christ, and purging out all that defiles, will be a pouring forth of the Spirit into the world. **"And in that day it shall be that living waters [which is a picture of the Holy Spirit] shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea; in both summer and winter it shall occur. And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be—'The LORD is one,' and His name one."** (Zech 14:8-9).

This pouring forth of the Spirit is confirmed by the account of living waters flowing from the threshold of Ezekiel's temple, (which is a figurative picture of the restored church). The prophet Ezekiel describes ever increasing rivers of living water flow out from the glory of the Lord to the surrounding nations, 'healing' all who are touched by it. As a result, multitudes of 'fish,' or lost souls, are harvested to the Lord.

"Then He brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east...Then He said to me: 'This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed. And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. It shall be that fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be places for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many. But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt. Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.'" (Ezekiel 47:1, 8-12).

From a strictly geographical perspective, the water symbolising the Holy Spirit flows out towards the Valley of the Jordan River, and then into the Dead Sea. The physical characteristics of these areas illustrate certain spiritual truths. The Dead Sea, with its sulphurous lake of Sodom and the contamination of numerous toxic chemicals, speaks of absolute spiritual deadness. But as soon as the living waters from the throne of the temple touch the dead waters of the Salt Sea, **"...its waters are healed...and everything will live wherever the river goes. It shall be that fishermen [evangelists] will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim [places on the shore of the Dead Sea where it was pointless to fish before]; they will be places for spreading their nets [or preaching the gospel]."**

While even the most barren areas will receive spiritual life from this 'healing' ministry of the Holy Spirit, we are warned that those who stubbornly resist the Spirit will continue to stagnate and

remain spiritually dead. **"But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt."**

In clear contrast, those who do receive the river become healthy and fruitful. **"Along the banks of the river...will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine."** These trees are the ministries that will be restored to the church, particularly the Lord's gift of **"...apostles, ...prophets, ...evangelists, and ...pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ..."** (Ephes 4:11-12).

This same prophetic picture is reproduced in the New Testament book of Revelation, underlining its application and importance to the Christian church at the end of the age. The apostle John relates a vision of the restored church as **"...the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, adorned for her husband."** (Rev 21:2). And at the end of his description of the beautiful city, he mentions a river **"...of life.."**

"And [the angel] showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." (Rev 22:1-2).

MORE MANIFESTATIONS OF RESTORATION FROM THE SCRIPTURES

The FORMER and the LATTER RAIN

Using the analogy of the former rain and the latter rain, Joel prophesies that God will send forth His Spirit at the end of the age, precipitating a huge harvest.

"Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you--the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you; and My people shall never be put to shame." (Joel 2:23-26).

The **"former rain"** is the equivalent of the first rains of the season, which enable the crop to germinate and grow. Applying this to the church, the former rain of the Spirit fell on the early church at Pentecost. The **"latter rain"** is then necessary for the crop to fill out in ear before the harvest. In the history of the church, this 'later rain' represents the pouring out of the Spirit to produce a huge harvest of souls at the end of the age.

Joel's picture is one of restoration, abundance, and satisfaction, in the church. God promises, **"The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten..."**

A HUGE HARVEST

Isaiah prophesies that not only the Gentiles, or those outside of the church, will be saved. He also includes **"your sons"** and **"your daughters,"** or many of those who professed Christianity but had been lost to apostasy. **"The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of**

your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see: they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be nursed at your side." (Isa 60:3-4).

The influx of new believers into the restored church will increase rapidly, but this will only occur in God's time. **"A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation. I, the LORD, will hasten it in its time."** (Isa 60:22).

LIGHT Will PREVAIL Over DARKNESS

Isaiah starkly contrasts the darkness of the kingdom of Antichrist, and the light and glory of the restored church. **"Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. 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 60:1-2).

In a similar vein, the prophet Daniel described the restored and refined remnant as standing out like bright stars in a dark sky. **"Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever."** [Dan 12:3].

And Malachi vividly compares the fate of the righteous with those who persist in wickedness. **"For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,' says the LORD of hosts, 'that will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,' says the LORD of hosts."** (Mal 4:1-3).

REPENTANCE and SUBJECTION to AUTHORITY

When the truth is revealed, many in the apostate church will repent and subject themselves to Christ's delegated authorities. **"Also the sons of those who afflicted you shall come bowing to you, and all those who despised you shall fall prostrate at the soles of your feet; and they shall call you The City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel."** (Isa 60:14).

The RESTORED CHURCH Will Have An ABUNDANCE Of All THINGS

Restoration prophecies make it plain that the restored church will be provided with all that is necessary to minister aid to the huge influx of saints.

"Then you shall see and become radiant, and your heart shall swell with joy; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you. The multitude of camels shall cover your land, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense, and they shall proclaim the praises of the LORD...You shall drink the milk of the Gentiles, and milk the breast of kings; you shall know that I, the LORD, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. Instead of bronze I will bring gold, instead of iron I will bring silver, instead of wood, bronze, and instead of stones, iron." (Isa 60:5-6, 16-17).

These pictures are not literal, but rather figurative expressions of the Lord's provision. Paul told the Corinthian church that, **"...God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work."** (2 Cor 9:8). It was said of the early church, **"[n]or was there anyone among them who lacked..."** (Acts 4:34). We should not expect the restored church to have a huge store of accumulated wealth. But she will have **"all sufficiency"** and **"an abundance"** to minister to every need.

The PRESENCE of the LORD in HER MIDST will be HER LIGHT

Isaiah wrote that the presence of the Lord in the midst of the saints would be their light. **"The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; but the LORD will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory. Your sun shall no longer go down, nor shall your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning [of not knowing the Lord] shall be ended."** (Isa 60:19-20).

In speaking of the New Covenant, the author of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah 31:34. **"None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them."** (Heb 8:11). In other words, everyone in the restored church will have a personal relationship with their Lord. They will hear His voice and know His direction for them.

As the apostle John reports in his vision of the New Jerusalem, **"...I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light...(there shall be no night there)." (Rev 21:22-24, 25).**

'HOLINESS to the LORD'

The Lord **"...will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness."** (Mal 3:3). **"And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy--everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem."** (Isa 4:3).

This refining work of the Lord will be so profound that even the most mundane objects will be declared holy, or 'set apart' for His work. **"In that day 'HOLINESS TO THE LORD' shall be engraved on the bells of the horses. The pots in the LORD'S house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness to the LORD of hosts."** (Zech 14:20-21).

PEACE JOY and ACCLAIM

"For thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream.'" (Isa 66:12).

"Instead of your shame you shall have double honor, and instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be theirs...Their descendants shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people. All who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the posterity whom the LORD has blessed." (Isa 61:7-9).

The SAINTS Will Be 'A CROWN Of GLORY'

"You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called Hephzibah [literally 'My Delight Is In Her'], and your land Beulah [literally 'Married']; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." (Isa 62:3-5).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

After Antichrist and his confederacy have been defeated by the sword of the truth, the church will set about cleansing herself from all apostasy. There will be a zeal for purity and holiness, and consequently the work will continue until every last trace of the works of Antichrist is completely removed.

When the work of purification has been completed, the Lord's glory will re-enter the church and His Spirit will flow out to the nations, precipitating a huge harvest of souls.

The restored church will receive overflowing abundance and manifold blessings from the presence of the Lord. She will know peace, joy, and acclaim, and the Lord will be her light. All things in her will be holy to the Lord, and the saints will be to their Lord **"...a crown of glory..."**

THE VALLEY OF DECISION

THE VALLEY OF JEHOSEPHAT

In his portrayal of God's judgment, and the restoration of the church at the end of the age, the prophet Joel described two valleys. The first is the Valley of Jehoshaphat, and the second, the valley of decision.

"Let the nations be awakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow-- for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness. The LORD also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the LORD will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel." [Joel 3:12-16].

The first mentioned valley is called **"the valley of Jehoshaphat."** This time we will quote from Verse 1, which states that it is God who draws the nations into the Valley of Jehoshaphat so that they might face His judgment. **"For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel."** [Joel 3:1-2].

The Valley of Jehoshaphat, which is at present called the Kidron Valley, is situated between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives, and runs towards the wilderness, and eventually the Dead Sea. Despite its definite geographical location, in Joel's reading the Valley of Jehoshaphat is used figuratively to describe the nature of God's judgment of those who will refuse to repent. The name Jehoshaphat means *'God shall judge,'* or *'God has judged.'* The name of the valley is taken from King Jehoshaphat of Judah, and the valley of self destruction where he watched his enemies destroy themselves. Figuratively, the Valley of Jehoshaphat is the 'valley' of God's judgment - a 'valley' of self-destruction and death.

At one time during his reign, **"the people of Moab with the people of Ammon, and others with them besides the Ammonites, came to battle against Jehoshaphat....a great multitude."** [2 Chronicles 20:1]. Fearing greatly because he was vastly outnumbered, Jehoshaphat **"set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah."** [V.3]. As Judah congregated together, a 'word' was presented by one of the prophets: **"Thus says the LORD to you, 'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's....You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem!' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD is with you."** [Vs 15 & 17].

King Jehoshaphat encouraged his subjects by speaking in their midst, "Hear me, O Judah and Jerusalem: Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper." Jehoshaphat and the men of Judah and Jerusalem then took their position on the rim of the valley, and **"when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated. For the people of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir**

to utterly kill and destroy them. And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another." [2 Chronicles 20:22-23].

This theme of self destruction imposed by God on His enemies is repeated in many other bible passages, particularly those relating to the end time judgment. E.g.:

Zechariah 14 "...a great panic from the LORD will be among them. Everyone will seize the hand of his neighbor, and raise his hand against his neighbor's hand."

Isaiah 3:5 "The people will be oppressed, every one by another and every one by his neighbor."

Haggai 2:22 "I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I will destroy the strength of the Gentile kingdoms. I will overthrow the chariots and those who ride in them; the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother."

Few doubt that God's judgment will fall on **"the Gentile kingdoms,"** or those in the world who have obstinately rejected His salvation. They are already on a course of self destruction, and at **"the time of the dead, that they should be judged,"** God shall **"destroy those who destroy the earth."** [Revelation 11:18].

However, **"since the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God,"** our main concern should be for those entrenched in the counterfeit church, whose eyes are blinded to the foulness of the apostasies in their midst. God's purging judgment will fall on those who in their blindness and ignorance have rejected the truth, and have persecuted those in the true church of Christ. The spiritual darkness and death they have unleashed will fall back on their own heads until all opposition to the saints will be brought to nothing. **"(T)he day which is coming shall burn them up,"** says the LORD of hosts, **that will leave them neither root nor branch."** [Malachi 4:1].

Those who remain unrepentant will be separated from the true church as the tares are from the wheat. **"And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy."** [Isaiah 4:3]. No one in the church will escape God's purging judgment, which will not cease until **"there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."** [Revelation 21:27]

THE VALLEY OF DECISION

In Chapter 15, we saw that the figurative splitting of the Mount of Olives made an obvious separation of the 'mountain' of the apostate works of Antichrist, from the 'mountain' of the righteous works of Christ. The **"very wide valley"** that separated the mountains is referred to by Joel as **"the valley of decision."** The valley of decision is not a geographical site. It is a place in a person's spiritual experience where he is enabled to clearly discern the manifest works of Antichrist as distinct from the righteous works of Christ. Because the difference has been made clear, he is now obliged to make a decision as to who he will follow - Christ or Antichrist. He has been brought into the valley of decision.

By taking away His restraining hand, God is causing the darkness of apostasy to become even more obvious, to the intent that the distinction between light and darkness will be clearly discernable. Because of the ministries of God's prophets and teachers, the clear evidence of light and darkness is being set before us, and even now **"multitudes upon multitudes"** are being brought into **"the valley of decision."** Before them the choice has been made clear. The distinctly identifiable works of Antichrist which have plunged much of the church into the darkness of lawless apostasy, has been set against the glory of the presence of the Lord in His saints.

As the distinction between the mountain of the works of Antichrist and the mountain of the true works of Christ is made evident, every person will be confronted with the valley of decision. We will have a clear choice of repenting and separating ourselves from all apostasy and submitting to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, or rebel and continue to align ourselves with the apostasies of Antichrist in the worldly church.

There will be no escaping from the **"valley of decision."** Every person will be obliged to make a decision between Christ and Antichrist. Compromise will be regarded as rebellion. One end of the valley of decision leads to the valley of God's judgment, and the other to Azazel at the gates of Jerusalem, or the church. By our own choice we will enter into God's judgment in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, or alternatively, to enter into the blessings of Christ in His restored church.

A Call to Repentance

How should we in the church respond when God's judgment begins to be manifested? The prophet Joel expresses God's will for the church when she is confronted with His end time judgment. It is a universal call to repentance and renewed consecration.

"Blow the trumpet (sound a warning) in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the LORD is coming, for it is at hand.... Now, therefore," says the LORD, **"Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes; let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, and the bride from her dressing room. Let the priests, who minister to the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar; let them say, 'Spare Your people, O LORD, and do not give Your heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?' Then the LORD will be zealous for His land, and pity His people. The LORD will answer and say to His people, 'Behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied by them; I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations.'"** [Joel 2:1-2, 12, 15-19].

COME OUT OF HER MY PEOPLE

Through the voice of His prophets and teachers, God is unmasking the presence of the spirit of antichrist in the church, and issuing this warning: **"Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities"** [Rev 18:4-5].

Since repentance is only legitimate if it results in turning from our previous state to the will of the Lord, we are required to spiritually and physically separate ourselves from all activities involving the spirit of antichrist. **"Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.'"** [2 Corinthians 6:17].