

The restoration and culture of
the kingdom of God

VICTOR HALL

WITH PETER HAY AND DAVID BAKER

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Chapter I

The transition to the Father's throne

When Jesus Christ committed His Spirit into the hands of the Father, He ascended to the bosom of the Father. Luk 23:46. The bosom of the Father is *the very heart* of the Father's throne. The throne of the Father is the source of the river of the water of life that flowed through the physical body of Christ when the soldier pierced His side with a spear. Joh 19:34. The river of the water of life will flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb for eternity. Rev 22:1.

After three days and three nights in the bosom of the Father, Jesus Christ reinhabited His immortal and incorruptible, physical body. On the day of His physical resurrection, the disciples were born of the Spirit when Christ breathed on them and proclaimed to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' Joh 20:22. For a further forty days, He spoke to the disciples about the kingdom of God. At the end of those forty days, the disciples asked Him, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' Act 1:6.

Jesus responded to the disciples, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.' Act 1:7. The

Father will initiate the time for the saints to possess the kingdom when He places His throne in the heavenly Jerusalem and spreads His tabernacle over Mount Zion. Dan 7:9. Rev 4:2. Jesus Christ will then stand up as the Lamb, in the Father's throne, with the firstfruits of the true Israel of God, to establish the Father's kingdom on the earth. Rev 5:6. Rev 14:1.

Prior to Christ's ascension from the Mount of Olives, the Father had not yet given Him the mandate to reveal to the disciples the timing for the restoration of the kingdom. However, we know that, over sixty years later, the Father did give Christ the mandate to reveal these times and seasons to the apostle John. Rev 1:1. John recorded the times and seasons that belong to the restoration of the kingdom of God in the book of Revelation.

Significantly, the *aggelos* messenger who revealed the bride city to the apostle John instructed him to *not seal up* the book of Revelation. Rev 22:10. This is an important point, because it means that we can understand the book of Revelation and the times and seasons that belong to the restoration of the kingdom. John addressed the entire book of Revelation to Christ's lampstand churches. Rev 1:4. He exhorted every believer, in every lampstand church, by saying, 'Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.' Rev 1:3.

We *hear* the words of the prophecy when it is proclaimed to us, under the direction and anointing of the Holy Spirit, as a word of present truth. We are reminded that Jesus concluded His personal admonition to each lampstand church by saying, 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' Rev 2:7. We *keep the things* that are revealed in the book of Revelation through our ongoing participation in the fellowship of the word of God in the agape meal. Rev 1:3. Rev 22:7. The fellowship of the word of God is revealed in the book of Revelation to be an everlasting fountain, or river of life, that will flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb for eternity. Rev 22:1-2.

We have written this booklet as part of our ongoing fellowship in this river of the water of life. The content that we are presenting in this booklet, with its accompanying chart, is not theological information that has been written as a commentary. Nor is it intended to be an all-encompassing or conclusive statement on the events that belong to the time of the end. Rather, as we continue to turn in response to hearing the voice of Christ, and incline our ear to what the Spirit is saying to the

churches, we are recording the points of focus and emphasis that the Spirit is illuminating to us. These points of focus are part of the Lord's provision for us as the bread from heaven in our present season. 2Pe 1:12. We also know that the Lord is shedding a light on our path for the seasons ahead. Psa 119:105.

As we begin, it is important to remind ourselves about this ongoing fellowship in the word of present truth. The book of Revelation is only understood by the illumination of the Spirit, in a fellowship, as a word of present truth. We have written this material in a fellowship and, likewise, we are writing to invite you to join the same fellowship as we continue to study the book of Revelation. 1Jn 1:3. In relation to the chart, you will note that we have not definitively nominated the timing of the seventh seal and the blowing of the seventh trumpet. The timing of these elements is still part of our ongoing discussion and consideration. We know that further clarity will come on these points, and many others, as we continue to walk together in the fellowship of the word. Psa 119:130. Pro 4:18.

John's vision of the bride city

When we read the book of Revelation, we observe that the apostle John witnessed all the major events that belong to the end of the age. However, he also received several summary visions which are not limited to the time of the end and which span large periods of history. For example, the vision of the church as a woman in travail in the heavenly places reveals the ministry of the church in bringing forth sons of God, from the Day of Pentecost all the way to the time of the end. Rev 12:1-2.

As another example, once the apostle John had witnessed the judgement of God upon Antichrist and his kingdom, one of the messengers with the seven vials came to speak with him. He said, 'Come here, I will show you the judgement of the great harlot who sits on many waters.' Rev 17:1. John saw the administration of Babylon riding upon the historic beast with seven heads and ten horns. Rev 17:3. The historic beast includes all seven world kingdoms, and then also the eighth world kingdom which is 'of the seventh'. Rev 17:11.

Significantly, in relation to the events that belong to the end of the age, the last verse in the book of Revelation is found at the beginning of Chapter 21. John recorded, 'Then I saw a new heaven and new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea'. Rev 21:1. It is important to recognise that this is the final verse

in terms of the chronology of the book of Revelation, because the description of the bride city that follows this verse does not belong to the new heavens and new earth.

We know that John's vision of the bride city does not belong to the new heavens and the new earth because we read, 'Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. *Outside* are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practises lying'. Rev 22:14-15. This cannot be a description of the bride city in the new heavens and new earth, because the ungodly will not be outside the city. They will be 'remembered no more' in the sea of God's forgetfulness, which is the lake of fire. Rev 20:11-15.

Having concluded the chronology of the book of Revelation, John began his summary statements on the bride city by saying, 'Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.' Rev 21:2. The marriage between Christ and the church occurred on the day of His crucifixion. When Jesus laid down His life on the cross, the Father fashioned the church from the physical body of Christ to become His bride. The church, as the bride of Christ, is to be His comparable helper in the work of bringing forth sons of God.

As the context for the multiplication of sons of God, the bride of Christ is likened to a city called *the New Jerusalem*. The first manifestation of the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God as a bride adorned for her husband was seen on the Day of Pentecost. John saw that the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and the names of the twelve apostles were written on these stones. Rev 21:14. The twelve apostles are the foundation of the New Jerusalem. In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul proclaimed that Abraham was looking for this city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Heb 1:10.

Following the Day of Pentecost, if we have been born as sons of God and baptised into the fellowship of Christ's offering, we have been raised to sit with Christ in the heavenly places. This means that we are no longer looking for the city from afar. The apostle Paul declared, 'You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.' Heb 12:22. As sons of God and members of the body of Christ, we belong to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven. Heb 12:23. Our citizenship is in heaven because our names are

written in the tree of life which is in the middle of the heavenly Jerusalem. Php 3:20. Rev 22:19.

Remarkably, when Jesus Christ admonished the presbytery in Ephesus, towards the end of the first century, they had already fallen from the heavenly Jerusalem. They no longer had access to the tree of life in the middle of the heavenly city, because they had replaced the fellowship of the agape meal with their own sacramental practices. Rev 2:4,7. Rev 22:1-2,14. Jesus called the presbytery in Ephesus to forsake their sacramentalism and to return to the fellowship of the *agape* meal. Jesus proclaimed to all the overcomers in the presbytery, and in the lampstand church, 'To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.' Rev 2:7.

In our present season, we are being admonished by Jesus Christ to 'hear what the Spirit says to the churches'. Rev 2:7. The Lord is calling all believers to return to their first love as He restores the fellowship of the *agape* meal in lampstand churches. Once the Father has taken His seat, the overcomers from each lampstand church will join the Spirit in inviting all men to come and join the fellowship of the *agape* meal in the heavenly Jerusalem. John declared, 'The Spirit *and the bride* say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.' Rev 22:17.

The Son's throne

It is important that we understand the distinction between the Father's throne and the Son's throne. When Jesus Christ physically ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives, He sat down in His own throne, which is at the right hand of the Father. The psalmist proclaimed, 'The Lord [the Father] said to my Lord [the Son], "*Sit at My right hand*, till I make Your enemies Your footstool".' Psa 110:1. The apostle Paul rejoiced, in his letter to the Hebrews, that we have a great High Priest 'who is *seated at the right hand* of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens'. Heb 8:1.

Jesus Christ is presently seated in His throne, at the right hand of the Father, in the middle of His lampstand churches. He is *walking* among His lampstand churches by *extending* His right hand, with the seven stars, to each lampstand church. Each star in the right hand of Christ represents *the presbytery* of a lampstand church. A presbytery is a fellowship of ascension gift overseers, elders and deacons. We know that there will be more than seven presbyteries in the world. The number seven represents *fullness* and *completeness*.

When we consider the admonition of Christ to the seven presbyteries, we observe that each presbytery was confronted by unique issues. In relation to the specific issues that Christ addressed, every presbytery was called to overcome through their unique participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Jesus finished His admonition to each presbytery with a promise to every overcomer. Notably, in relation to His own throne, Jesus said to the presbytery in Laodicea, 'To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.' Rev 3:21.

In fellowship with the presbyteries in the right hand of Christ, this is the great promise to every overcomer during the church age. When a person is born of the Spirit as a son of God, and is then baptised into the fellowship of Christ's offering, they are raised to sit with Christ *in His throne*, in the heavenly places. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul declared that the Father 'made us alive together with Christ' and 'raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus'. Eph 2:5-6. Similarly, Paul said to the Colossians, 'If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, *sitting at the right hand of God.*' Col 3:1.

Since the Day of Pentecost, the church, as the bride of Christ, has been in travail to bring forth sons of God. Rev 12:2. A child who is conceived to believing parents, who belong to the New Jerusalem, is adopted and born as a son of God while they are still in their mother's womb. Their citizenship is in heaven because, as soon as they are born of God, they are caught up by God *and are seated with Jesus Christ in the Son's throne.*

In this way, the motherhood of the church in bringing forth sons of God has been operative since the Day of Pentecost. However, we know that the apostle John's vision of the church bringing forth sons of God, which is recorded in Revelation Chapter 12, is specifically relevant for the time of the end. We know this because the apostle John did not see the man-child being raised and seated in the Son's throne. Rather, he saw that this company of sons of God will be caught up *to God and His throne.* Rev 12:5.

The Father's throne

Following the vision of Jesus Christ seated in the middle of His lampstand churches, the apostle John recorded, 'After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here,

and I will show you things which must take place after this".' Rev 4:1. We observe that Jesus Himself, with the voice like a great trumpet, highlighted to the apostle John that there will be *a major transition* that will follow the restoration of lampstand churches.

John was immediately caught up in the Spirit to see 'a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne'. Rev 4:2. The throne set in heaven is *the throne of the Father*. The One seated on His own throne is the Father. In his prophetic vision, the prophet Daniel described this time by saying, 'I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days *took His seat*; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. *His throne* was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire.' Dan 7:9. The Ancient of Days is the Father.

Significantly, when the Father takes His seat in the middle of the New Jerusalem, He will shift *the overcoming presbyters* from the Son's throne to His own throne. John saw twenty-four elders seated on twenty-four thrones around the throne of the Father. He said, 'Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.' Rev 4:4. The twenty-four thrones belong to one world-wide presbytery with twenty-four courses. The order of twenty-four was the pattern of administration that belonged to King David's throne, over the whole kingdom of Israel. 1Ch 23-27. In the same way that David appointed specific leaders to oversee each course in his administration, the twenty-four elders may be overseers who belong to the one presbytery, and represent each course of the presbytery, around the Father's throne.

King David prophetically declared that there will be thrones placed in the heavenly Jerusalem. He said, 'For thrones are set there [in the city] for judgement, the thrones of the house of David.' Psa 122:5. The twenty-four thrones that will be placed around the throne of the Father belong to the house of David. In the time of the end, the authority of the house of David to rule over the whole kingdom of Israel will belong to the presbytery with its twenty-four courses. The presbytery will be the shepherds after the Lord's own heart, who will feed the true Israel of God with knowledge and understanding. Jer 3:15. They will feed the entire kingdom of God with the bread of life that is necessary to sustain every believing household in the time of the end.

The table of the Lord

When the twenty-four thrones are placed for the time of the end, the priority of ministry within the true tabernacle will shift from the lampstand to the table of shewbread. The table of shewbread was called 'the table of the Lord'. It was from the table of the Lord that the twelve loaves of bread, which were called 'the bread of Yahweh's presence', were ministered as an offering fellowship between Yahweh and Israel. Exo 25:30. We know that the bread was eaten by the priests in the holy place of the tabernacle. Luk 6:4. This bread was symbolic of the bread of life which is now ministered to us, as a kingdom of priests, by the Spirit of God. Joh 6:32-35,51,57-58,63. The bread of life is also called 'the *hidden manna*'. Rev 2:17. It is the provision of Yahweh for our participation in His *agape* fellowship.

When we consider the table of shewbread in the tabernacle of Moses, the shewbread was placed on the table in two rows, with six loaves in each row. Lev 24:6. Furthermore, we observe that the table itself was capped by 'a double crown'. Exo 25:24-25. This signifies that the Father's rulership over His kingdom in the time of the end will be expressed through 'a double portion' administration. Isa 61:7. Zec 9:12. We recall that the early church was led by the twelve apostles. The twelve apostles proclaimed the word of life as the bread from heaven, to the church in Jerusalem. Act 5:20. Applying the principle of the double-portion, the word of life will be proclaimed by the presbytery with its twenty-four courses, in the time of the end.

In relation to the table of the Lord, the numeric of 12 x 2 is symbolic of the presbytery, with its twenty-four courses, when the Father takes His seat to judge the world. The numeric of 12 x 12 is symbolic of the 144 000 who will be sealed as the firstfruits of the true Israel of God. The Lord is restoring the ministry of the spirit of Elijah in our day to prepare the way for the time when the Father takes His seat, and the Lamb stands up on Mount Zion. When the Lamb stands up, the 144 000 will receive a double portion of this anointing in the same way that Elisha received a double portion of the anointing that rested upon Elijah. 2Ki 2:9. We will consider the significance of the 144 000 further in our next section.

The four living creatures

When the apostle John saw the administration that belongs to the throne of God in the New Jerusalem, he also saw four living creatures *in* the throne of the Father and *around* the throne of the Father. Rev 4:6. The

first living creature was like a lion; the second living creature was like a calf; the third living creature was like a man; and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. Rev 4:7. As we have considered in other notes, the four living creatures comprise all the ascension gift overseers that the Father has given to Christ to reveal and express the four dimensions of His administration. Eph 4:11-12.

The ascension gift overseers belong to Jesus Christ as the Lamb. When Jesus Christ stands up as the Lamb and moves into the middle of the Father's throne, the apostolic administration of Christ will also move with Him into the middle of the Father's throne. The four living creatures are described as being 'in and around the throne', because the apostolic administration *belongs to the Lamb* in the centre of the Father's throne while, at the same time, it is also *part of the presbytery* with its twenty-four courses, around the throne.

The initiative of Jesus Christ, who is the Lamb, is expressed through His apostolic administration in the presbytery. Whenever the four living creatures give 'glory and honor and thanks' to the Father who is seated upon His throne, the twenty-four elders also fall down before the Father and worship Him who lives forever and ever. Rev 4:9-10. The elders proclaim to the Father, 'You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.' Rev 4:11. This is the expression of their worship to the Father as intercessors before His throne, in the time of the end.

The ministry of intercession

In the time of the end the presbytery with its twenty-four courses will be fully engaged in a ministry of worship and *intercessory prayer* before the throne of the Father. The twenty-four elders have harps and golden bowls full of incense. Rev 5:8. The golden bowls of incense belong to the table of the Lord, and they contain the prayers of all the saints. The focus of the presbytery's *intercessory ministry* will be to gather all the saints of God with them, in the fellowship of prayer that belongs to the *agape* meal of Yahweh, at the true table of shewbread.

This ministry of intercession will be essential in the time of the end. We have already entered the beginning of birth pains, which is characterised by a great falling away of Christians from the faith. Mat 24:8. This great falling away, when the love of many Christians will grow cold, will continue into the time of the end. Mat 24:12. Jesus said that there will be many false prophets who will rise up and deceive many. Mat 24:11.

Furthermore, He said that many will become offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Mat 24:10. In the time of the end, the betrayal and persecution that will be experienced by the church will continue to test and purify the motives of those who obey the gospel.

In the same way that Christ prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail in the hour of his trial, the presbytery will be praying for the faith of those who are receiving the bread of life in the hour of their trial. Luk 22:32. Rev 3:10. Grace will be multiplied to many believers through this ministry of intercession so that their faith will not fail. In this way, and through this ministry, a numberless multitude will become true Israelites by being joined to Christ as members of His body. Significantly, the prayer of the apostolic administration and the presbytery in the time of the end will also be *imprecatory prayer*. Imprecatory prayer is an invocation of judgement upon the world.

The throne of God and of the Lamb

As we have considered, the apostle John saw the Father seated upon His throne, the apostolic administration of Christ in and around the throne, and the presbytery with its twenty-four courses around the throne. Most significantly, he then saw Jesus Christ standing up as the Lamb in the middle of the Father's throne. John recorded, 'I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth'. Rev 5:6.

Once the Father places His seat in the middle of the heavenly Jerusalem, Jesus Christ will stand up from His own throne, and will move, as the Lamb of God, into the middle of the Father's throne. From that time onwards, the throne is called 'the throne of God and of the Lamb'. Rev 22:1,3. After Jesus Christ has moved, as the Lamb of God, to the middle of the Father's throne, the Father will give Him the scroll that has been sealed with the seven seals. Rev 5:7. The seven-sealed scroll is the full revelation of the Father's will that has already been accomplished by the offering of Jesus Christ. Heb 10:5-10.

When the Lamb receives the scroll from the right hand of the Father, He will receive the authority to exercise the Father's dominion; to reveal the Father's glory; and to establish the Father's kingdom over all the kingdoms of the world. The prophet Daniel described *the mandate* that the Father will give to Christ, as the Son of Man, by saying, 'To Him was

given dominion, glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.' Dan 7:14.

The scroll is written on both sides, because it is *the full revelation* of both His salvation and His judgement. Rev 5:1. When Jesus Christ begins to open the seals, it will initiate the unfolding judgement of God upon the world, in an irrevocable manner. We observe that when the seals are being opened, the judgement of God will be manifested in the earth in a *quarter measure*. Rev 6:8. When the trumpets are being blown, the judgement of God will be manifested in the earth in a *third measure*. Rev 8:7-12. Rev 9:15. Finally, the seven vials contain *the full measure* of the wrath of God that will be poured out upon Babylon, Antichrist, and the eighth world kingdom. Rev 15:1,7.

After the Lamb has received the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders will bow down before the Lamb and begin to sing a *new song*. They will sing to the Lamb, 'You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.' Rev 5:9-10. It is significant that they declare 'and we shall reign on the earth', because this is the time when the administration of the bride city will be elevated above all the kingdoms of the world. Isa 2:2.

This new song will announce that the time has come for the saints to receive and possess the kingdom. Dan 7:22. The saints, or the elect, will include the apostolic administration of Christ, the presbytery with its twenty-four courses, the 144 000 who are the firstfruits of the true Israel of God, and then the great multitude from every nation. The 144 000, who will receive the seal of the living God in their foreheads after Jesus Christ stands up as the Lamb on Mount Zion, will also sing a new song. Rev 7:2. Rev 14:1,3. It will be a unique song that belongs to their ministry, but it will be in complete harmony with the new song that belongs to the apostolic administration of Christ and the presbytery with its twenty-four courses. We will consider the song of the 144 000 in more detail in our next section.

The tabernacle of God is with men

When the Father places His throne in the middle of the heavenly Jerusalem, and Jesus Christ stands up as the Lamb in the middle of the

Father's throne, the Father will spread His tabernacle over Mount Zion. Once the Father spreads His tabernacle over all the inhabitants of Mount Zion, His tabernacle will 'be with men'. Having described the bride city that has been coming down out of heaven from God since the Day of Pentecost, the apostle John continued by saying that He heard a loud voice from heaven' saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.' Rev 21:3.

Once the Father has spread His tabernacle over Mount Zion, the whole mountain will be called 'the mountain of the Lord's house'. The prophet Isaiah declared concerning this time, 'Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that *the mountain of the Lord's house* shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of God of Jacob; He will teach us of His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.' Isa 2:2-3.

Further to this, the prophet Isaiah described the Father's protection and provision for the inhabitants of Mount Zion in the time of the end by saying, 'The Lord will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering. And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain.' Isa 4:5-6. Significantly, the Father will spread His tabernacle over the entire administration of His throne, as is recorded in Revelation Chapters 4 and 5, prior to the opening of the seals.

During the opening of the seals, there will also be a numberless multitude who will come into the mountain of the Lord's house from all nations. Isa 2:2. We read in Chapter 7 of the book of Revelation concerning this great multitude, 'They are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the centre of the throne will be their Shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.' Rev 7:15-17.

The phrase 'and God will wipe every tear from their eyes' is significantly expanded in John's description of the bride city in Chapter 21 of the book of Revelation. The same loud voice from heaven that proclaimed that 'the tabernacle of God is with men' also proclaimed, '*And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.*' Rev 21:4. When we compare all these Scriptures, we note that John's vision of the bride city, which is recorded in Revelation Chapters 21 and 22, describes the heavenly Jerusalem when the Father spreads His tabernacle over Mount Zion and Jesus Christ stands up on Mount Zion to open the scroll with its seven seals.

The wings of an eagle

This brings us to another important point. When the Father spreads His tabernacle *over every dwelling place* that belongs to Mount Zion, it means that every citizen in the heavenly Jerusalem will be *under the shadow of His wings*. The psalmist declared, 'He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, My God in whom I trust!" For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper and from the deadly pestilence. He will *cover you with His pinions*, and *under His wings* you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.' Psa 91:1-4.

We can compare the provision and protection that we will experience under the shadow of the wings of the Almighty with the way that Yahweh brought the nation of Israel out of Egypt on eagles' wings. Yahweh instructed Moses to say to the nation of Israel when they came to Mount Sinai, 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' Exo 19:4-6.

Yahweh brought the nation of Israel to Himself, on eagles' wings, for *agape* fellowship. The meaning of 'eagles' wings' was clearly demonstrated by the miraculous protection and provision of the Lord for the nation of Israel on their journey in the wilderness. The psalmist declared, 'He spread a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light in the night. The people asked, and He brought quail, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven. He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it ran in the day places like a river.' Psa 105:39-41. Further to this, their sandals

did not wear out on the journey, and the Lord removed the sicknesses of Egypt from them.

In contrast to this, we have not come to Mount Sinai, which is the mountain that burned with fire. Rather, we have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, which is the heavenly Jerusalem. Heb 12:22. Moreover, the church will experience the same miraculous provision and protection in the time of the end. We are reminded that the apostle Paul described both the Lord's miraculous provision *and* the Lord's sovereign judgement that the nation of Israel experienced in the wilderness. He then said, 'These things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, *upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*' 1Co 10:11.

Restating the key point: when the Father takes His seat in the heavenly Jerusalem, He will spread His tabernacle over all the citizens of the spiritual Mount Zion. Furthermore, Jesus Christ will stand up as the Lamb on Mount Zion. He will stand up with the 144 000, who will be sealed as the firstfruits of the true Israel of God, for their unique ministry. The apostle John saw that the fruit of their evangelistic ministry will be a great multitude from every tribe, nation, people and tongue. The great multitude from every nation will be clothed in white priestly robes and they will have palm branches in their hands, signifying that they are ready to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Rev 7:9-17.

We clearly see that the miraculous provision and protection that the nation of Israel experienced in the wilderness will be *the same 'eagle-wing power'* by which the Father will lead the church, through Jesus Christ and His administration, in the time of the end. The church will be carried by the Father's eagle wings all the way to the celebration of the wedding feast, for 3½ years in the wilderness. As a summary statement, we read in Revelation Chapter 12, 'But *the two wings of the great eagle* were given to the woman [the church], so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent'. Rev 12:14.

Chapter 2

The elect from the four winds

The apostle Peter addressed his first letter to 'the pilgrims of the dispersion'. 1Pe 1:1. This literally means '*the elect* sojourners'. Peter was writing to those who were 'elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ'. 1Pe 1:2. The elect are the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, because they have been born of God and then planted by the Father in the fellowship of the body of Christ. Joh 3:3,5. 1Co 12:18. As they walk after the Spirit, by embracing their unique participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, they are being sanctified, by the Spirit, as sons of God. Heb 10:14. Rom 8:14.

The elect are learning the obedience that Christ has already learned for them on His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. Heb 5:8-10. In the fellowship of Christ's seven wounding events, His blood is sprinkling their hearts. Heb 9:14. As the other law is being circumcised from their hearts, they are ceasing from sin. Furthermore, the resurrection power of the life of God in the blood of Christ is equipping them to serve the Father as priests in His temple. Rev 1:5-6. Rev 7:15. In summary, the elect are sons of God who are washing their priestly robes 'so that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the city'. Rev 22:14.

The twelve tribes dispersed abroad

The apostle James also wrote to the elect of the dispersion. He addressed his letter to 'the twelve tribes who are scattered abroad'. Jas 1:1. James was writing to the elect as 'the true Israel of God'. Gal 6:16. He evidently understood the words of Isaiah when he declared, 'Here this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and have come forth from the wellsprings of Judah.' Isa 48:1. We recall that Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, was the father of twelve sons. Judah was one of the sons of Jacob. In this regard, Judah came from the loins of Jacob. So, why did Isaiah say that Jacob came from the loins of Judah?

Jesus Christ was born in the lineage of King David, who belonged to the tribe of Judah. Christ is the Son of Abraham and the Son of David. When Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, the middle wall of separation between the Jews and Gentiles was removed. Eph 2:14-15. On His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, Christ became the end of the old creation and the beginning of the new creation. Rev 1:8. Rev 22:13. He made *one new man* in Himself. Eph 2:15. 2Co 5:17. Gal 6:15. The one new man is the true Israel of God. The members of the body of Christ belong to the true Israel of God, which is also called 'the house of Jacob'.

There are twelve tribes that belong to the house of Jacob that have come forth from the loins of Judah, through Jesus Christ. That is, there are twelve tribes in the true Israel of God. The Jews and Gentiles who belong to the true Israel of God, in Christ, all receive their inheritance among these twelve tribes. This explains why the apostle James addressed his letter to the '*the twelve tribes* which are scattered abroad'. Jas 1:1. As we have considered, the apostle Peter also referred to the true Israel of God as 'the elect in the dispersion'. 1Pe 1:1-2.

Prior to His ascension from the Mount of Olives, Jesus explained to His disciples that they would be scattered among all nations. He foretold that this would happen in various stages when He said, 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.' Act 1:8.

The four winds of heaven

The Scriptures teach us that the elect have been scattered *by* the four winds of heaven and *to* the four winds of heaven. In our present day,

God's elect are scattered among lampstand churches in all nations. As both the apostle Peter and the apostle James clearly identified, the elect are presently in the dispersion. 1Pe 1:1-2. Jas 1:1. They are scattered abroad. In the time of the end, the elect will be gathered *by* the four winds of heaven *from* the four winds of heaven. Jesus proclaimed that, immediately following the opening of the sixth seal, He will send His messengers 'with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect *from the four winds*, from one end of the sky to the other'. Mat 24:31.

It is important that we understand the phrase 'the four winds of heaven'. This is not simply a poetic way of describing the four corners of the earth. We note that there are two important applications of this phrase. In the first case, the four winds of heaven describe the four horsemen in the angelic administration who are used by the Lord to both *scatter* and *gather* His people. In the second case, the four winds of heaven describe the various kingdoms that have ruled over the Gentile nations of the world since the Babylonians. The elect have been scattered among these nations and, in the time of the end, they will be regathered from all of these nations into the kingdom of God.

Let us consider this in more detail. In prophetic vision, Zechariah saw the four winds of heaven as four angelic horsemen. Zec 1:7-11. The horsemen were led by the archangel Michael. He is the angel of the Lord who rides upon the red horse. Zec 1:8,11. Michael said to Zechariah, concerning the horsemen, 'These are those whom the Lord has sent to patrol the earth.' Zec 1:10. In a later vision, the prophet Zechariah saw the four winds of heaven as four angelic chariots. Zec 6:1-8. Each chariot was pulled by horses of a particular colour. The interpretive angel explained to the prophet Zechariah, 'These are the four spirits (lit. 'winds') of heaven, who go out from their station before the Lord of all the earth'. Zec 6:5.

The four winds of heaven stand before the Lord of hosts in heaven, and they also patrol the earth. In this manner, the Lord uses the four winds of heaven to stir up the nations of the world to accomplish His will and purpose. Throughout history, the Lord has used the kingdoms of the world as tools, or instruments, in His hand to both judge and chasten His people. Jer 51:20. For example, we know that the Lord used King Nebuchadnezzar and the nation of Babylon as an instrument in His hand to judge the Jewish nation. Significantly, while Daniel was in exile in Babylon, he saw *the four winds of heaven* stirring up 'the Great Sea' in a prophetic vision. Dan 7:2.

The provocation of the four winds of heaven, under the direction of the Lord, caused four great beasts to emerge from the sea of the nations. Dan 7:3. The beasts represented specific world kingdoms that would rise to prominence from the time of Daniel to the end of the age. The first beast was the Babylonian Empire. The second beast was the Medo-Persian Empire. The third beast was the Greek Empire. The fourth beast was different from the other beasts. It represented both the Roman Empire *and* the seventh world kingdom. In the book of Revelation, the seventh world kingdom is likened to a dragon with seven crowned heads and ten horns. Rev 12:3.

The important point is that the Scriptures also refer to *these world kingdoms* as 'the four winds of heaven'. For example, the Lord declared to Elam, through the prophet Jeremiah, 'I will bring upon Elam the four winds from the four ends of heaven, and will scatter them *to all these winds*; and there will be no nation to which the outcasts of Elam will not go.' Jer 49:36. In this prophetic statement, we note that the outcasts of Elam were scattered *by* the four winds of heaven, and they were also scattered *to the four winds of heaven*. In relation to being scattered to the four winds of heaven, this evidently refers to *all the Gentile nations*. The Lord said, 'There will be no nation to which the outcasts of Elam will not go.'

Interestingly, it is the Greek Empire that is most closely associated with this phrase 'the four winds of heaven'. In another vision, the prophet Daniel saw the Greek Empire as a male goat with a great horn between its eyes. Dan 8:5. When the great horn was broken, it was replaced by 'four notable horns'. The four notable horns came up *towards the four winds of heaven*. Dan 8:8. Following this, *a little horn* came out of one of the notable horns. Dan 8:9. The little horn grew all the way up to the host of heaven because it was empowered by Satan from the heavenly places. Dan 8:10-12. Satan regained access into the heavenly places during the reign of the Seleucids, who gained ascendancy over the Greek Empire because of the corruption of the continual offering within the Jewish nation at that time.

The Greek Empire spread to the four winds of heaven and *received dominion* from the heavenly places. Dan 7:6. The angel Gabriel explained to Daniel concerning the little horn, 'His dominion shall be a great dominion'. Dan 11:5. Since the time of the Seleucids, the kingdoms of the world, as the four winds of heaven, have been empowered by Satan, from the heavenly places, to exercise *dominion* over the messengers and the

people of God. It was revealed to the prophet Daniel that the messengers of God will be trampled by the rulers of the world for a period of 2300 years. Dan 8:13-14. When the apostle Peter wrote to 'the elect in the dispersion' in his day, he was addressing many believers who were experiencing persecution under the Roman Empire.

Having understood the words of Jesus concerning the judgement and destruction of the earthly temple and the city of Jerusalem, Peter urged all the Christians to leave the city of Jerusalem before the time of this sovereign judgement. Mat 24:1-2. He taught the early believers that the earthly temple was *no longer their temple*, and that the earthly Jerusalem was *no longer their city*. In his first letter, Peter clearly proclaimed that Jesus Christ was the chosen and precious Cornerstone of a new temple and a new city. 1Pe 2:4,6-8. As sons of God, we are being built up as living stones in the true temple, which is the body of Christ. We are called to be a holy priesthood in this spiritual house, offering up spiritual sacrifices to God through our participation in the offering of Christ. 1Pe 2:5.

It is likely that the apostle Peter personally led many of the Christians from Jerusalem all the way down to the region of Babylon. We know that he wrote his first letter from Babylon. 1Pe 5:13. There is no reason to suspect that he was using this as a code word for Rome, as some commentators have suggested. Peter was evidently accompanied by many of the elect, including John Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark on his behalf. Peter concluded his letter by passing on the greetings of the elect in Babylon to the elect in all the other regions. 1Pe 5:12-14. The early apostles evidently maintained their relational connection to all the elect in the dispersion.

As we have considered, the elect who had been scattered to the four winds of heaven from the early church in Jerusalem, were *firstfruits Christians* who belonged to the twelve tribes of the true Israel of God. This description applies to *all firstfruits Christians* who have been scattered to the four winds of heaven, as part of lampstand churches, for the entire church age. The 144 000, who will receive the seal of the living God in their foreheads when the Father takes His seat and the Lamb stands up on Mount Zion, belong to *this same order of firstfruits*. In the book of Revelation, we read that the 144 000 have been redeemed from among men as 'firstfruits to God and to the Lamb'. Rev 14:4.

Holding back the four winds

We have considered the function of the four horsemen, as the four winds of heaven, to stir up the nations and to scatter the elect among the nations. Significantly, we read in the book of Revelation that the four horsemen will ride again in the time of the end. Rev 6:1-8. However, in the time of the end, they will ride to bring all the ungodly nations to judgement, and to gather the elect from every nation into the kingdom of God. Most significantly, Jesus Christ will personally lead the horsemen, riding upon the white horse. Rev 6:2. Rev 19:11-16. He will be accompanied by all the elect of God, who are likened to the armies of heaven, riding on white horses with Him. Rev 19:14.

We know, from the prophetic vision of Zechariah, that the rider of the red horse will be Michael, who is the angel of the Lord. Zec 1:7-12. He will be accompanied by his angels. We read in the book of Revelation that a great sword will be given to him. Rev 6:4. When Michael rides forth on the red horse, peace will be taken from the earth. This will be the beginning of a great world war in the time of the end. When the rider on the black horse rides forth, it will cause severe economic turmoil and hardship in all nations. Rev 6:6. Finally, the rider of the pale horse is called 'Death'. Rev 6:8. He will be immediately followed by Hades. Remarkably, the rider of the pale horse will be given power to kill one quarter of the world's population.

Clearly, when the four horsemen begin to ride forth in the time of the end, the sovereign judgements of God will begin to be manifest in all the earth. As soon as Jesus Christ stands up as the Lamb of God in the middle of the Father's throne, and the apostolic administration and the presbytery begin to sing the new song, the four horsemen will be ready to ride! However, this brings us to a wonderful point. Before the beginning of this irrevocable manifestation of God's judgement in all the earth, there will be *a brief pause*. In obedience to the command of Christ, the four living creatures will *hold back the four winds of heaven* until Christ has sealed the 144 000 with the seal of the living God in their foreheads. Rev 7:2-3.

The apostle John recorded that he saw '*four angels* standing at the four corners of the earth, *holding the four winds* of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree'. Rev 7:1. The four angels standing at the four corners of the earth are the four living creatures, which represent the apostolic administration of Christ. Rev 4:6. As we have been considering, the four winds are the four horsemen.

We know that this vision reveals the events that will happen in the heavenly places *immediately before the opening of the seals*, because the four living creatures are *holding back the horsemen* before they begin to ride. The horsemen are under the command of the four living creatures, who then have the mandate to call each of the four horsemen to ‘come’ and ride forth into the earth. Rev 6:1,3,5,7.

The seal of the living God

The apostle John saw the four angels holding the four winds. He then saw ‘another angel ascending from the east, *having the seal of the living God*. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, “Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads”.’ Rev 7:2-3. The seal of the living God is the name of the Father. Rev 14:1.

The apostolic administration and the presbytery with its twenty-four courses, who will be seated around the throne of the Father in the time of the end, will have already received this seal in their foreheads. We know this because Jesus Christ said to the presbytery in Philadelphia, ‘He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. *I will write on him the name of My God* [the Father] and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.’ Rev 3:12.

However, before the opening of the seals, Jesus Christ will seal a further 144 000 brethren with the seal of the living God in their foreheads. In the same way that the seven stars is a symbolic number of presbyteries in the right hand of Christ, we can also consider the sealing of the 144 000 to be a symbolic number of firstfruits. When Jesus Christ stands up as the Lamb on Mount Zion, it refers to *all the elect* who will stand with Him as the firstfruits of the true Israel of God. Rev 4:1. However, in relation to the judgement of the eighth world kingdom, the 144 000 will also be *a finite number*, and it may well be *a literal number* as a representative group of all the elect. We know that the 144 000 will remain in the city of Jerusalem to support the ministry of Moses and Elijah, while *the rest of the church* is nourished and protected in the wilderness. Rev 14:1-3. Rev 15:2-3. Rev 12:6.

Notably, during the Jewish exile in Babylon, the prophet Ezekiel saw this same angel with the seal of the living God as ‘a man clothed in linen’. When the Lord took hold of Ezekiel, in the Spirit, and transported him

back to the earthly Jerusalem, he saw six men from among the angelic administration who had charge over the city. Eze 9:1-2. Each of the men had a battle-axe in his hand. He then saw another man *clothed in linen*. Eze 9:2-3. Considering that he was clothed in high-priestly garments, it is reasonable to conclude that the man clothed in linen was a theophany of Jesus Christ. Significantly, the man had a writer's inkhorn at his side.

The Lord God instructed the man clothed in linen to 'go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it'. Eze 9:4. This is a remarkable instruction. The citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, who are walking blamelessly before the Lord, will be those who mourn with godly sorrow when the iniquity that still resides in their own heart is revealed to them by the Lord. Furthermore, as those who are meeting Christ eye to eye, and therefore 'seeing as He sees', they will also be those who mourn and lament when they observe the idolatry that is still present within Christ's lampstand churches. Rev 2:6.

In his letter, the apostle James identified many expressions of idolatry that were present among the early believers. For example, he addressed the hypocrisy of the forgetful hearer, the sin of partiality, the presumption of faith without obedience, the poisonous nature of some conversations, the demonic nature of wisdom from beneath, the adulterous nature of friendship with the world, the corruption of entrepreneurialism, and the deceitfulness of wealth. James summarised his admonition by saying, 'Let your "Yes" be "Yes", and your "No" be "No", lest you fall into judgement.' Jas 5:12. There is only *one culture* of first love in the body of Christ, and the proliferation of every other religious culture is an abomination that causes the violation of sanctification and fellowship.

Speaking to all those who continued to embrace and normalise other religious cultures, the apostle James said, 'Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.' Jas 4:8-10. In his day, Ezekiel was the only one who was left standing in the sanctuary who mourned and lamented, or sighed and cried in prayer, because of the abominations that were being committed in the city. Eze 9:4. Likewise, he

was the only one who interceded in prayer for the glory of God to return to Israel after His judgements upon the nation were fulfilled. Eze 9:8.

In the days of Ezekiel, the Lord God instructed the men with the deadly weapons to slay every person who had not received the mark on their forehead. Eze 9:4-6. This was a complete judgement upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Highlighting that the entire city had come under the judgement of the true altar of incense, the Lord God asked the man who was *clothed with linen* to go in among the wheels under the cherubim and to fill his hands with coals of fire. Eze 10:2. He was then instructed to scatter the coals of fire from the altar of incense all over the city. Eze 10:2. We observe a clear parallel between this account and John's vision in the book of Revelation.

The apostle John saw this angel ascending from the east, before the opening of the seals, with the mark or *the seal of the living God*. Rev 7:2. He then saw the same angel again, ministering at the true altar of incense when the seventh seal was opened. He said, 'Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, *filled it with fire from the altar*, and threw it to the earth.' Rev 8:3-5.

In Ezekiel's vision, the coals of fire from the altar of incense were spread all over the city of Jerusalem. The apostle John saw that the coals of fire from the altar of incense will also be spread over the whole earth. Rev 8:5. This will be the outcome of the imprecatory prayer of the saints who have received the seal of the living God. The judgement of God upon the seventh world kingdom will begin when the seals are opened. The trumpets will then announce the judgement of the administration of Babylon that has ruled over all seven world kingdoms. Our key point is that before the judgements that belong to the seals and the trumpets begin, the Lord will seal the 144 000 with the seal of the living God in their foreheads.

The 144 000 on Mount Zion

This brings us to an important point concerning the sequence of the book of Revelation. When Jesus Christ stands up as the Lamb on Mount Zion, the 144 000 will be sealed, and then they will be seen standing *with Christ* on Mount Zion. The apostle John recorded, 'Then I looked, and

behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, *and with Him* one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads'. Rev 14:1. In relation to the chronology of the book of Revelation, the vision of the 144 000 standing with the Lamb, which is recorded in Chapter 14, immediately follows the events that are described in Chapter 5, when the Lamb stands up on Mount Zion. Rev 5:6. Rev 14:1.

As we have already considered, the 144 000 will be sealed as the firstfruits of *the true Israel of God*. The true Israel of God is *the new creation*, which includes both Jew and Gentile in the body of Christ. Eph 2:14-19. Gal 6:15-16. We know that Jesus Christ was born in the lineage of Judah, through Mary. With this in view, the prophet Isaiah declared that the Israel of God has come from the loins, or the wellsprings, of Judah. Isa 48:1. The true Israel of God includes all the sons of God who are the members of the body of Christ. Jesus Christ is the Seed of Abraham. The sons of God who are the members of Christ's body, have also become the true sons of Abraham. Gal 3:29.

We know that the 144 000 will include 12 000 from each of the twelve tribes of the true Israel of God. Rev 7:4-8. Notably, when we read the list that is recorded in Revelation Chapter 7, we observe that the tribe of Judah is listed first. The prophet Zechariah declared, 'The Lord will save the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall not become greater than that of Judah.' Zec 12:7. The 144 000 includes the firstfruits of the Jewish nation, who will be regrafted into Jesus Christ as the rich root of the olive tree. Rom 11:17,24.

The 144 000 are part of the elect of God who will be blameless in their ministry as they serve Christ, as the Lamb of God, after He stands up to rule on Mount Zion. John declared that 'no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless'. Rev 14:5. Furthermore, they will 'follow the Lamb wherever He goes' when He begins to ride on the white horse to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom to all nations. Rev 14:4. The Lord will use the 144 000 to gather the great multitude from every nation into the kingdom, to receive their inheritance among the elect of God.

Speaking about the ministry of the 144 000, the Lord said, 'Return to your stronghold, you prisoners of hope. Even today I declare that I will *restore double to you*. For I have bent Judah, My bow, fitted the bow with Ephraim, and raised up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and made you like the sword of a mighty man.' Zec 9:12-13. In our

previous section, we mentioned that the Lord is restoring the ministry of the spirit of Elijah in our day to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. The 144 000 will receive *a double portion* of this anointing, in the same way that the prophet Elisha received a double portion of the anointing that was on Elijah. 2Ki 2:9. Isa 61:7.

The 144 000 are likened to the bow and the arrows in the hand of Christ when He rides forth on the white horse. Zec 9:13. If the rider of the white horse has *the bow of Judah* in His hand, then we know that there will be a firstfruits from the Jewish nation who will be regrafted into the rich root of the olive tree before the opening of the first seal. Once the first seal is opened, the 144 000 will be the messengers who will be used by Christ as a 'vanguard' when He goes forth to overcome the kingdoms of the world and to gather the great multitude from every tribe, nation, people and tongue into the kingdom of God. Rev 6:2.

The song of the 144 000

The 144 000 will be the vanguard, who will ride with Christ on the white horse, *singing the new song* before the throne of the Father. They will have their own unique prophetic song which will be in harmony with the new song that belongs to the apostolic administration of Christ and to the presbytery with its twenty-four courses. Rev 5:9-10. John wrote concerning the 144 000, 'They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no-one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth'. Rev 14:3.

In the days of King Jehoshaphat, he appointed those who *sang to the Lord* to lead the army into battle. Dressed in holy attire, they went before the army to sing with a spirit of thanksgiving and praise. 2Ch 20:21. Significantly, the Scriptures record, 'When they began singing and praising, *the Lord set ambushes* against the sons of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; so they were routed'. 2Ch 20:22. In the same manner, the 144 000 will be on the forefront of the spiritual battle in the time of the end as they sing their new song. The new song that will be sung by the 144 000 is both the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. Rev 15:3. The song of Moses is a battle song. It proclaims the Lord's triumph in battle.

The song of Moses is both a song of miraculous deliverance and a song of sovereign judgement. It was first sung after the Israelites had been miraculously delivered from the Egyptians by passing through the

Red Sea, and the Egyptian armies had been sovereignly judged in the Red Sea. The song of Moses began, 'I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him. The Lord is a man of war; The Lord is His name.' Exo 15:3. Moses continued, 'Your right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces'. Exo 15:6.

The prophet Isaiah described the song of Moses as a new song that will be sung by the 144 000 immediately before the Lamb opens the seals to release the four horsemen into the earth. When the first seal is opened, Christ Himself will go forth as the rider of the white horse to overcome the kingdoms of the world. Isaiah prophesied, 'Sing to the Lord a new song, and His praise from the ends of the earth ... the Lord shall go forth like a mighty man; He shall stir up His zeal like a man of war. He shall cry out, yes, shout aloud; He shall prevail against His enemies.' Isa 42:10,13. This is the time when the Father will bring all the enemies of Christ under His feet.

The authority to shatter the nations of the world is symbolised by the rod of iron that belongs to Christ. Psa 2:8-9. Rev 19:15. Jesus promised to give the rod of iron to the overcoming presbyteries. He said to the presbytery in Thyatira, 'He who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations - he shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels - as I also received from My Father.' Rev 2:26-27. In fulfilment of this promise, the authority of the rod of iron will, firstly, belong to the presbytery with its twenty-four courses, around the throne of the Father. However, in fellowship with the presbytery, the 144 000 will also possess the rod of iron as authority over the nations. Rev 12:5.

The prophetic songs in the book of Isaiah

Significantly, the prophetic songs that are contained in the book of Isaiah give us great insight into the nature of the new song that will be sung by the 144 000 when they stand up with the Lamb on Mount Zion. As part of one of these prophetic songs, the Lord proclaimed that He had chosen Cyrus to perform His good pleasure, by destroying Babylon and allowing the Jews to return to their homeland and the city of Jerusalem. Isa 48:14-15. It is remarkable to consider that Isaiah prophesied concerning Cyrus and the return of the Jewish people from captivity in

Babylon, over 150 years before it happened. Even more remarkably, it was the prophetic word of the Lord through Isaiah that *created those events*.

The Lord declared to the people, 'I have made you hear new things from this time, even hidden things, and you did not know them. They are *created now and not from the beginning*; and before this day you have not heard them, lest you should say, "Of course I knew them".' Isa 48:6-7. This is an amazing point. Events are created in history through the prophetic word. We know that Christ, as the Creator, is the source of the prophetic word. Through the prophet Isaiah, He has called the true Israel of God to sing the prophecy of the gathering of the Jews and Gentiles into the kingdom of God, through the one body of Christ.

For example, the Lord instructed the Jews to return from Babylon with 'a voice of singing'. They were to proclaim, through song, 'The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob! And they did not thirst when He led them through the deserts; He caused the waters to flow from the rock for them; He also split the rock, and the waters gushed out.' Isa 48:20-21. As they returned from Babylon, they were to sing of the Lord's miraculous provision in the wilderness. However, the focus of this prophetic song extended well beyond the return of the Jews from Babylon.

As we have been considering, when Jesus Christ stands up as the Lamb on Mount Zion, He will firstly gather the 144 000 to Himself. The 144 000 will be sealed with the name of the Father in their foreheads, as the firstfruits of the true Israel of God. Their work is to gather the Jews and the fullness of the Gentiles, from every nation, into the kingdom of God for the fulfilment of the Feast of Tabernacles. The book of Zechariah tells us that one third of the Jewish nation will come into the kingdom of God. Zec 13:9. The book of Revelation tells us that there will also be a great multitude which no man can number from every tribe, nation, people and tongue. Rev 7:9.

We read, concerning Jesus Christ as the Servant of God, and the 144 000 who will be with Him in the time of the end, 'And now the Lord says, who formed Me from the womb to be *His Servant*, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel is gathered to Him (For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and My God shall be My strength), indeed He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth".' Isa 49:5-6.

Speaking about both the Jews and the Gentiles who will be gathered into the kingdom of God, the prophet Isaiah continued, 'And they shall feed along the roads, and their pastures shall be on all the desolate heights. They shall neither hunger nor thirst, neither heat nor sun shall strike them; for He who has mercy on them will lead them, even by the springs of water He will guide them. I will make each of My mountains a road, and My highways shall be elevated. Surely these shall come from afar; look! Those from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinim.' Isa 49:9-12. The land of Sinim refers to China, in the east.

We note that this passage is directly quoted in the book of Revelation concerning the great multitude from every tribe, nation, people and tongue. Rev 7:16-17. The great multitude will be clothed in white garments. They will also have palm branches in their hands, because they will be ready to celebrate the true Feast of Tabernacles. Rev 7:9. The great multitude from every nation will come into the mountain of the house of the Lord to receive an inheritance among the twelve tribes that belong to the true Israel of God. Isa 2:2. The prophet Ezekiel declared, 'They shall be to you as native-born among the children of Israel; they shall have an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall be that in whatever tribe the stranger dwells, there you shall give him his inheritance.' Eze 47:22-23.

The 144 000 on the sea of glass

When the church celebrates the wedding feast in the wilderness for 3 ½ years, during the reign of Antichrist in the world, the 144 000 will remain in the city of Jerusalem to support the ministry of Moses and Elijah. Rev 11:1-3. Rev 12:6,14. They will proclaim the final judgement of God upon the eighth world kingdom. The apostle John saw the 144 000 standing on the sea of glass mingled with fire. Rev 15:2. The sea of glass is the true laver. Rev 4:6. Exo 24:10. It is the fellowship of the word of Yahweh, which is the river of the water of life that flows from the throne of God, through the Lamb, that will increase and multiply forever. Rev 22:1. When the laver is mingled with fire, it reveals the word of Yahweh that will be operative in eternal judgement.

The 144 000 will stand on the sea of glass mingled with fire as those who have been given the victory over the beast, over his image, over his mark, and over the number of his name. Rev 15:2. They will sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb to the Father who is seated upon His throne. They will sing to the Father, 'Great and marvellous are Your

works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship You, for Your judgements have been manifested.' Rev 15:2-4. It is this song that will initiate the outpouring of the seven vials, which contain the fullness of the wrath of God, upon Antichrist and the eighth world kingdom, in the first hour of his reign. Rev 15:1,5-8.

Chapter 3

The parable of the wedding feast

Jesus used several different parables during His earthly ministry to focus on the importance of the fellowship of the *agape* meal. In these parables, Jesus often described the fellowship of the *agape* meal as ‘*a wedding feast*’. Luk 14:8. When we consider these parables, it is important to understand that there are *four phases* to the wedding feast before the coming of the new heavens and new earth.

In our first section, we considered the apostle John’s vision of the bride city, which is recorded in Revelation Chapters 21 and 22. We know that the marriage between Christ and the church occurred on the day of His crucifixion. In the same way that the Lord God formed the woman from the side of Adam in the beginning, the Father fashioned the church from the physical body of Christ to become His bride. Gen 2:21-23. Joh 19:34. Eph 5:30-32. From the Day of Pentecost, the New Jerusalem has been coming down out of heaven from God as a bride adorned for her husband. Rev 21:2,10.

The apostle John saw that the wall of the bride city is built upon the foundation of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Rev 21:14. In the early church in Jerusalem, the apostles publicly proclaimed the word of life from Solomon's Portico within the temple precinct. This word was the foundation of the *agape* fellowship for all the believers in Jerusalem. We read in the book of Acts that 'they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers'. Act 2:42. The key point is that, as they continued in the fellowship of the *agape* meal, they were participating in *the first phase of the wedding feast*.

The *first phase* of the wedding feast is the fellowship of the *agape* meal for the church age. The *agape* meal is a public and house to house fellowship. The early believers in Jerusalem gathered 'daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart'. Act 2:46. Significantly, the fellowship of the *agape* meal continued among the elect when they were dispersed, or scattered, from Jerusalem. Jas 1:1. 1Pe 1:1. The elect have been scattered to all nations, in the fellowship of lampstand churches. Furthermore, the Lord's lampstand churches are still subject to the administration of Babylon that rules over the nations of the world.

The *first phase* of the wedding feast began on the day of Pentecost and will continue for the duration of the church age. When the Father places His throne in the middle of the heavenly Jerusalem, and Jesus Christ stands up as the Lamb, it will initiate *the second phase* of the wedding feast. During this phase, the administration of the Father's throne will be revealed through the apostolic administration of Christ; the presbytery with its twenty-four courses; and the 144 000, who will be sealed as the firstfruits of the true Israel of God. During the *second phase* of the wedding feast, the mountain of the Lord's house will fill the whole earth. It will be established with dominion over all the kingdoms of the world. Isa 2:2.

We read in the book of Isaiah concerning the *second phase* of the wedding feast, 'The Lord will create over *the whole area of Mount Zion* and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory *will be a canopy*. There will be a shelter to give shade from the heat by day, and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain.' Isa 4:5-6. Likewise, we read in the book of Revelation, 'They are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His

tabernacle over them. They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the [middle] of the throne will be their Shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.' Rev 7:15-17.

The Father will stretch His tabernacle, or temple, over the entire city of the heavenly Jerusalem and all its inhabitants. For this reason, there will be no temple in the middle of the New Jerusalem. John said, concerning the city, 'I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.' Rev 21:22. When the Father spreads His tabernacle over Mount Zion, it means that every assembly, or dwelling place, that belongs to the heavenly Jerusalem will be under the shadow of His wings. Psa 91:1. The citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem will begin to experience the same miraculous provision and protection that the nation of Israel enjoyed when the Lord God brought them out of Egypt on eagles' wings. Exo 19:4. Rev 12:14.

Two groups will participate in *the second phase* of the wedding feast when the Lamb will lead them to 'the springs of the water of life'. Rev 7:17. The *first group* comprises all the overcomers from the seven lampstand churches who will move from the Son's throne to the Father's throne when the Father takes His seat. Jesus said to the presbytery in Philadelphia, 'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.' Rev 3:10. Furthermore, He said, 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore.' Rev 3:12. The *first group* of overcomers will include the apostolic administration, the presbytery, and the 144 000, who will be sealed as the firstfruits of the true Israel of God. Rev 7:4. Rev 14:1-5.

The *second group* who will participate in the *second phase* of the wedding feast is the 'fruit' of the evangelistic ministry of the church when the gospel of the kingdom is proclaimed in all nations. Mat 24:14. It is the great multitude which no man can number from every tribe, nation, people and tongue. Rev 7:9. The great multitude will come out of the great tribulation, which is the hour of testing that will come upon the whole world during the opening of the seals. The apostle John saw that this great multitude will be clothed in white garments because they have embraced their unique participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Rev 7:13-14. The palm branches in their hands signify

that they are ready to join the fellowship of the wedding feast as the true Feast of Tabernacles.

The *third phase* of the wedding feast is the time when Jesus Christ will nourish and protect the church in the wilderness for 3½ years during the reign of Antichrist in the world. Rev 12:6,14. During the blowing of the trumpets, Christ will send His messengers to gather His elect from the four winds of heaven in readiness for this phase of the wedding feast. The parable of the wise and foolish virgins reveals that there will come a time when the door to this phase of the wedding feast will be shut. Mat 25:10. The door to the *third phase* of the wedding feast will be shut when the altar of incense in the true temple is measured, and the outer court is delivered to the Gentiles to be trampled underfoot for 3½ years. Rev 11:1-2.

The *fourth phase* of the wedding feast will occur during Christ's millennial reign on the earth. The wedding feast during the millennium will include the resurrected believers from all ages, because it will commence after the day of resurrection. Jesus was referring to this phase of the wedding feast when He said that 'many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven'. Mat 8:11. This phase of the wedding feast will include the final group of martyrs who will be killed during the emergence of the eighth world kingdom. Rev 20:4. In response to the final evangelistic proclamation of Christ's messengers, this group of martyrs will be killed when they refuse to worship the beast and his image, and they refuse to receive his mark on their foreheads. Rev 14:9-13. Rev 13:11-15.

Following the *fourth phase* of the wedding feast in the millennium, the present heavens and earth will be dissolved by fire, and the Lord will establish the new heavens and new earth. Rev 20:11-15. Rev 21:1. The new heavens and the new earth will be the context in which the righteousness of sonship, in the *agape* fellowship of Yahweh, will increase forever and ever. 2Pe 3:12-13. Isa 9:7. Dan 9:24. We could refer to this never-ending, and ever-increasing, *agape* fellowship as *a fifth and final* manifestation of the wedding feast. We know that there will be no multiplication of identities through the order of procreation in the new heavens and the new earth. However, the multiplication of sonship, as the fruit of Christ's marriage to the church, will continue forever, using the *generative offering mechanism* that belongs to the finished mystery of God. Rev 10:3-4.

The stone which the builders rejected

Before we consider the central parable of the wedding feast, which is recorded in Matthew Chapter 22, it will be helpful to consider the parable of the wicked vinedressers, which is recorded at the end of Matthew Chapter 21. Both of these parables are part of *the same discussion*. In the parable of the wicked vinedressers, the owner of the vineyard sent servants to collect the fruit from those who had leased his vineyard. Mat 21:33-34. However, the vinedressers beat, killed, and stoned the various servants who had been sent to them. Mat 21:35-36.

When the landowner sent his son, they also seized the son, and killed him, so that they could seize the vineyard. Mat 21:37-39. Jesus concluded the parable by asking the question, 'When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?' Mat 21:40. After the people answered His first question, He then asked another question, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief Cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes"?' Mat 21:42. Psa 118:22-23.

We know that the stone which the builders rejected is Jesus Christ. He was rejected by the religious and political leaders of the Jewish nation. He was delivered up by them to be crucified at the hands of the Romans. However, through His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, Christ became the chief Cornerstone of the true temple and the heavenly Jerusalem. Isa 28:16. 1Pe 2:6. It was the Father who glorified Christ to be the Head of His body, which is the true temple in heavenly places, and to be the Head of His church, which is 'Jerusalem from above'. Eph 1:22-23.

Applying this parable directly to the Jewish leaders, Jesus declared, 'Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.' Mat 21:43. The new nation that is to bear the fruits of sonship in the kingdom of God is the church as the true Israel of God. The apostle Peter declared, concerning the church, 'But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, *a holy nation*, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.' 1Pe 2:9-10.

Jesus continued His discussion about the Cornerstone, with the Jewish leaders, by saying, 'And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on

whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.’ Mat 21:44. We know that Peter was a religious zealot until he watched Christ being bruised and beaten for *his* iniquity in the court of Caiaphas. Luk 22:54-62. During this hour of trial, *Peter failed as a zealot*. He fell upon Christ as his Rock and the Cornerstone of the true temple. When Jesus turned to look at Peter, he remembered the word that had been spoken to him by Christ, and he began to weep with ‘godly sorrow that leads to repentance’. Luk 22:61-62. This relational interaction with Christ was Peter’s conversion. Luk 22:32.

Having been converted from a religious zealot to become a true friend and messenger of Christ, Peter began to strengthen his brethren. Joh 21:15-19. In his first letter, the apostle Peter admonished all his brethren to forsake the religious practices that belonged to the earthly temple, and to turn to Christ who is the Head of the true temple. He proclaimed that we are called to be ‘living stones, who are being built up as a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ’. 1Pe 2:4-5. We know that most of the Jewish nation refused to ‘fall upon Christ’ in this manner. The rock then fell on the Jewish nation, and the city of Jerusalem when it was destroyed by the armies of Prince Titus in AD70. Mat 24:1-2.

In the same way that the rock hit the Jewish nation in AD70, it will hit the seventh world kingdom in the time of the end. In King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, which was explained to him by the prophet Daniel, the seventh world kingdom was represented by the two feet and the ten toes of the great statue. Daniel explained to the king, ‘You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.’ Dan 2:31-35.

Daniel further explained the meaning of the stone by saying to the king of Babylon, ‘And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.’ Dan 2:44. Likewise, the prophet Isaiah declared, ‘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.’ Isa 2:2.

The parable of the wedding feast

With this background in view, we will now consider the parable of the wedding feast that is recorded in Matthew Chapter 22. This parable covers the entire period from the earthly ministry of Jesus, all the way to the invitation to join the third phase of the wedding feast in the wilderness at the end of the age. Jesus likened the kingdom of heaven to a certain king who had arranged a marriage for his son. In this parable, the king is evidently God the Father. The Son is Jesus Christ. He is the Bridegroom. We know that the bride is the church. The apostle Paul proclaimed, 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.' Eph 5:25.

Jesus said that the king sent out his servants to call all those who were invited to the wedding, but *they were not willing to come*. Mat 22:3. This first group of messengers refers to all the prophets of old who were sent by God to the nation of Israel. The last and greatest of all these prophets was John the Baptist. It was John the Baptist who announced that Jesus Christ had come as the Bridegroom. John described himself as 'the friend of the Bridegroom'. Joh 3:29. The nation of Israel did not receive the ministry of John the Baptist and, likewise, they rejected the ministry of Christ Himself. Jesus said, concerning the Jews, 'How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but *you were not willing!*' Mat 23:37.

Significantly, following the offering of Christ, the Father sent out *other servants* to the Jewish nation. In contrast to the first group of messengers who invited the Jews to a future wedding feast, the next group of messengers were instructed to tell the people that everything was *now ready*. The king said to this next group of servants, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and *everything is ready; come now* to the wedding feast".' Mat 22:4. The wedding feast was ready because the offering of Christ was complete. The marriage between Christ and the church happened on the day of His crucifixion.

The first manifestation of the bride city coming down out of heaven from God, as a bride adorned for her husband, was seen on the Day of Pentecost. Rev 21:2. The second group of servants included the twelve apostles who were the living foundation of the New Jerusalem. It also included all of the elect, who continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, in fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers. Act 2:42. Many of the Jews did accept the invitation to join the fellowship of the

agape meal. Act 6:7. However, the response of most of the religious leaders and of the Jewish nation was the same as it had been prior to the offering of Christ. They rejected the invitation to come to the wedding feast.

Specifically, Jesus said that many 'made light' of the invitation. Mat 22:5. This could also be translated that they 'paid no attention to it'. They did not recognise or appreciate the significance of the *agape* meal; nor the imperative for them to accept the invitation. Rather than responding with faith and obedience to the call of God through His messengers, they 'went their ways'. They were preoccupied with their own goals and activities in the world. For example, one went to his own farm and another went to his business.

In addition to those who were ambivalent toward the invitation to the wedding feast, there were religious zealots who treated the servants spitefully, and killed them. Prior to his conversion, we know that Saul was one of those zealots who was 'breathing threats and murder' against the believers in the early church. Act 9:1. Stephen said to the Jews, 'You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers.' Act 7:51-52.

The book of Acts recorded that Stephen was the first martyr who was killed by the Jews following the offering of Christ. In the parable, the king was furious with those who persecuted and killed his messengers. He sent out his armies, destroyed the murderers, and burned their city. Mat 22:7. We note that this was fulfilled in history when the armies of Prince Titus destroyed the city of Jerusalem in AD70. The city was literally burned with fire. The destruction of Jerusalem was the judgement of God upon the Jewish nation.

The king said to the servants who had been sent initially to the Jews, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited *were not worthy*.' Mat 22:8. The king's statement that they 'were not worthy' reminds us of the words of Paul to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch. After the word that he proclaimed in the Jewish synagogue was rejected, he said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves *unworthy of everlasting life*, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.' Act 13:46.

In the parable, when those who had been invited were not worthy, the king instructed his servants to go into the highways and to invite every person whom they could find, to come to the wedding feast. Mat 22:9. They gathered both the bad and the good. Mat 22:10. Mat 13:48. The result is that the wedding hall was filled with guests. Throughout the entire church age, God the Father has been sending messengers into the world to invite all men to join the fellowship of the *agape* meal. However, it is in the time of the end that there will be a great harvest. A great multitude which no man can number from every tribe, nation, people and tongue will come into the kingdom of God. Rev 7:9.

No wedding garment

The great harvest is the highpoint of the parable. However, the parable does not conclude with the wedding hall being filled with guests. When the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man who was not wearing a wedding garment. Mat 22:11. The king said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment? The man was speechless.' Mat 22:12. The king then instructed his servants to bind the man hand and foot. He told them to cast the man into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Mat 22:13. We know that Jesus was referring to the eternal torment that will be experienced by all those who are cast into the lake of fire for eternity.

The man who had no wedding garment had responded to the invitation to the join the wedding feast, but he did not accept or embrace the culture of the *agape* meal. He did not belong to the elect. Mat 22:14. Rather, he was guilty of the sin of presumption as he sat down to eat and drink at the feast 'without fear'. Jud 1:12. The presumption of this man demonstrates that he did not fear God. He did not honour or respect the king. We are reminded that God addressed this same sin of presumption among the priests and the Jewish nation. He declared through the prophet Malachi, 'A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honour? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence?' Mal 1:6.

In a similar way, the prophet Isaiah described the judgement of God that will come upon the daughters of Zion who are 'haughty'. In this passage, 'the daughters of Zion' refers to all the religious organisations and denominations that have rejected the fatherhood of God and the headship of Christ. They have 'covered the shame of their nakedness' with all kinds of religious beliefs and practices. He said, '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.

Isaiah summarised the judgement of God upon the daughters of Zion by saying, ‘Her gates shall lament and mourn, and she being desolate shall sit on the ground. And in that day, seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, “We will eat our own food and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by your name, to take away our reproach”.’ Isa 3:26-4:1. Evidently, they desire to be called by the name of the Lord, but they refuse to embrace the fellowship of the *agape* meal. Rather than receiving ‘the bread from heaven’ which Christ gives us from the tree of life, they prefer to eat ‘the bread’ of their own doctrines. Likewise, instead of receiving priestly garments from Christ, they will prefer to be clothed with the religious projections that they have made for themselves. This means that they will not be clothed with wedding garments; nor will they be able to participate in the wedding feast.

Chapter 4

The parable of the great supper

The Gospel of Luke recorded that Jesus went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath. Luk 14:1. This should have been an *agape* meal. However, we know that many of the Pharisees had already conspired to kill Jesus and were trying to ensnare Him. They may have used the case of the man with dropsy as a test to see what Jesus would do. Jesus asked the lawyers and the Pharisees who sat at the table, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?' Luk 14:2-3. When they remained silent, He called out the man and healed him. In this interaction, Jesus demonstrated that the fellowship of the *agape* meal is the context for the ministry of restoration and healing.

Having healed the man with dropsy, Jesus then used this same meal as an opportunity to address those who are invited to an *agape* meal, and those who are hosting an *agape* meal. He began by addressing those who were invited to an *agape* meal, because He noticed that those who had been invited to this meal had desired to sit in the best places at the table. Luk 14:7. He said to them, 'When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honourable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, "Give place to this man," and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place.' Luk 14:8-9.

We note that Jesus called the *agape* meal in this parable ‘a wedding feast’. This highlights the point that this parable is a *complementary parable* to the parable of the wedding feast that is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. They address the same issue. We recall that, in the parable of the wedding feast, Jesus illustrated the sin of presumption by referring to the man who did not have a wedding garment. In this parable, he addressed *the same sin* by speaking to those who presume to ‘sit in the best places’ at the table. This presumption demonstrates that they are not aware of their own sanctification; nor do they honour and respect the sanctification of others. Php 2:1-4. Rom 12:3.

When you host an agape meal

Jesus then turned his attention to the man who invited him to the Sabbath meal. He said, ‘When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbours, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.’ Luk 14:12-14. Jesus was emphasising that the *agape* meal is not a social occasion; and nor is it a ‘trading’ exercise. All trading dynamics are a violation of the fellowship of the *agape* meal.

The *agape* meal is fellowship in the tree of life. It is fellowship in the word of the Father that is proclaimed to us as the fruit of the tree of life in each season. When this word is in our heart and in our mouth in the fellowship of the *agape* meal, it ministers grace for edification and healing to one another. This includes the maimed, the lame and the blind. Referring to this fellowship, the apostle Paul said, ‘Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will *give grace* to those who hear.’ Eph 4:29. Likewise, the wise man proclaimed, ‘A wholesome [lit. ‘curative, healing’] tongue is a tree of life.’ Pro 15:4.

Jesus explained that a son of God who participates in the fellowship of an *agape* meal in a worthy manner, not looking to derive any earthly benefit in this lifetime, will be repaid in the resurrection. They will be raised at the last day. We recall that Jesus said to the multitude who followed Him after He fed the five thousand, ‘Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.’ Joh 6:54. It appears that one of the guests at the dinner table in the Pharisee’s home received a flash of illumination as Jesus spoke about the resurrection at

the end of the age. He suddenly declared, 'Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!' Luk 14:15.

Jesus responded to this man by telling him the parable of a great supper. He said, 'A *certain man* gave a great supper and invited many, and sent *his servant* at supper time to say to those who were invited, "Come, for all things are now ready".' Luk 14:16-17. In this parable, we can liken the 'certain man' to God the Father. We can also liken the 'servant' to Jesus Christ. We note that Jesus referred to a singular servant in this parable whereas, in the parable of the wedding feast, He referred to the sending of *many* servants. The prophet Isaiah declared that Jesus Christ would come as *the Servant* of the Father. Isa 42:1.

I have bought a piece of land

In the parable of the great supper, those who were invited by the servant all began to make excuses. The first man said to the servant, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' Luk 14:18.

This man had evidently made a choice to buy a piece of land that did not previously belong to him. His decision may have been motivated by his own desire for a certain lifestyle; to increase his generative capacity; or even to help someone else who had fallen upon hard times. Regardless of the motive, it was the expression his own initiative. The man said to the servant, '*I have bought* a piece of ground.'

We observe, however, that the expression of the man's freedom of initiative to purchase this land led him into bondage. That is, the ownership of this land immediately imposed certain obligations upon him. We don't know whether these obligations were real or perceived, but we know that the bondage upon the man was real. He said to the servant, 'And *I must go* and see it.' He probably viewed this course of action as being a legitimate expression of 'accountable stewardship'.

Believing in the veracity of his own decisions and the expression of his own stewardship, the man felt fully justified in refusing the invitation that he had received from the servant. Pro 14:12. He did not recognise the importance of the invitation to the *agape* meal. Jer 17:5-6. Nor did he appreciate the implications of rejecting this invitation. The man believed that he had legitimate grounds for being excused from the supper. He expected that the servant would readily grant his request. This presumption demonstrated his pride.

Our allotted portion

Let us consider the nature of this man's situation in more detail. Before the Israelites went into the promised land, the Lord commanded Moses to say to the people, 'When you come into the land of Canaan, this is the land that shall fall to you as an inheritance - the land of Canaan to its boundaries.' Num 34:2. Having identified the overall boundaries of the land, He appointed Joshua and Eleazar as the men who would divide the land among the tribes of Israel. Num 34:17. Each tribe was to receive a unique portion of the land as their inheritance. Furthermore, the Lord appointed a leader from each tribe who would divide the tribe's inheritance among the families who belonged to the tribe. Num 34:18-29.

In this way, each family was to receive an inheritance in the land. The land was then to be passed down from generation to generation. The Lord instructed the nation, 'The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me.' Lev 25:23. However, if a person became poor, and needed to become the servant of another, they were able to sell their land until the year of Jubilee. The price was determined in relation to the year of Jubilee, which occurred every fifty years. Lev 25:15-16. That is, as the year of Jubilee approached, the price of the land diminished. The price needed to be reduced because, when the year of Jubilee arrived, the land was to be returned to its original owners.

If a person became poor because they did not steward their inheritance properly, they did reap the consequences of their failed stewardship. However, the year of Jubilee ensured that this judgement did not continue upon the family for generation after generation. Every fifty years, the land was to be restored to its original owners. Lev 25:13. The year of Jubilee restored the lines of sanctification that belonged to each family, according to the original division of the land.

It is important to understand this principle, because the man in the parable of the great supper had evidently bought a piece of land that did not belong to him as an inheritance. Even if he had bought this land to help someone who had become poor, it would only belong to him *temporarily*. The land had not been given to him by the Lord. His desire to make the most of the purchase, while he had the opportunity, was nothing more than an expression of covetousness. Luk 12:15.

This principle draws our attention to an important point. The legitimate stewardship that belongs to a son of God in this world will not impede

that person's capacity for participation in the fellowship of the *agape* meal. If a person's perceived responsibility, or stewardship, in the world has become an impediment to their participation in the *agape* meal, it is the sure indication that they have gone beyond the limits of their sanctification. Such a person has become entangled with 'a yoke of bondage'. Gal 5:1.

When the man in the parable received the invitation to the *agape* meal, he should have seen that his land purchase was outside the lines of his sanctification because it was preventing him from accepting the invitation. Rather than excusing himself from the fellowship of the *agape* meal, he should have delivered himself from the entanglement. He should have sold the land, because it was not part of the inheritance that he had received from the Lord.

They sold their lands

When we consider the fellowship of the church in Jerusalem, we observe that many of the believers did sell parcels of land. They then laid the proceeds at the apostles' feet so that the proceeds could be distributed to those who needed it. We read in the book of Acts, 'Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need'. Act 4:34-35.

This verse does not mean that everyone immediately sold the land and the house where they were living. We know that, in the early years of the church in Jerusalem, not all of the believers were homeless; nor did they live together in a kind of commune. Rather, they listened to the apostles publicly proclaiming the word of life in Solomon's Portico, and then they met daily from 'house to house' for the fellowship of the *agape* meal. The book of Acts recorded, 'So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread *from house to house*, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart'. Act 2:46.

Initially, the believers were probably selling any additional land or houses that they had accumulated as investments. Having been born as sons of God and baptised into Christ, they knew that their citizenship was now in heaven. Php 3:20. Heb 11:9-10. They readily relinquished the desire to accrue property or wealth in this world. In stark contrast to the man in the parable of the great supper, they willingly pruned to the reality of their own sanctification as sons of God. This was part of their

commitment to the fellowship of the *agape* meal. Significantly, the proceeds from the sale of these additional properties ensured that there was no need or lack among the believers in the church in Jerusalem. Act 4:34-35.

Following the death of Stephen, which may have been a few years later, great persecution arose against the church in the region of Judea and Samaria. Act 8:1. At that time, all the believers in Jerusalem were scattered to other regions. Only the twelve apostles remained in Jerusalem. There is little doubt that the believers who were scattered during this persecution would have been thankful that they had already sold land, houses and many of their possessions.

As all the believers were scattered from Jerusalem, some of them may have been able to sell their own property as they left. However, others gladly accepted the seizure of their own property and remaining possessions. They had already resolved the issue that their possessions did not belong to them. They had been given to them to steward for the sake of the body of Christ. In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul was probably referring to many of these early believers when he said, 'For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.' Heb 10:34.

We know that, after the conversion of the apostle Paul, the church in Jerusalem did experience a season of peace, and it began to grow again. Act 9:31. However, the next group of believers in Jerusalem were required to walk in the same steps of faith and to resolve the reality that they had no lasting inheritance in the city of Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed in AD70 by the Roman armies who were led by Prince Titus. This was the Lord's judgement upon the Jewish nation, because they refused to turn from their religious abominations, which included animal sacrifice, to accept Christ's invitation to join the fellowship of the *agape* meal.

I have bought five yoke of oxen

The second man said to the servant, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Luk 14:19. This man was not a farmer who had personally trained his own oxen for use on his own farm. He was most likely a businessman who was running teams of oxen as a contractor. He had just purchased another five yoke of oxen. We don't know whether he was intending to use all five yoke of

oxen to pull a very large plough or whether he wanted to mobilise another five smaller ploughs, using one yoke of oxen for each plough. Either way, this purchase was a significant expansion to the generative capacity of his business.

The man needed to test the reliability of the oxen before he could use them in his business. He needed to know whether they were well trained and would respond appropriately to his commands or to the commands of his staff. He needed to do this promptly; otherwise, he would incur all of the extra costs to maintain the oxen, without being able to use them to generate income. Perhaps he had also borrowed money from the bank to purchase the five yoke of oxen, and was under pressure to generate income to cover his loan repayments.

The man believed that he had a good economic reason for purchasing the oxen, and he also had valid reasons for needing to test them. He obviously felt justified in excusing himself from the fellowship of the *agape* meal when he was invited by the servant. However, by refusing the servant's invitation, it demonstrated what he most valued and what he served. Even if he was not consciously motivated by a love of money, he clearly valued the success of his business and had become enslaved by the needs of his business. Mat 6:21. He served the market forces within his industry, which Jesus broadly described as 'mammon', and he despised God by rejecting Christ's invitation to the *agape* meal. Mat 6:24.

We can contrast the response of the businessman in this parable, with the response of Elisha when he was called by Elijah. Elisha was also a businessman who likely went from field to field as a contractor with multiple teams of oxen. We read in the Scriptures that he was ploughing a field with *twelve yoke of oxen*. He may have had employees who were driving the various pairs of oxen so that they could plough this large field in a short period of time, before moving onto the next field. Elisha was probably directing his employees or servants while, at the same time, he was personally working with the twelfth pair of oxen. 1 Ki 19:19.

We can only assume that it had been appropriate for Elisha to run this business for a season of his life. This may well have been a family business because of the way that Elisha asked to kiss his father and mother farewell. 1 Ki 19:20. Significantly, as soon as Elijah called him to become his disciple, he willingly let go of his share in the business and all of its potential future earnings. In contrast to the man in the parable of the great supper, the response of Elisha demonstrated that he was a man who served God, and not mammon. Mat 6:24. As soon as there was a

conflict between his business and the sanctification of his calling as a disciple, he delivered himself hastily from the business. 1Ki 19:21.

I have married a wife

The third man said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' Luk 14:20. This seems like an unusual excuse! Why would getting married preclude the man from accepting the invitation to the great supper? Couldn't he simply bring his wife along with him? Why did the man resolutely believe that this was not an option? While this man's excuse does appear to be unusual, when we read the account of *the first marriage* in the Scriptures, we find that it is the oldest excuse of all. Getting married was not the man's problem. The problem was the fallen culture of his marriage covenant.

We have been considering the Fall, and its impact upon the marriage of Adam and Eve, for many years. Eve was deceived when she engaged a conversation with Satan at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Gen 3:1-5. In the fellowship of Yahweh, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil belongs only to God, who is the origin of the creation, and the source of the identity and name of every person. Eve was deceived by Satan into believing that she could use the fruit from this tree as a resource to be *like God* in the context of her own marriage and family.

Eve expressed her desire to be *like God* when she reached out her hand to take the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In a state of delusion, she then presumed to take the place of God by offering this same fruit to her husband. Gen 3:6. Eve genuinely believed that the food which she gave to Adam would feed his identity as a person, make him look good, and give him the necessary wisdom to be successful in relation to his work in the world. Eve did not mean to cause hurt or to inflict harm upon her husband. We could say that her action was well-intentioned, but it was the expression of a self-centered motivation and deceived perspective.

Significantly, as Adam took the fruit from her hand, Eve perceived this to be a verification of her aspiration to be *like God*. This is an important point. In the first case, it was not eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, *herself*, that fed Eve's religious projection. Rather, as Adam ate this fruit from her hand, it fed the projection that she had created for herself as being the source of life and direction in her marriage and family. We know that this transaction had no substance for Adam or Eve because, as soon as he ate the fruit, their eyes were opened,

and they immediately became aware of their alienation from the fellowship of Yahweh. Gen 3:7.

Motivated by shame and fear, they worked together to make coverings for themselves in a desperate attempt to establish their own autonomous household that was self-sufficient, and no longer reliant upon fellowship with Yahweh at the tree of life. Gen 3:7. Furthermore, when they heard the Father walking in the garden, looking for fellowship with them, they both hid themselves from Him among the trees of the garden. Gen 3:8. The Father called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?' Gen 3:9. We could liken this question from the Father, as He walked through the garden, to *the invitation* that Christ, as the Servant of God, now extends to every man to come and join the fellowship of the *agape* meal.

Notably, we observe that the man's response to the servant in the parable of the great supper *was the same* as Adam's response to the Father in the beginning. When the Father asked Adam if he had been disobedient, he replied, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.' Gen 3:12. In the same way, the man replied to the servant, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' Luk 14:20. The simple reason why the man could not come to the great supper is because he had chosen to eat what his wife was now feeding him, instead of receiving the Lord's provision in the *agape* meal. He had committed himself to serving his wife's agenda and meeting her expectations.

The failure to choose sonship

In this present season, we have been considering *why* Adam chose to eat the food that was offered to him by his wife. In contrast to Eve, we know that he was not deceived. 1Ti 2:13-14. If Adam was not deceived, it means that he made a deliberate and accountable decision. The key point is that Adam had not yet *chosen* to be a son of the Father. He had not yet *chosen* to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, even though he was the beneficiary of fellowship with the Lord every day at the tree of life. Mat 4:4. If Adam had already made this choice, he would not have viewed Eve's proposition as an alternative. We note that once a choice has been made, it immediately rules out all alternatives.

The failure to *choose sonship* was the underlying problem for the man in the parable of the great supper, as well. He had not chosen to be a son of God and to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Rather, he had *chosen* to eat the food that his wife offered him, and to serve her agenda, because it was more *palatable* for him. He believed that

he would receive the necessary energy from this food to achieve his goals and aspirations in the world, including a happy and harmonious marriage. 1Co 7:33. He was reliant upon his success in the world, and upon his wife's affirmation, to verify the projection that he had created for himself.

There may have been many more reasons why this man considered his wife's food to be a more palatable option than accepting the invitation to the great supper. Perhaps he was an *independent man* who did not want to be constrained by obedience to the word of God and to the relational obligations of true friendship among brethren. Perhaps he was a *lazy man* who did not want to apply himself to the word of God or to the offering that is required in speaking in the fellowship of the *agape* meal. Perhaps he was a *proud man* who believed that he would be humiliated because of his inadequacy if he took his place at the Lord's table. Perhaps, he was a *cowardly man* who did not want to risk any form of conflict with his wife.

Regardless of this man's profile or his marital circumstances, we can be assured of one foundational truth. When the servant invited him to the great supper, the word was accompanied by the prevenient grace of God. As the invitation was extended to him, the prevenient grace of God released the man from his bondage to the law of sin in his own life and in his marriage. He was completely free to choose whether he would accept or reject the invitation. Gal 5:1. Joh 8:36. The assertion that he had no choice, when he said to the servant, 'Therefore, I cannot come', was a denial of the truth and a repudiation of the grace of God. The word that had been proclaimed to him was imbued with the faith and grace that was necessary for him to accept the Lord's invitation. Rom 10:17.

Jesus used the parable of the great supper to highlight that He is, personally, as the Servant of God, extending an invitation to every person to join the fellowship of the *agape* meal with Him. In this regard, we are reminded of the words of Jesus to the presbytery in Laodicea. He said, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.' Rev 3:20. There is no reason or valid excuse for any person to harden their heart and reject this invitation. It is sobering to consider the way in which Jesus finished the parable. He said that the Father, who is likened to the master, will proclaim, 'I say to you that none of those men who were invited [and made excuses] shall taste My supper.' Luk 14:24.

Chapter 5

The parable of the minas

Jesus used the parable of the minas and the parable of the talents to describe the necessity for every son of God to be *a faithful servant* in the administration of lampstand churches while they wait for His coming. The coming of Christ will commence when the Father places His throne in the middle of the heavenly Jerusalem and spreads His tabernacle over all those who belong to Mount Zion. Rev 4:2. Rev 21:3. *At that time*, Jesus Christ will stand up as the Lamb on Mount Zion to receive, from the Father, the authority to possess the kingdom of God. Rev 5:6. This will commence *the season of His coming*.

The parables of the minas and the talents both describe the coming of the Lord to *reward* and *judge* His servants. When Jesus Christ stands up on Mount Zion to commence His return, the time will arrive for His servants to possess the kingdom of God and to begin to reign upon the earth. Dan 7:18. We know that there will be many *seasons of visitation* during our lives. However, we are fast approaching the time when Jesus Christ will stand up on Mount Zion and then *call* all His servants to give an account for their stewardship. Jesus said, 'Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.' Rev 22:12.

The coming of the kingdom

The context of the parable of the minas is significant. Jesus proclaimed this parable because He was 'near Jerusalem' and the disciples thought that 'the kingdom of God would appear immediately'. Luk 19:11. We know that the city of Jerusalem was the political and religious capital of the nation of Israel. Many of the Jewish people were waiting for a Messiah who would deliver the nation from the dominion of the Roman Empire. We recall that the great multitude who followed Jesus, after He fed the five thousand with five barley loaves and two fish, were planning to seize Him by force to make Him their king. Joh 6:15.

However, Jesus was not travelling to *the earthly Jerusalem* to establish the kingdom of God on the earth. Rather, He was travelling to Jerusalem to suffer and to die. Mat 16:21. Following His resurrection from the dead, Jesus then travelled to a far country when He ascended from the Mount of Olives and sat down at the right hand of the Father in heaven. The Father said to Him, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.' Psa 110:1. Jesus began the parable of the minas by saying, 'A *certain nobleman went into a far country* to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.' Luk 19:12.

Jesus Christ is presently seated at the right hand of the Father and is waiting for the time when the Father takes His seat. The Father will place His throne in the middle of the New Jerusalem and then spread His tabernacle over the whole of Mount Zion. Jesus Christ will then *stand up* as the Lamb and move into the centre of the Father's throne. The Father will give Christ the seven-sealed scroll which contains the full revelation of the Father's will for the time of the end. Rev 5:5-7.

When Jesus Christ receives the seven-sealed scroll from the Father's hand, He will receive the right to exercise the Father's dominion; to reveal the Father's glory; and to establish the Father's kingdom over all the kingdoms of the world. The prophet Daniel described this time by saying, 'I was watching in the night visions, and behold one like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.' Dan 7:13-14.

The opening of the seals will commence *the return of Christ*, riding upon the white horse, accompanied by 'the clouds of heaven'. Mat 24:30. Rev 1:7. 'The clouds of heaven' are the witnesses of Christ who will belong to the administration of the Father's throne in the time of the end.

Heb 12:1. The clouds of heaven are those who will participate in the ministry of the true altar of incense in the heavenly places. They will be fully engaged in the ministry of worship and intercession before the throne of the Father. Rev 5:8-10.

Multiplying the mina

The parable of the minas highlights that there will be *a long period of time* between the ascension of Jesus Christ to the Father's right hand, and the time when He stands up in the middle of the Father's throne to receive the kingdom. During this intervening period, the servants of Christ are required to 'do business' with the mina that they have received from Him. The nobleman, 'Called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, "Do business until I come".' Luk 19:13. The phrase, 'do business', literally means to 'busy yourself'. Each servant was required to diligently apply themselves to the multiplication of the mina that they had received.

A mina was a common measure of weight or value in the days of Jesus. In the parable, the mina represents *the authority* that belongs to the name of each servant. The name of every son of God is written in the tree of life. Rev 22:19. The inner bark of the tree of life is the papyrus of the book of life. The name of a son of God is the substance of their sonship. Even after a person has been born as a son of God, by the Holy Spirit, the substance of their name continues *to be fed to them* through the fruit of the tree of life. The fruit of the tree of life is the bread of life. 'The bread of life' is the word of the Father, which is proclaimed to us by the messengers of Christ. Mat 4:4.

The word that has been proclaimed to us becomes our spiritual sustenance and life, by the Holy Spirit, as we digest it in the fellowship of the *agape* meal. Joh 6:63. It is important to recognise that we do not receive the substance of our name *apart from* this ongoing fellowship at the tree of life. This will be true for eternity. Even in the new heavens and the new earth, we will never graduate beyond the fellowship of the tree of life, to become independent sons of God. The idea that we can be *independent*, or *self-sufficient*, sons of God is a great deception, and belongs to the lie of Satan. It is iniquity, and it leads only to *death*.

It is important for us to understand this point in relation to the parable of the minas, because we receive *the authority* to express our name only in this same fellowship at the tree of life. There is no authority apart from *fellowship*. Even more specifically, *our authority* to express our

name as a son of God is commensurate with *our obedience* to the word of the Father that is proclaimed to us by the messengers of Christ. Jesus clearly explained that *His obedience* to the Father was *His authority*. Joh 12:49-50. He said, concerning His life, 'No-one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This *commandment I received from My Father.*' Joh 10:18.

The source of authority as a son of God is obedience to the commandment of the Father. Furthermore, the expression of authority as a son of God is to lay down life to reveal another, in the fellowship of the body of Christ. In the fellowship of Christ's offering, a son of God will then receive their life again by the power of His resurrection life. This is how the mina, as the authority of the name of a son of God, multiplies. It is expressed by laying down life to reveal another, and then it is multiplied by resurrection life! In stark contrast to this, the world believes that authority is derived from a position, and that it is exercised by exerting power, influence or control over others. Luk 22:25. It is important that we understand the difference between a worldly, or carnal, view of authority, and a spiritual understanding of authority.

It is equally important, from a spiritual perspective, that we recognise the authority of the name that belongs to each servant in the Lord's house. Mar 13:34. Heb 13:7,17. The Lord has given authority to some of His servants to function as overseers. Luk 12:42. The obedience of the servants who belong to Christ's apostolic administration is expressed as they lay down their lives, in the fellowship of a presbytery, to reveal Christ and His word. The obedience of presbyters is expressed as they lay down their lives, within the fellowship of a lampstand church, to reveal the word of Christ's apostolic administration. The obedience of individual members of a lampstand church is expressed as they lay down their lives, among their brethren, to reveal and multiply the word of the presbytery. This is not a hierarchy. It is a fellowship of offering in which the word of Christ grows and multiplies as the bread of life for every son of God. Act 12:24.

A carnal view of authority

In this fellowship of offering at the tree of life, the authority of the name of every son of God is revealed and expressed as they obediently lay down their life to reveal another. Significantly, if this fellowship of laying down life to reveal another is not understood, it will lead to corruption. A person who believes that they have received authority, *without obedience*,

will often presume to exercise rulership by exerting power or control over others. 2Co 1:24. Jesus said to the disciples at the last supper, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called "benefactors". But it is not this way with you.' Luk 22:25-26. A carnal, or worldly, expression of rulership is the expression of empowerment; not the expression of obedience.

This is a common problem for a person with a ministry position or function, who is not submitted or obedient to the fellowship of the presbytery. They may become empowered by their association with the presbytery, and then presume to 'lord it over' the faith of others within their congregation. Likewise, it is a common problem for a man who claims to have received headship from Christ, but who does not heed or obey the word of the presbytery, and does not participate in the fellowship of the *agape* meal. Rather than serving his family by promoting and facilitating the discussion of the word of present truth in his home, such a man will often presume to rule over his family in the name of his own carnal view of headship. Gen 3:16.

Significantly, on the other side of the coin, if a person does not understand the true expression of the mina within the administration of Christ, they will view *all expressions of authority* with cynicism and suspicion. Looking through the veil of their own carnal fear, they will be unwilling to trust or to submit to the servants whom the Lord has appointed as overseers in His house. This may even lead to the belief that the call to be obedient to the word of the Father that is proclaimed by the presbytery, is a covert attempt to conquer or to exploit them. Isa 8:11-13. This kind of paranoia demonstrates that the person is still in bondage to the fear of death. Heb 2:14-15.

The worthless servant

In the parable of the minas, this bondage to the fear of death was demonstrated by the servant who hid his mina in a handkerchief. When he was asked to give an account, the servant said to the nobleman, 'Master, here is your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief; *for I was afraid of you*, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down and reap what you did not sow.' Luk 19:20-21. This is a remarkable statement. The servant was not afraid of losing his mina; nor was he afraid of not multiplying the mina. Rather, he confessed that *he was afraid of the nobleman!* He was afraid of Christ, because he viewed His administration, which works only by laying down life to reveal another, to be an exploitive mechanism!

The nobleman responded to the servant by saying that he was judged by *his own confession of fear*. Luk 19:22. As we have considered in other notes, the 'handkerchief' in this parable refers to the face cloth that was laid as a veil across the face of a dead body. When a person refuses to turn to the Lord in response to His word to 'look upon Him whom they have pierced', and to mourn for their own sin, they remain dead in their trespasses and sins. Furthermore, they will continue to view every person and every circumstance through the face cloth, or the veil, of their own fear. 2Co 3:16. One of the primary manifestations of this fear will be their suspicion, and their innate recoil, when the gospel is proclaimed requiring them to present themselves for obedience in the administration of Christ. Rom 6:16-22.

The nobleman affirmed to the worthless servant that his administration does work by laying down life to reveal another. Jesus Christ is revealed by the members of His body who are obedient to Him, and by the word of the Father that is proclaimed by His messengers. The outcome of this obedience is eternal life! Jesus declared, concerning His own obedience, '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. And *I know that His command is everlasting life.*' Joh 12:49-50. In the same way, the apostle Paul proclaimed that the outcome of our obedience is our sanctification as sons of God and, in turn, the outcome of our sanctification is eternal life. Rom 6:22.

The carnal citizens

The servants in the parable of the minas belong to the administration of Christ in the heavenly places. However, the parable also refers to 'other citizens'. We read, 'But *his citizens* hated him, and sent a delegation after him'. Luk 19:14. In the first case, 'other citizens' may refer to the inhabitants of the earthly Jerusalem or the citizens of the Jewish nation. We know that the Jews did reject Jesus Christ as their Messiah, and they likewise rejected the administration that was established by Him as the foundation of the heavenly Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Rom 10:1-3.

However, more specifically, the phrase, 'his citizens', implies that this was a group of believers who claimed to *belong to Christ*. Mat 7:22-23. The citizens in the parable recognised the sovereignty of Christ, but they did not recognise, or accept, the servants who had received authority from Him when He ascended on high. Having rejected the administration of Christ, they were not citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. Heb 12:22-25.

They either had *never been raised* with Christ or they had *fallen* from the heavenly places. Rev 2:5. It is notable that the citizens recognised the sovereignty of the nobleman, but that they 'hated him' because they refused to submit to his servants.

It is likely that the other citizens professed to love the nobleman, but their unwillingness to receive the nobleman's servants demonstrated that they preferred their own form of administration. We are reminded of the words of Jesus, 'No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.' Luk 16:13. The citizens evidently preferred their own form of administration and, hence, *hated the nobleman*, because, as soon as the nobleman left, they appointed their own delegation. They believed that their own delegation, or eldership, could function as an intermediary between themselves and the nobleman. Rom 10:6-7.

In practice, we know that the lampstand churches that were established by the apostle Paul in the region of Asia quickly rejected the administration that Christ had appointed for the church age. It is remarkable to observe how quickly the believers in the region of Asia fell from the heavenly places. They had fallen away even before the death of the apostle Paul. Paul wrote to Timothy, 'This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me'. 2Ti 1:15. In a similar way, Paul declared in his letter to the Philippians, 'For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they *are the enemies of the cross of Christ*.' Php 3:18.

When Jesus Christ personally admonished the presbytery of each lampstand church, He described those leaders who promote alternative administrations as 'a synagogue of Satan'. Rev 2:9. The synagogue of Satan includes all those who proclaim and follow the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, the doctrine of Balaam, the doctrine of Jezebel, and the doctrine of the Laodiceans. Rev 2:14-15. Rev 2:20. Rev 3:14-17. When we read the seven letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, it is readily apparent that all believers who remain loyal to the various doctrines that belong to the synagogue of Satan become the *enemies of Christ*.

Jesus said to the presbytery in Pergamum, 'I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold *the doctrine of Balaam*, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold *the doctrine of the Nicolaitans*, which thing I

hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and *will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.*' Rev 2:14-16. In the parable of the minas, Jesus spoke of the judgement that will befall all those who have rejected His administration. When the nobleman returned, he said, 'Bring here those *enemies of mine*, who did not want me to reign over them, and *slay them before me.*' Luk 19:27.

The reward of the faithful servants

In relation to the reward of the faithful servants, we read in the parable of the minas, 'And so it was when he returned, *having received the kingdom*, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading'. Luk 19:15. The first servant reported that the nobleman's mina had produced ten minas. The nobleman said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful *in a very little*, have authority *over ten cities.*' Luk 19:17. In the same way, the servant who produced five minas was given authority *over five cities.* Luk 19:19.

When Jesus Christ stands up as the Lamb on Mount Zion, and receives the right to possess the kingdom from the Father, He will require each of His servants to give an account of their stewardship. The obedience that each servant has learned as a participant in Christ's lampstand churches will determine the authority that they will receive in the kingdom of God. The phase of lampstand churches from the Day of Pentecost to the time when the Father takes His seat is 'the day of small things'. Zec 4:10. The *day of small things* is the time when the messengers of Christ are being trampled in heavenly places, and Christ's lampstand churches are under the dominion of the administration of Babylon in the world.

In relation to the parable of the minas, the time for *rulership* over cities is the time when Jesus Christ establishes the Father's kingdom over all the kingdoms of the world. Dan 7:22. The kingdom of God will fill the whole earth. In the time of the end, the Father will command Christ and the church to 'rule in the midst of Your enemies!' Psa 110:2. This command is not relevant for the millennium or for the new heavens and new earth. It belongs to the time when the New Jerusalem is raised above the kingdoms of the world, but the enemies of Christ *are still outside the gates of the city.* Rev 22:14-15.

Chapter 6

The parable of the talents

Jesus began the parable of the talents in a similar way to the parable of the minas. He said, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man travelling to a far country, who called his own servants and *delivered his goods to them*. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.' Mat 25:14-15. The talents are the 'goods' that belong to Jesus Christ. They describe *His riches* as the Son of God who is the possessor of both heaven and earth. Heb 1:2. Each talent is a specific portion of the inheritance that belongs to Jesus Christ.

To understand the stewardship of talents in the body of Christ, it will be helpful to consider the way in which the promised land was divided and apportioned to all the various families in the nation of Israel as their inheritance. This is a helpful illustration for us because, in the same way that Egypt is symbolic of the world, the promised land is symbolic of the fellowship of the body of Christ in heavenly places. The apostle Paul proclaimed that sons of God, who have been baptised into Christ, have been raised to sit with Christ in the heavenly places. Col 3:1-3. Our citizenship is in heaven. Php 3:20.

The division of the land

The Lord instructed Moses to say to the nation of Israel, 'You shall divide the land by lot *as an inheritance among your families*; to the larger you shall give a larger inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give a smaller inheritance; there everyone's inheritance shall be whatever falls to him by lot. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers.' Num 33:54. Through Moses, the Lord appointed Joshua and Eleazar as the men who would divide the land between the tribes of Israel. Num 34:17. He also appointed leaders from each tribe to further divide the land between each family. Num 34:18,29.

Each family received an inheritance according to their ability to possess and steward the inheritance. That is, a larger family had the natural ability to steward a larger portion of land. Of course, the size of the land was not the only variable. Some of the land would have been situated in fertile plains. Other land would have been situated in the hill country. Some land would have had abundant water, while other land would have been dry and difficult to irrigate. Regardless of the nature of the inheritance, each family was required to both 'fill out' and 'abide within the limit' of the land that they had received from the Lord as their inheritance.

The important point is that *the land itself* was given to each family as the primary resource that was necessary for them to generate increase and multiplication through their own labour. Moses said to the Israelites, 'For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flows out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper.' Deu 8:7-9.

The land was given to each man as the power, or the capacity, to generate increase. Deu 8:18. Significantly, we can compare the division of the land to each family in the nation of Israel with the parable of the talents. There is a direct parallel between the distribution of the land according to the ability of each family, and the distribution of the talents according to the ability of each servant. Mat 25:14-15. For each family in the nation of Israel, *the land was their talent*.

In this regard, we could liken a large family who received a large, flat portion of fertile ground to a servant who received five talents. Likewise,

we could liken a small family who received a small, steep portion of rocky ground to a servant who received one talent. Using the land as the resource, *or talent*, that they had received, each family in the nation of Israel was then required to labour with their own hands to produce increase and multiplication. Each family required wisdom to know how to best steward the land that they had received. For example, a relatively dry hillside may have been a suitable place to plant a vineyard, but not a suitable place to grow wheat or barley.

Whether the land was used for growing agricultural produce, raising livestock, or even digging up raw materials, such as copper, each family was required to labour with their own hands to generate a legitimate product. In the case of agricultural products, each family was required to diligently labour on their land by sowing and reaping. If the people walked in obedience to the Lord's word, He promised to bless the work of their hands by sending the rain for their land in its season. Deu 11:13-15. The early rain was necessary for the seed that had been sown in the ground to germinate, and the latter rain was necessary for the crop to grow to full maturity. Jas 5:7.

Weights and measures

Each family had the right to eat from the harvest that they produced on their own land. 2Ti 2:6. Alternatively, the product that each family produced on their own land could be traded with other families. For example, if a family was using their land as a copper mine, they could trade some of their copper with another family, for barley or wheat to make bread. When the nation of Israel first entered the promised land, the trade between families may have been carried out using a barter system.

As the economy of the nation of Israel grew and developed in the land, they also used *specific weights* of a precious metal, such as silver, to facilitate trade. A shekel, a mina, and a talent were all *specific weights* that could be used for business transactions. Using specific weights to facilitate trade was an established economic practice in the land of Canaan, well before the nation of Israel entered the land. For example, Abraham weighed out 400 shekels of silver, according to the currency of the merchants, to purchase land to bury his wife, Sarah. Gen 23:15-16.

When the nation of Israel came out of Egypt, it appears that the weight of one talent was equivalent to the weight of 3000 shekels. Exo 38:25-26. Knowing that these weights would become essential to the economic

system of the nation, the Lord warned the nation before they entered the land, 'You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a heavy and a light. You shall not have in your house differing measures, a large and a small. You shall have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure, that your days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.' Deu 25:13-15.

The use of specific weights in this manner is significant. It means that the portion of land that was given by God to each family could be valued in relation to a talent. Furthermore, the product that was generated by each family, using the land, could also be valued in relation to a talent. This principle clearly connects the apportioning of land to each family in the promised land, with the parable of the talents. We know that, in the case of the Israelites living in the promised land, the land itself was not multiplying. Rather, it was the generative capacity *of* the land that was producing the multiplication of talents.

If the land that was received by the head of a household did not have the generative capacity to fully support his family, that man needed to work on another man's land to supplement his income. This means that one man was a servant, and another man became his master; or we could say that one man was an employee, and another man became his employer. As an example, Boaz was a wealthy man who, evidently, employed servants to work on his land. It is likely that he also supplemented his full-time staff with contract reapers. Rut 2:3-5.

The Scriptures have much to say about the sanctification of the employer and employee relationship. In his letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul wrote, 'Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.' Col 3:22-24. Likewise, Paul wrote in the same letter, 'Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven'. Col 4:1.

In the agricultural economy of Israel, the land was used to produce tangible products which were valued in relation to specific weights and measurements. The owner of the field was accountable for his own stewardship and had the exclusive right to eat from the fruit that was produced by his field. A labourer who worked in his field was paid wages. This was the case whether the labourer was full-time, part-time, or a contractor who only worked for him periodically. In the parable of the

labourers in the vineyard, we observe that the landowner hired contract labourers on a daily rate. Mat 20:1-2.

The owner of the field also brought his *harvest offerings* to the doorway of the tabernacle of meeting. The harvest offerings included the tithe, the firstfruits and the heave offerings. Moses instructed all the people before they entered the promised land, 'You shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks.' Deu 12:5-6.

In remembrance of the Lord, and in response to His blessing upon their field, each family brought their harvest offerings to the Lord in a spirit of thanksgiving. Significantly, even under the Old Covenant, the purpose of the harvest offerings was the multiplication of *agape* fellowship. Having instructed the people to bring their harvest offerings to the doorway of the tabernacle of meeting, Moses continued, 'And *there you shall eat before the Lord your God*, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the Lord your God has blessed you.' Deu 12:7.

Woe to those who join house to house

The prophet Isaiah declared, 'Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field, until there is no more room, so that you have to live alone in the midst of the land!' Isa 5:8. In this verse, a 'house' describes a family. The sanctification of each house or family is an essential foundation for house to house fellowship. 'Joining house to house' describes *the yoking* of two families together in a manner that is a violation of the sanctification of each household. It means that the field that belongs to one family is added to the field that belongs to another family.

In our modern society, one of the most common ways that 'one field is added to another field' is through the formation of business partnerships. Often, business partnerships are formed because two or more people have complementary skillsets. A partnership is formed in the belief that running a business together will be mutually beneficial for each partner. Immediately, this is a collegial approach to business in the world, not a fellowship approach to accountable stewardship in the kingdom of God.

In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul declared, 'Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?' 2Co 6:14. Clearly, a son of God should never enter a business partnership with another person who does not have the same faith and relational commitment to the fellowship of the *agape* meal in the kingdom of God. If a believer is yoked together with an unbeliever, it is uncleanness. In such cases, the believer needs to obey the command of God the Father, 'Come out from among them and be separate ... do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.' 2Co 6:17.

The apostle Paul left no room for ambiguity in relation to the yoking of a believer and an unbeliever. However, what about partnerships between believers who are equally committed to the fellowship of the *agape* meal? In most cases, this will still mean that one believing household has been unhelpfully joined to another believing household. The proof of this may include confusion or conflict around accountability for business decisions; the freedom of each family to eat from the profit of the business; and the faith of each family to bring offerings to the Lord.

When the prophet Isaiah spoke of 'adding field to field', it is helpful to remember that he was not referring to the 'fields' of believers and unbelievers. He was referring to the fields of believers. He was saying that even believing households, and their respective fields *in the promised land*, must not be joined together in an unsanctified manner. Simply because *two believers* in the kingdom of God have decided to form a business partnership, it does not mean that the arrangement will be consistent with the lines of sanctification that the Lord has sovereignly ordained for each individual family.

When we consider that each family's allotment in the land of Israel was passed down from one generation to the next, we observe that there is scriptural support for *an extended family business*. For example, a business that is run by a father and his adult children is not, necessarily, 'adding field to field'. However, even in *an extended family business*, the lines of sanctification will need to be clearly discussed and understood. This wisdom will be found *only* through fellowship with those who have been given oversight in the body of Christ, and who understand the sanctification of each family member.

Returning to the words of Isaiah, the prophet summarised that the outcome of joining two households together, and adding field to field, is that each family would end up living alone in the land! Isa 5:8. This may

seem like an unusual statement. The prophet was not simply saying that, if one family absorbs all the fields that belong to every other family, they will be the only family left in the whole land. Rather, he was identifying that, if two households are joined together in an unsanctified manner, it will lead to the isolation and alienation of *both* households from the fellowship of the body of Christ. In other words, the loss of sanctification will lead to the loss of fellowship.

It is important to appreciate that the loss of a family's sanctification, when they are unequally yoked to another family in a business partnership, is not simply the outcome of some form of incompatibility between the households and their respective fields. As we have already considered, a business partnership will often be formed because the fields are complementary to each other. Rather, it is the violation of fellowship that brings a family under the judgement of God. This is the significance of the statement, 'woe to those'. When the Lord pronounces 'woe', it is the proclamation of His sovereign judgement.

Isaiah testified that he heard the Lord pronounce judgement on this mode of joining house to house and adding field to field. He heard the Lord say, 'Truly, *many houses* shall be desolate, great and beautiful ones, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield one ephah.' Isa 5:9. Rather than finding multiplication of the grace of sonship within the family, which will be evidenced by an increasing capacity for fellowship, the household will lose all of its capacity for fruitfulness.

The multiplication of the talent

To understand the multiplication of the talent in the New Covenant, it will be helpful to recall the mandate that Adam received from the Lord in the beginning. We know that the Lord God gave him dominion over the entire creation, including over the angelic host and all the animals. Gen 1:26. Psa 8:6. He placed Adam in the garden of Eden to tend and guard it. Gen 2:15. The trees in the garden typified the nations that would grow to full maturity and bring forth fruit in their appointed seasons. Eze 31:8-9. The entire creation was the field that belonged to Adam's mandate. In this regard, the entire creation was, in type, the talent that the Lord had given him to steward as the context for the works of his sonship.

Adam received the wisdom and the grace that was necessary to fulfil his mandate and, hence, to *steward his talent*, through his daily fellowship

with Yahweh at the tree of life. Furthermore, in this same fellowship, he received *the authority* that belonged to his name, even though he had only received his name in adoption. As he continued to walk in obedience to the word of the Lord, in fellowship with Yahweh at the tree of life, he was receiving the authority that was necessary to exercise dominion over creation. If the entire creation was *his talent*, then the authority to exercise dominion over the creation was *his mina*.

When Adam chose to disobey the Lord, and fell from his fellowship with Yahweh at the tree of life, he lost all dominion over the creation. We could say that, in type, he lost both his mina and his talent. Adam lost all connection with the authority of his name. Furthermore, having rejected the fellowship of Yahweh at the tree of life to lay hold of his own knowledge of good and evil, he came under *the curse of the Law*. The curse of the Law is the judgement of God upon all transgression, iniquity and sin. Death entered the world because of Adam's transgression. Rom 5:12. Under the curse of the Law, the world was now subject to time and chance, and in bondage to all the principles that belong to the law of sin. That is, every living organism had been plunged into a desperate struggle for survival.

We recall that the Lord said to Adam that the ground, which had previously been given to him as part of his mandate, or talent, was now *cursed because of his disobedience*. Gen 3:17. Rather than being the context for Adam's fruitfulness, the ground would bring forth thorns and thistles. That is, in bondage to the law of sin, the 'worthless things' would be the most successful as they competed for the limited resource of life. We know that the Lord's statement to Adam became an agricultural reality; thorns and thistles did begin to grow prolifically. However, the Lord was also saying to Adam that, *because of his disobedience*, he now lived in a world where the ungodly would multiply and prosper. The strong would rule over the weak and the rich would exploit the poor.

The offering of Christ

When Jesus Christ came alongside us to join us in our cursed condition and death, He became the embodiment of sin, and then suffered the full wrath of God's judgement, which is the curse of the Law, upon our sin. Rom 8:3. 2Co 5:21. However, even though He became the embodiment of sin, including the law of sin, Christ *never became the slave of sin*. We know that He was not in bondage to the law of sin, because He willingly laid down His life as the expression of His obedience to the Father. Joh 10:18. He did not seek to save His life during *the repeated abuse* that

He suffered at the hands of wicked men on His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross.

On His offering journey, Jesus suffered under the curse of the Law, and at the hands of wicked men who were motivated by the law of sin and were demonically energised by Satan and his spiritual host of wickedness. Luk 24:7. Act 2:23. The good and evil of the Law, with its justice and its curse, was used as a tool in the hands of wicked men to abuse Christ. The collusion between the high priests, the elders of Israel and King Herod then delivered this misappropriated authority to the rulers of Rome. We recall that the Jews proclaimed to Pilate, 'We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die.' Joh 19:7.

In the Praetorium, the Roman soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and placed it upon the head of Christ. They used the reed which they had placed in the hand of Christ as a mock sceptre to drive the thorns into His head. Mar 15:16-20. In so doing, the soldiers crowned Him with the effect of the curse of the Law that had come upon the whole earth because of Adam's transgression. Significantly, in this wounding event, the good and evil of the Law, with its justice and its curse, was removed from the hands of Satan and of man. It was given to Christ when He was crowned in this manner with the curse of their Law, as the king of the Jews. Joh 19:14-15.

Jesus Christ then took the curse of the Law with Him, wearing it as a crown upon His head, from the Praetorium to Golgotha. When the soldiers drove the nails through the hands and feet of Christ, the Law itself, with its justice and cursing, was nailed to the cross. Col 2:14. Now, from the cross, through Christ, the Law is administered as either a blessing or a cursing. If we become *an enemy of the cross*, the Law, with its knowledge of good and evil, becomes judgement upon us from the cross.

The two thieves who were crucified on either side of Christ demonstrate how the Law is now administered from the cross as either blessing or cursing. The unrepentant thief was crucified with Christ as an enemy of the cross. He did not accept that he was dying under the curse of the Law, and that his death was the expression of true justice. Luk 23:39. In unbelief, he continued to die under the curse of the Law, because He did not accept that Christ had become accursed for His sake. Gal 3:13.

In contrast to this, the repentant thief understood the justice and curse of the Law as he died with Christ. Luk 23:40-41. The cross was no longer

the execution of the justice belonging to the knowledge of good and evil, which he had misappropriated for himself as a zealot during his own life. The cross had become the tree of life for him, because he had received the word of Christ and found mercy through repentance. Luk 23:42-43. The word of Christ became *the fruit of the tree of life* that ministered everlasting life to his spirit.

Following His conversation of faith with the believing thief on the cross, Jesus continued to drink the cup that had been given to Him by the Father in the garden of Gethsemane. We recall that Jesus said to Peter at the gate of the garden of Gethsemane, 'The cup which the Father has given Me shall I not drink it?' Joh 18:11. The cup contained the fullness of the wrath of God upon our sin. The prophet Isaiah described it as 'the cup of God's fury'. Isa 51:17. During the three hours of great darkness, Christ drank this cup, right down to its dregs. He drained it out. He took the whole body of sin out into the sea of God's forgetfulness. Rom 6:6. Mic 7:19.

The body of sin was condemned and destroyed in the physical body of Christ as He suffered under the full curse of the Law. Rom 8:3. The broken heart of Christ was the endpoint of His identification with our cursed death. The Father reached down to draw Christ out of the waters of judgement while, at the same time, the body of sin was completely cut off, or circumcised, from Him, to be left in the sea of God's forgetfulness forever. Psa 69:20. Psa 34:18. Psa 18:16. Significantly, Jesus Christ emerged from the waters of judgement as the fullness of the new creation. Even though His physical heart had stopped beating, His physical body continued to be sustained by the power of the resurrection life of God in His blood.

Bringing in everlasting righteousness

The key point is that, while Christ was *draining the cup of God's wrath* on the cross, He was also *filling up the cup of God's righteousness* for every son of God. He was filling up this cup for every son of God by learning our obedience and fulfilling the Father's will for our lives. Heb 5:8. Heb 10:10,14. While He was in the lowest parts of the earth on the cross, Christ completed the works of sonship for every son of God, for all eternity. Psa 88:10-12. This is how Christ brought in *everlasting righteousness*. Dan 9:24. The cup of righteousness that Christ has filled up for every son of God is 'overflowing', because the works of our sonship, and hence the revelation of His righteousness, will

increase forever. Speaking about this cup of righteousness, the psalmist rejoiced, 'My cup runs over.' Psa 23:5.

Having drained the cup of God's wrath, and filled up the cup of God's righteousness, Christ proclaimed, 'I thirst', for the sake of inaugurating the New Covenant. We read in the Gospel of John that 'Jesus, *knowing that all things were now accomplished*, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" ' Joh 19:28. This cry of faith revealed that the Holy Spirit was flowing from His innermost being. Joh 7:37-39. He was *thirsting for righteousness*. Mat 5:6. He desired to drink the cup of the New Covenant with us. Mat 26:29. The New Covenant is our participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering, by the Spirit, whereby the righteousness of God, which Christ has already accomplished for us, is progressively revealed in us. Rom 8:4.

It has been necessary to understand the multiplication of righteousness in the fellowship of Christ's offering, because this explains *the multiplication of the talents*. In the same way that each family in Israel received an allotted portion in the promised land, the talent that we receive in the New Covenant is our allotted portion in the body of Christ. We recall that the promised land was a type of the fellowship of the body of Christ in the heavenly places. Our allotted portion is our unique measure of grace. Eph 4:7. The measure of grace that we receive as a member of Christ will be commensurate with our human identity and our name as a son of God.

When we consider the offering of Christ, we observe that He has drawn alongside us and has become fully acquainted with the cursed condition of our ground. He has *sown Himself* in the likeness of our cursed death through the seven wounding events that He experienced from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. Heb 2:9-10. He has suffered the full pain of every 'thorn and thistle' that we will encounter in our life. He has also suffered the full judgement of God, as the curse of the Law, upon our iniquity and sin. However, because He died our death in obedience to the Father and, by the grace of God, He has turned our 'barren ground' into 'a fruitful field'.

Jesus Christ has already multiplied our talent by bringing forth *the full harvest of our righteousness*. Mat 13:23. The talent that we receive is the unique measure of grace that is necessary for us to fulfil the righteous works that Christ has already accomplished for us. To avoid receiving this grace in vain, we must continually *sow ourselves* in the likeness of His death. Php 3:7-11. That is, we continue to walk in the faith of our

baptism. We know that, if we have been united in the likeness of His death, we will also be united in the likeness of His resurrection. Rom 6:3-5. In the fellowship of His offering, we are receiving an abundance of grace, each day, to be functional and fruitful members of Christ's body.

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul described the multiplication of the talents in very simple terms. He said, 'For as we have many members in one body, but all members do not have the same function ... having then gifts (talents) differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry (deaconing), let us use it in our ministering, he who teaches; in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.' Rom 12:4,6-8. Of course, this is not an exhaustive list. There are many talents, belonging to Christ, that He has divided among His servants for the sake of His body.

Enter into the joy of the Lord

In the parable of the talents, the master said to the servant who had generated a further five talents, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. *Enter into the joy of your master.*' Mat 25:21. This is a most remarkable statement! We know that the joy of the Lord is not a human emotion. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit that we receive from Christ in the fellowship of the *agape* meal. Gal 5:22. The joy of the Lord is *our strength* as we embrace *our weakness* in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Neh 8:10. 2Co 12:9. As sons of God who have been granted access to the tree of life, we are to know the joy of the Lord in all of our circumstances. Jas 1:12.

However, in the context of the parable of the talents, 'the joy of the Lord' also describes the specific time when the faithful servants will *enter into* the joy of the Lord. Specifically, *the joy of the Lord* describes the fellowship of the Feast of Tabernacles, when the Father takes His seat and spreads His tabernacle over every believer on Mount Zion. We recall that the apostle John saw a great multitude, clothed in white garments, from every nation, tribe, people and tongue. Rev 7:9. The great multitude had palm branches in their hands because they were ready to celebrate the true Feast of Tabernacles.

One of the elders explained to the apostle John, concerning the great multitude, 'They are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. They will hunger no longer, no thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and *God will wipe every tear from their eyes.*' Rev 7:17. The key point is that, when God wipes every tear from their eyes, the multitude will enter the joy of the Lord.

The prophet Isaiah declared, concerning the time when the Father takes His seat and the Lamb stands up on Mount Zion, 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" Your watchmen shall lift up their voices, with their voices they shall sing together; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord brings back Zion. *Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem! For the Lord has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem.*' Isa 52:7-9.

There are many prophetic Scriptures which describe the joy of the Feast of Tabernacles in the time of the end. The joy of the Lord, in the Feast of Tabernacles, is the comfort that awaits all those who have looked upon Christ and have mourned with godly sorrow. When Jesus Christ stands up on Mount Zion to initiate the day of God's vengeance upon the world, He will also comfort all those who mourn. Isa 61:2. He will 'console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that He may be glorified'. Isa 61:3.

The prophet Isaiah was speaking about the reward of the overcoming presbyters, the 144 000 who will be sealed with the name of the Father in their foreheads, and the great multitude who will come out of the great tribulation. He declared, 'But you shall be named the priests of the Lord, they shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory you shall boast. Instead of your shame you shall have double honour, and instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. There in their land they shall possess double; *everlasting joy shall be theirs.*' Isa 61:6-7.

Chapter 7

The economy of offering in the New Covenant

The believers in the early church in Jerusalem '*continued steadfastly* in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers'. Act 2:42. Their devotion to these four dimensions of fellowship was evident in their participation in the substance of the continual offering. Equally, the believers in Jerusalem were committed to *an economy of offering* as their participation in the substance of the peace or harvest offerings. The book of Acts recorded that 'all who believed were together, and had *all things in common*, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need'. Act 2:44-45.

Similarly, we read later in the book of Acts, 'Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had *all things in common* ... nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need'. Act 4:32,34-35. The phrase, 'all things in common', does not mean that the believers in Jerusalem were

living in some form of commune. We know that the lines of sanctification that belong to each family are essential for fellowship.

The phrase, 'all things in common', means that every believer recognised that all of their possessions *belonged to the Lord*, and that everything they possessed was available to meet the needs of the body of Christ. For example, the believers willingly, and eagerly, opened their homes for the daily fellowship of the *agape* meal. Act 2:46. The *agape* meal was the context for their fellowship in the apostles' doctrine, as well as being the expression of their hospitality and practical care for one another. Jas 2:15-16. In addition to this organic expression of hospitality and practical care from house to house, the believers also brought their monetary offerings to the feet of the apostles. Act 4:35,37.

In the earliest days of the church, the apostles stewarded the monetary offerings so that they were used to meet the specific needs among the congregation. As the church continued to grow rapidly, it soon became apparent that the apostles needed help to steward the offerings of the people. Act 6:1. The seven deacons were appointed from among the congregation to 'serve the tables' by coordinating the house to house fellowship of the church, and by overseeing the receipt and distribution of the offerings. Act 6:2-3. Remarkably, the outcome of the fellowship of offering in the Jerusalem church was that there was 'no lack' in the congregation. Act 4:34.

The economy of offering among the Gentiles

The apostle Paul further developed this same economy of offering when he established lampstand churches among the Gentiles. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he addressed the purpose of the tithe under the New Covenant. 1Co 9:3-14. Heb 7:1-10. Even though he did not personally exercise this right while he was in Corinth, Paul explained that those who labour in word and doctrine, and serve as deacons, have the right to be supported from the altar. 1Co 9:13. 1Ti 5:17-18. Paul declared that his teaching on the support of ministry workers was consistent with the prophetic Scriptures *and the command of Christ*. 1Co 9:8-9. In summary, Paul said, 'Even so *the Lord has commanded* that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.' 1Co 9:14. Luk 10:7.

The apostle Paul also encouraged the believers in every place to bring thanksgiving offerings. In some cases, the fellowship of offering extended beyond the needs of their local congregation, and even beyond the needs of their own lampstand church. For example, Paul collected a specific

offering from the congregations in the region of Macedonia and the region of Achaia for the support of the saints in Jerusalem. 2Co 9:1-5. In the same faith as that of the early believers in Jerusalem, Paul declared that the goal of this fellowship of offering between congregations was 'no lack'. He said to the Corinthians, 'Now at this time *your abundance may supply their lack*, that their abundance may also supply your lack - that there may be equality.' 2Co 8:14.

In the same way that the early church in Jerusalem needed deacons to steward the offerings within the congregation, Paul also appointed deacons to steward the offerings from lampstand to lampstand. We know that Paul sent Titus, and at least two faithful deacons, to the Corinthians, ahead of time, as representatives of the apostolic administration. 2Co 8:16-24. They were sent to receive and steward the offerings from the people. Paul ensured that all offerings were stewarded with the utmost diligence and care. He said to the Corinthians, 'We have regard for what is honourable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.' 2Co 8:21.

The apostle Paul clearly proclaimed the need for offering, and exhorted the people toward their participation in bringing peace offerings. However, he did not seek to coerce the people to make offering or to manipulate them with false and empty promises. He summarised the necessary motivation for offering by saying, 'So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.' 2Co 9:7. A cheerful giver will make offering because of the faith that they have received from Christ, and the love of God that has been poured into their heart.

Alternative modes of offering

When we read Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians, we observe that he contrasted the cheerful giver, who is motivated by the love of God, with three alternative modes or motivations for giving. He referred to the first alternative as giving 'grudgingly'. 2Co 9:7. The person who gives grudgingly is doing so only because they have been compelled to or because they believe that they are fulfilling an obligation. It may be an obligation to a leader; an obligation to a project; or a perceived religious obligation. Their offering is motivated by a carnal commandment, rather than being an expression of faith that is motivated by the love of God.

The second alternative mode of offering that Paul identified was because of 'necessity'. 2Co 9:7. We know that there will be many legitimate needs

within the fellowship of the body of Christ. As we have considered, a genuine fellowship of offering will meet those needs so that there is no lack. 2Co 9:12. However, a person who gives only when they are motivated to meet specific needs is in danger of becoming 'a benefactor.' Luk 22:25. A benefactor is a person who believes that they are bestowing a benefit upon the church or upon another believer. If this is the motivation for giving, it is an expression of self-righteousness, and becomes an unhelpful mode of identity verification.

Paul described the third alternative mode of offering as 'covetousness'. Writing to the Corinthians, he said that he wanted their offering to be 'ready as a bountiful gift *and not affected by covetousness*'. 2Co 9:5. A person's offering is affected by covetousness when they view their offering as a formula or a trading mechanism. That is, they believe that God will bless them because of their offering. There are many religious leaders who promote various forms of a prosperity doctrine. They teach people that if they give money to a particular religious ministry or organisation, God will bless them with good health, wealth or personal prosperity.

All prosperity doctrines belong to 'the synagogue of Satan' and, specifically, they are part of *the doctrine of Balaam*. Rev 2:14. The apostle Peter described religious leaders who promote prosperity doctrines as those who have 'gone astray, having followed *the way of Balaam*, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness'. 2Pe 2:15. Peter continued to describe their ministry by saying, 'For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.' 2Pe 2:18-19.

An expression of thanksgiving

In stark contrast to these alternative modes of offering, the apostle Paul proclaimed that all offering must be given to the Lord as *an expression of thanksgiving*. If a person's offering is one of 'thanksgiving', they are giving because of the *grace* that they have already received from the Lord, and they are expecting nothing from the Lord in return. In this regard, we are reminded of the testimony of King David when he observed the generous offering of the people toward the building of the temple. He declared, 'Who am I and who are my people that we should be

able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You.' 1Ch 29:14.

Significantly, in his admonition to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul simply referred to their peace offerings as 'thanksgivings'. He said, 'Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing *thanksgiving to God*. For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through *many thanksgivings to God*.' 2Co 9:10-12. In the New Covenant, all of the harvest offerings should be given to God as a thanksgiving.

In the time of the end

The practical fellowship of offering in the early church was the firstfruits of the economy of offering that will sustain the fellowship of the body of Christ in the time of the end. We read in the book of Acts, concerning the early church, that 'great grace was upon them all'. Act 4:33. We could liken this grace to 'the early rain' that caused the word of faith concerning the fellowship of the *agape* meal, to germinate and put down roots in the hearts of many sons of God. The Lord has been restoring this word of faith in our day. However, we are also fast-approaching the time for the outpouring of 'the latter rain', which will cause this fellowship to bring forth such fullness of fruit that it will fill the whole earth! Joe 2:23-24.

The opening of the second seal will initiate a time of great warfare and conflict in the world. Rev 6:4. The opening of the third seal will initiate a time of great economic turmoil, which will be characterised by scarcity of resources and by rampant inflation. Rev 6:5. This will impact upon the whole economy of the world. However, at the same time, there will be miraculous provision and protection for those who are participating in the fellowship of the *agape* meal, as the fulfilment of the Feast of Tabernacles. When he witnessed the opening of the third seal, the apostle John heard the voice of Christ from the midst of the Father's throne proclaiming, '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 6:6.

During the opening of the seals, the fellowship of the body of Christ will continue to be sustained by the economy of the thanksgiving offerings within the fellowship of the *agape* meal. The numberless multitude from

every nation will bring the wealth of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God. Isa 60:5,11. However, the blowing of the trumpets will herald a major transition in the economy of offering. The trumpets will declare the judgement of God upon the administration of Babylon, and will call every believer to gather for the wedding feast in the wilderness.

Mat 24:31. The second trumpet will announce the fall of Babylon. At the same time, the Lord will proclaim to the ends of the earth, 'Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.' Rev 18:4.

When Jesus Christ proclaims this word from heaven, through His messengers, it will be the call for every citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem *to cease all trade and interaction* with the economy of the world. The present economy of the harvest offerings will come to an end before the final destruction of the administration of Babylon, by Antichrist and the ten kings. Rev 17:16. Rev 18:9-19. However, having already spread His tabernacle over the inhabitants of Mount Zion at the beginning of the time of the end, the Father will continue to carry His people on the wings of the great eagle. Exo 19:4. Rev 12:14. In the same way that the Lord sustained the nation of Israel in the wilderness with manna from heaven and water from the rock, the church will also be sustained by the miraculous provision of the Lord for the wedding feast in the wilderness.

THE END OF THE AGE

