

# The ministry of the church

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## The bride of Christ

In the book of Revelation, the bride of Christ is identified as 'the New Jerusalem' which descends out of heaven from God. Rev 21:2,9-10. The world of the future, described as 'the new heavens and earth', will be governed from the New Jerusalem. Rev 21:24-26. It is the administration of God that is set over the works of His hands. Heb 2:7.

The first great revelation concerning Christ's bride, the New Jerusalem, belonged to Abraham. He received this revelation from Christ while he was living in Ur of the Chaldeans. It motivated Abraham to depart from that region, later known as Babylon. Although the Lord promised to give Abraham the land of Canaan as an inheritance, Abraham was illuminated to see that the promised inheritance was a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Heb 11:8,10.

The apostle Paul highlighted this point, writing, 'But now they [Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob] desire a better, that is, a *heavenly country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has *prepared a city* for them.' Heb 11:16. As Abraham waited for this city, which he saw from afar, he confessed that he was a stranger and pilgrim on the earth. Heb 11:10,13. He looked for the bride city to be his eternal dwelling place. This pursuit became the primary focus of his life.

Abraham looked for the New Jerusalem, which would come *down out of heaven from God*. As we have already noted, the New Jerusalem is the bride of Christ, the Lamb of God. Although the builder and maker of this city is God the Father, it would be formed from the elements of water, blood and Spirit that flowed from Christ's offering as He journeyed from Gethsemane and died on the cross. The bride of Christ would be brought forth from the body of Christ when He was lifted up on the cross.

The initiative of the Father to build a city that would descend out of heaven from Him, through the offering of Christ, was expressed in the testimony of Jesus, who said, 'For I have *come down from heaven*, not to do My own will, *but the will of Him who sent Me*.' Joh 6:38. It was for this reason that Jesus also said, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.' Joh 8:56. 'My day' was the day of Christ's offering, when the bride city, which Abraham had seen from afar, would be revealed. This is why Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day.

## The formation of the bride

In the covenant fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, before the foundation of the world, Yahweh the Son emptied Himself to become the Father's Son. Christ's body became a household for God the Father, in which the seed of God, with the names of all the sons of God, resided. This was when 'heavenly places' was established. Christ's corporate body is depicted in the Scriptures as a 'house' or a 'temple'.

The first man, Adam, was a type of Christ. The identities of all mankind were committed to Adam through the word of the Father as He breathed the breath of lives into man's nostrils. Gen 2:7. When no helper who was comparable to Adam could be found in heaven or on earth, the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon him. The Lord God took a rib from Adam's side and formed it into a woman who would be able to multiply his seed as children, and thus be comparable to him. Gen 2:18-23.

This 'operation' foreshadowed the work of the Father to bring forth the bride of Christ through the offering of Jesus on the cross. When Christ's offering was completed on the cross, and He had committed His Spirit to God the Father, His physical body *fell asleep in death*. Luk 23:46. A centurion then pierced Christ's side with a spear, causing blood and water to flow from His side. Joh 19:34.

The apostle John was an eyewitness of this event. He explained that it was the fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy, '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 pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.' Zec 12:10-11.

John witnessed something new as blood, water, and the spirit of grace and supplication flowed from the side of Christ. As a spirit of grace and supplication fell upon the hearts of those who watched the crucifixion of Christ, they began to *mourn and repent*, beating their breasts as they *returned to their houses*. Luk 23:48.

On the Day of Pentecost, a great multitude of those who had seen this event received the message of the apostle Peter. They were born again, and were baptised into the name of Jesus. Act 2:41. A person who is born again and baptised into Christ is raised and seated with Him in heavenly places. Eph 2:5-6. The temple of His body is the context of their priestly work, where they present themselves as living sacrifices, and prove the will of God, which is their sanctification as sons of God. Rom 12:1-2. 1Th 4:3.

They also became part of the bride of Christ as they drew near to Him with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having their hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and their bodies washed with pure water through the ministry of the fountain for sin and uncleanness that flows from Christ's side. Heb 10:22. This is the ministry of the washing of the water by the word, through the headship of Christ in the church. Eph 5:25-27.

The multitude who received Peter's ministry on the Day of Pentecost became members of the church in Jerusalem, which was the *local* expression of the bride of Christ. Significantly, they were no longer citizens of the natural Jerusalem, which the apostle Paul described as 'Hagar', the bondwoman, whose children were in bondage under the Old Covenant. They were now citizens of the Jerusalem from above, the bride of Christ, who is the mother of the sons of God. Gal 4:26. This is true for every person who is born of God and baptised into Christ.

As part of the bride of Christ, we are joined to the travail through which others on earth are brought forth as sons of God through the gospel. Gal 4:19. We note, for example, that as the members of the church continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers, the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Act 2:40,46-47.

Significantly, this motherhood of the church is also seen *in every believing family*. The children of parents who are born again and baptised into Christ, are also born as sons of

God. Paul highlighted this reality, saying, 'For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, *but now they are holy.*' 1Co 7:14.

### Bringing forth godly seed

When God formed woman from the rib of man, the one man was made two so that identities could be multiplied through *procreation*. However, God's plan was not simply for the proliferation of the sons and daughters of men. He predestined us all to adoption as sons of God in Christ. Eph 1:3-6. His desire is for *godly seed* – sons and daughters who are born of God and are brought forth into covenant families.

Under the Old Covenant, the Lord endowed a husband and a wife with 'a remnant of the Spirit' to enable the two to become one so that they could bring forth godly seed. Mal 2:15. This was an anointing of the Holy Spirit that belonged to those who, like King David, lived by faith. In this regard, we note David's prayer, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and *do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.* Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and *uphold me by Your generous Spirit.*' Psa 51:10-12.

Because of this anointing, a believing couple under the Old Covenant was able to be one as they remained faithful to the covenant of circumcision; that is, as they walked in the same blameless manner as their father Abraham had done. Gen 17:1,10-14. Accordingly, their children were heirs of the resurrection that God promised to Abraham.

In the New Covenant, the remnant of the Spirit that is given to believing parents is not only an anointing; *it is the divine nature*. Their family belongs to the bride city, which Abraham, and the great men and women of faith under the Old Covenant, saw from afar. Heb 11:39-40. Substantiating this great truth, Paul declared, '*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.*' Heb 12:22-24.

In the fellowship of Christ's offering and travail, a Christian couple is made one as they put off the fallen ways of the flesh, and avail themselves of the life that is in His blood. Walking blameless in this manner marks them as a household of faith and recipients of the blessing of Abraham. Paul explained that the blessing of Abraham is '*the promise of the Spirit through faith*'. Gal 3:14.

A child who is conceived in a New Covenant household is a son of God even before they are brought forth from their mother's womb through natural labour. At the point of conception, a new, natural identity with a biological body is formed. Because their parents are part of the bride of Christ, the Father births this new identity as His own son by forming Christ, His Seed, in their heart. Gal 4:19. Eph 3:17. Christ has already been formed in their heart as they continue to grow and develop in the womb of their mother. Amazingly, from conception, they have been raised into heavenly places and are part of the temple of Christ's body. If they die in the womb, heaven remains their place of abode.

As we have considered in previous notes, the prophet Isaiah spoke of children who are born of God before they are brought forth through the natural labour of their mother. This birth belongs to those who are part of God's covenant people. Isaiah declared,

'Before she was in labour, she gave birth; before her pain [natural labour] came, she delivered a male child [a son of God]. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion [the mountain upon which Jerusalem was built] was in labour, she gave birth to her children.' Isa 66:7-8. Isaiah was referring, figuratively, to Jerusalem as the church, the bride of Christ, in the New Covenant.

## Zechariah's vision of the lampstand

The pattern of revelation that is identified in Chapter 1 of the book of Zechariah is the same pattern that continues for the remainder of the book. After seeing the four horsemen, Zechariah recorded, 'Then I said, "My lord, what are these?" So *the angel who talked with me* said to me, "I will *show you* what they are".' Zec 1:9. The angel who talked to him and promised to show him the vision was Gabriel. Likewise, it was Gabriel who continued to talk to him and to show him the various prophetic visions that have been recorded by Zechariah.

Supporting the conclusion that it was Gabriel who was sent by the Lord to show Zechariah the prophetic visions, we observe that he was also sent to explain the meaning of the prophetic visions to Daniel. For example, Daniel recorded, after seeing the vision of the little horn that 'suddenly there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, who called, and said, "*Gabriel*, make this man understand the vision".' Dan 8:15-16. We know that it was Gabriel who also delivered the Seventy Weeks prophecy to Daniel. Dan 9:22.

The angel Gabriel explained to Daniel that Michael was the other archangel who stood with him against the fallen principalities and powers that ruled over the kingdoms of the world. Dan 10:13,20-21. He described Michael as the great prince who stands watch, or guard, over the sons of Abraham. Dan 12:1. He is the commander of the angelic host of heaven. It was Michael who stood at the entrance to the promised land as the commander of the army of the angelic host, with a sword drawn in his hand. Jos 5:13-15.

The prophet Zechariah saw Michael as the angel of the Lord riding on a red horse. As we have considered in other notes, Michael will be the rider on the red horse when the Lamb stands up and opens the seven-sealed book in the time of the end. Interestingly, in the prophetic vision of Zechariah, Michael also *spoke directly* to the prophet. It was the angel of the Lord on the red horse who explained to Zechariah, concerning the horsemen, 'These are the ones whom the Lord has sent to walk to and fro throughout the earth'. Zec 1:10.

We read in Chapter 3 of the book of Zechariah, 'Then *he showed me* Joshua the high priest standing before *the Angel of the Lord* and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him'. Zec 3:1. The 'he' in this verse is Gabriel. He is the interpretive angel who illuminated and explained each vision to Zechariah. The angel of the Lord in this verse is Michael. Satan was standing before Michael to oppose Joshua the high priest with reviling accusation. Michael responded to him on behalf of the Lord by saying, '*The Lord rebuke you, Satan!*' Zec 3:2. Jud 1:9.

As the angel of the Lord, Michael admonished Joshua by saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "If you will walk in My ways, and if you will keep My commands, then you shall also judge My house, and likewise have charge of My courts; I will give you places to walk among these who stand here".' Zec 3:7. This was a significant statement, because the Lord

promised to give Joshua access among the angelic host, and charge over the heavenly sanctuary. The book of Malachi reveals that it was the corruption of the priests, with this mandate, which allowed Satan to regain access into the heavenly places.

The angel of the Lord continued, ‘Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, for they are a wondrous sign; for behold, I am bringing forth My servant the Branch. For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua: upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription’, says the Lord of hosts, “and I will remove the iniquity of that land *in one day*”.’ Zec 3:8-9. The day that the Lord removed the iniquity of the land was the ‘once, for all’ offering of Christ. The offering of Christ from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross was the fulfilment of the true Day of Atonement.

Joshua, Zerubbabel, and their companions were a wondrous sign. Together, these men were a type of Christ, whose name is ‘the Branch’. Zec 6:12. Christ is the Branch, who has the seven Spirits of God resting upon Him. The prophet Isaiah declared, ‘There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.’ Isa 11:1-2. The seven Spirits of God are also the seven eyes upon the foundation stone of the true temple.

It is helpful to remove the chapter distinction between Chapters 3 and 4 of the book of Zechariah, because it is a continuation of the same narrative. The prophet continued by saying, ‘Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep.’ Zec 4:1. When Gabriel asked Zechariah, ‘What do you see?’, the prophet replied, ‘I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on the top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left.’ Zec 4:2-3.

When the prophet Zechariah repeatedly asked the angel about the two olive trees, he was perplexed that the prophet did not already know the answer. Zec 4:5,13. Finally, the angel explained, ‘These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.’ Zec 4:14. The two olive trees cannot represent Joshua and Zerubbabel because the Scripture clearly identifies that the anointed ones were speaking to those two men. Zec 3:6. Zec 4:6. The simplest interpretation of the two olive trees is that they represent the ministry of Gabriel and Michael as the anointed messengers in the angelic administration. Luk 1:19.

The two angelic messengers proclaimed an anointed word to Joshua, Zerubbabel, and their companions. This anointed word was to become the message of the seven lamps upon the lampstand in the true temple. We note that the seven Spirits of God, which are depicted as *seven eyes* on the foundation stone of the temple, in Chapter 3, are depicted as *seven lamps* upon the lampstand in Chapter 4. The Lord said to Zechariah, ‘Who has despised the day of small things? For these seven [lamps] rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They *are the eyes of the Lord* which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth.’ Zec 4:10.

The temple that was built in the days of Zerubbabel and Joshua was ‘the day of small things’. It foreshadowed the building of the true temple by Jesus Christ. The true temple is the body of Christ. It is the Father’s house. At the conclusion of His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, Jesus Christ took His seat in the mercy seat, which is the throne of grace, in the true temple. He is seated on His throne as our great

High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Zec 6:12-13. Rev 1:13. From this finished position, He is *branching out* through the seven stars that He holds in His right hand to build the true temple of the Lord.

The true temple is made of *living stones* who have been built upon Jesus Christ as the Chief Cornerstone. The apostle Peter described the true temple by saying that we are 'coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ'. 1Pe 2:4-5. Lampstand churches are the light in the true temple of God that is in all the world. In the days ahead of us, the lampstand church that is burning before the throne of God will also become *the light of the world*, bringing a great multitude of sons of God out of the world and into the true temple in the heavenly places. Rev 4:5.

The word of the Lord that was proclaimed to Zerubbabel, as the builder of the temple in his day, is *the same word* that is proclaimed to, and then by, the seven stars in the right hand of Christ as the builders of the true temple in our day. The first element of the message is, ' "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit", says the Lord of hosts.' Zec 4:6. This describes *the mode of ministry* that must be exemplified by the seven stars in the right hand of Christ. The mode of their ministry is not by angelic or human might and power. Rather, the messengers of Christ minister in weakness as those who are walking with Him in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. 2Co 12:9. 2Co 13:4.

The second element of the message is, 'Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!" ' Zec 4:7. 'The great mountain' is the administration of *Babylon the great* that has ruled over all seven kingdoms of the world. The Lord declared through the prophet Jeremiah, ' "Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, who destroys all the earth," says the Lord. "And I will stretch out My hand against you, roll you down from the rocks, and make you a burnt mountain".' Jer 51:25. The judgement of Babylon will begin when the second trumpet is blown.

## The rod of God

The lampstand church is the rod of God, in the right hand of Christ, that will judge Satan and the administration of Babylon in the time of the end. We recall that the rod of God was first given to Moses. It was then given to Aaron as the prophetic priest who served under the direction of Moses. Exo 7:1. The rod of God, in the hand of Moses and Aaron, was the instrument through which God judged Pharaoh and the Egyptian nation. This rod was also the means through which power for deliverance from bondage in Egypt was brought to the children of Israel. For example, the Lord instructed Moses to use the rod in his hand to divide the Red Sea so that the Israelites could pass through the sea on dry land. Exo 14:16.

After the rebellion and judgement of Korah and his companions, who had challenged the authority of Moses and Aaron to lead the Israelites, the Lord instructed Moses to take a rod from the head of each tribe of Israel. Moses placed the twelve rods before the Lord in the tabernacle of meeting. On the following morning, the rod of Aaron had sprouted, put forth buds, produced blossoms, and yielded ripe almonds. Num 17:8. This sign confirmed that the Lord had chosen Aaron and his sons to serve as priests in the tabernacle. However, this sign also revealed that the rod of God would become a lampstand. We note

that the lampstand in the tabernacle of Moses was fashioned in the likeness of a blossoming almond tree in the springtime.

The Lord sanctified Jeremiah from his mother's womb to carry the authority of the rod of God as a prophetic-priest to the nations. Jer 1:5. The Lord declared to Jeremiah, 'Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and throw down, to build and to plant.' Jer 1:9-10. When the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, asking him what he saw, the prophet replied, 'I see a branch [or rod] of an almond tree.' Jer 1:11. Jeremiah carried the authority of the rod of God, which is the lampstand, to proclaim the judgement of the nation of Babylon at the end of the seventy years of exile for the Jewish people. He also prophesied concerning the judgement of the administration of Babylon, which has ruled over all seven world kingdoms, in the end of the age. Jer 51:25.

The prophetic word of Jeremiah regarding the judgement of the nation of Babylon was fulfilled in the days of King Belshazzar. During a great feast, Belshazzar asked for all the gold vessels that had previously been taken from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar to be brought into the feast. This included the lampstand. As the people ate and drank, the finger of a man's hand appeared in front of the lampstand and wrote on the wall of the king's palace. Dan 5:5. The king saw the back of the hand that did the writing. Immediately, his face grew pale, his thoughts alarmed him, his hip joints went slack, and his knees began knocking together. Dan 5:6. The writing on the wall was *the message of the lampstand* as the rod of God in the right hand of the Son of God.

Significantly, the message that was written by the hand in front of the lampstand was interpreted and proclaimed to the king by the prophet Daniel. Daniel was a man-child who belonged to the Lord. In a similar way to Jeremiah, the prophet Daniel carried the authority of the rod of God as His messenger to the nation of Babylon. He had been given prophetic authority over the nation of Babylon, despite serving under the king and in his administration. Daniel rebuked King Belshazzar because he had not humbled himself, like his father Nebuchadnezzar had done, to recognise that the Most High God rules in the affairs of men. Dan 5:18-23.

The inscription on the wall in front of the lampstand was: 'MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN'. Daniel explained this message of the lampstand, as the rod of God, to King Belshazzar. He proclaimed, 'MENE: God has numbered your kingdom and finished it; TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.' Dan 5:25-28. The Scriptures record that Belshazzar was slain that very night, and Darius the Mede received the kingdom. Dan 5:30-31. We know that the prophet Daniel continued to serve in the administration of Darius the Mede, and then of Cyrus the Persian. It was in the first year of Darius the Mede that Daniel received the Seventy Weeks prophecy from the angel Gabriel, in response to his prayer. Dan 9.

While he served in Babylon, it was also revealed to Daniel that Satan would regain access into the heavenly places during the reign of the Greek Empire, and that the Lord's messengers would be trampled for a period of 2300 years. Dan 8:9-14. Satan regained access into the heavenly places because of the corruption of the priesthood and the violation of the fellowship of the Lord's table. Jesus Christ admonished the presbytery of each lampstand church, through the apostle John, to recover and restore the fellowship of the *agape* meal. Rev 2:4-5,7. The Lord called each presbytery and lampstand church to *overcome* Satan by walking with Him in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings.

In the fellowship of Christ's offering, His life is formed in us so that *His* testimony becomes *our* testimony. The testimony of Jesus is expressed by those who are overcoming Satan by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony, and by laying down their lives for one another. Rev 12:11. The key point is that, as the presbytery and the lampstand church overcome Satan in the heavenly places, the lampstand becomes *the rod of iron* in the hand of Christ, which will proclaim the judgement of the seventh world kingdom and the administration of Babylon. The Lord proclaimed to the presbytery in Thyatira, 'He who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end [the time of the end], to him I will give power over the nations - "He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels" - as I have also received from My Father.' Rev 2:26-27.

The prophet Isaiah compared the judgement of Satan and the judgement of the seventh world kingdom with the judgement of Pharaoh and the first world kingdom. As we have considered, Pharaoh and the nation of Egypt were sovereignly judged by *the rod of God* in the hand of Moses and Aaron. Isaiah proclaimed, concerning the judgement of Satan in the time of the end, 'Awake, awake, put on strength, O *arm of the Lord!* Awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Are You not *the arm* that cut Rahab [Egypt] apart, and wounded the serpent? Are You not the One [the arm] who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; that made the depths of the sea a road for the redeemed to cross over?' Isa 51:9-10.

In the time of the end, the Lord will extend His arm, and stretch out His hand, to bring a multitude which no man can number into the kingdom of God, through His lampstand administration. Isa 51:11. Rev 7:9. This great multitude of sons of God will be redeemed from the world and brought into the true temple in the heavenly places to serve the Father, day and night. Rev 7:15. The Lamb, who is in the midst of the throne, will shepherd this great multitude of sons of God to the springs of the water of life. Rev 7:17. The springs of the water of life belong to the New Jerusalem, which is the bride city. The river of the water of life proceeds *as an everlasting stream* from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the new heavens and the new earth. Rev 22:1.

Following this great harvest of sons of God, who will serve the Father as priests in His temple, the Lord will also extend His arm, and stretch out His hand, to proclaim the judgement of the administration of Babylon. The final judgement of Babylon will be announced by the seven angelic messengers with the seven trumpets. Rev 8:6. When the fall of Babylon is announced by the mighty angel with the second trumpet, the messengers of Christ will proclaim, '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 8:8. Rev 18:4-5. This message will be proclaimed in the final season before the door to the temple in the heavenly places is closed and Babylon is made completely desolate in the first hour of the reign of Antichrist. Rev 11:1-2. Rev 18:17,19.