

Building up the church as Mount Zion

THE NEW JERUSALEM COMING DOWN
OUT OF HEAVEN FROM GOD

VICTOR HALL
WITH PETER HAY AND DAVID BAKER

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Preface

The wheat and the tares

After Jesus explained the parable of the sower to His disciples, He immediately continued with the parable of the wheat and tares. Mat 13:18-30. It is important to recognise that the parable of the wheat and tares is the sequel to the parable of the sower. We know that the parable of the sower is the foremost of all the parables. Mar 4:13. It explains the gospel of God. That is, it focuses on how sons of men must be born to see and enter the kingdom of heaven as sons of God. As the sequel to the parable of the sower, the parable of the wheat and tares then explains *the eschatology* for sons of God, who are in this world, waiting expectantly for the time when the Father will take His seat.

It is notable that as soon as Jesus was alone with His disciples, they asked Him to explain to them the parable of the wheat and tares. Mat 13:36. It is important for every son of God to understand this parable. Jesus explained to the disciples that it is the Son of Man who sows the good seed. The good seed are the sons of the kingdom. In this regard, it is those who are *good ground* in the parable of the sower who are likened to the *good seed* in the parable of the wheat and tares. Mat 13:23-24. The good seed are *sons of God*, who are walking by the Spirit, in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, and bringing forth the fruit of their sonship - thirty, sixty, and one hundredfold.

The field is the world

Significantly, Jesus said that the field is the world. Mat 13:38. When Jesus stood in the middle of His disciples on the day of His resurrection, He breathed upon them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'. Joh 20:22. In this interaction, they were born again as sons of God. The apostles became the foundation stones of the wall of the heavenly Jerusalem. For the following forty days, Jesus continued to build up the foundation of the church as Mount Zion. At the end of the forty days, He said to the apostles, 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and *to the ends of the earth.*' Act 1:8.

The church was anointed with the sevenfold Spirit of Yahweh, by the Holy Spirit, on the Day of Pentecost. Act 2:17-18. The Scripture recorded that the fellowship of the early church grew rapidly in the city of Jerusalem. The early believers were continually devoted to the apostles' doctrine, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayers. Act 2:42. However, following the martyrdom of Stephen, the church experienced severe persecution, led by Saul of Tarsus. Act 8:1-2. Fulfilling the words of Jesus, the early believers in Jerusalem were scattered into the regions of Judea and Samaria. This was the first phase of the sowing of the church from Jerusalem, into the world.

After his conversion, the apostle Paul was sent by Christ to be a light to the nations. Act 13:47. He established presbyteries and lampstand churches among the Gentiles. In the years before the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem in AD70, there was another phase of the church being sown into the world. In obedience to the word of Christ, the remaining sons of God in Jerusalem left the city before its desolation, and joined the lampstand churches among the Gentiles. Luk 21:20. For example, we know that the apostle Peter led a group of sons of God all the way to the region of Babylon. 1Pe 5:13. The apostle James addressed his letter to the twelve tribes of the true Israel of God who had been scattered abroad in lampstand churches. Jas 1:1.

While men slept

As the glorified Son of Man, who is seated at the right hand of the Father, Jesus Christ has sown sons of God into the field of the world. The elect have been scattered to the four winds in lampstand churches. Mar 13:27. However, the parable of the wheat and tares also teaches us that another form of 'sowing' has taken place during the church age. We read in the

parable that 'while men slept', the Son of Man's enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat. Mat 13:25. The enemy of Christ is the devil. The 'men who slept' refer to many of the overseers who had been set apart by the Holy Spirit to shepherd and guard Christ's lampstand churches in the world.

It is notable that the apostle Paul warned the Ephesian presbytery that this would take place. He said to them, 'Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.' Act 20:28-30. Clearly, many of these overseers did not heed Paul's warning. They *fell asleep*, spiritually, and allowed Christ's churches to be broken into by the enemy. Mat 24:43.

Satan sowed tares in Christ's field by infiltrating His lampstand churches with other gospels. 2Co 11:3-4. Jesus identified the various doctrines that belong to the synagogue of Satan when He instructed the apostle John to write to the seven lampstand churches in Asia. For example, the synagogue of Satan includes those who teach and believe the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, the doctrine of Balaam, the doctrine of Jezebel, and the doctrine of the Laodiceans. Rev 2:14-15. Rev 2:20-24. Rev 3:14-18. Jesus called the presbytery of each lampstand church to renounce these various doctrines and return to the fellowship of first love, which is the fellowship that belongs to the tree of life in the middle of the heavenly Jerusalem. Rev 2:4-5,7.

Let both grow together

Interestingly, in the parable of the wheat and tares, the landowner did not ask his servants to immediately remove the tares from the field. He was concerned that the wheat would also be uprooted. Rather, he said, '*Let both grow together until the harvest*, and at the time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn".' Mat 13:29-30. This highlights an important principle for the church age. Christ does not ask His servants to pre-emptively remove tares from the church. Rather, the work of Christ's servants in each generation is to proclaim the word of present truth.

When Christ's admonition to His lampstand churches is proclaimed in each generation as the word of present truth, it is *the word itself* that progressively divides the wheat from the tares in the church. The word of the cross has a polarising and divisive impact upon every hearer. Heb 4:12-13. Isa 28:10-13. Isa 55:10-11. A person's response to the word of Christ's messengers will reveal whether they are choosing the fatherhood of God or the fatherhood of Satan. Joh 8:39-45. A person who is choosing the fatherhood of God will set their mind on the things of the Spirit. The fruit of this choice will be life and peace as a son of God. Rom 8:5-6. In contrast to this, a person who is choosing the fatherhood of Satan will set their mind on the things of the flesh. The fruit of this choice will be death.

We know that it will take time for the fruit of a person's response to the word to be clearly seen. Jesus explained that the wheat and tares grow together until the time of harvest. We can consider the time of harvest from *a personal perspective* and from *an eschatological perspective*. From a personal perspective, the time of harvest denotes the end of a season when a person's choice has brought forth fruit to maturity – either, life or death. In the upper room, Jesus explained to His disciples that there will be specific seasons when the Father comes looking for the fruit of sonship in our life. Joh 15:1-2. He said that it is God the Father who takes away every branch in the Vine that does not bear the fruit of sonship. Notably, a branch that is removed from the Vine by the Father will be thrown into the lake of fire. Joh 15:6.

The Father is sovereign over the times and seasons in the life of every believer. In the same way, the Father is sovereign over the times and seasons that belong to the church age. Act 1:7. From an eschatological perspective, the time of harvest is the end of the age. This is the major focus of the parable of the wheat and tares. Jesus declared, 'The harvest is *the end of the age*, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practise lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.' Mat 13:39-42.

The harvest in the end of the age

Notably, the first dimension of the harvest in the end of the age is that the Lord, through His messengers, will *gather out of His kingdom* all who

practise lawlessness. The tares will be gathered and bound in bundles to be burned, before the wheat is gathered into the barn. Mat 13:30. We recall that 'the tares' describe those believers who have rejected the gospel of God, which is the gospel of sonship, in favour of the alternative gospels that belong to Satan. The tares will be burned in the great and terrible day of the Lord. The prophet Malachi declared, 'Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up.' Mal 4:1.

The judgement that belongs to the great and terrible day of the Lord will begin when the Father takes His seat. This will be the time of harvest. However, it is important to remember that *the type of harvest* will be determined *long before* the time of harvest arrives. The type of harvest is determined by the type of seed that has been sown into the ground. This is an important point. The gospel of God is polarising the church *now* as the wheat and tares still grow together in the field of the world. A believer's response to the gospel of God *now*, before the Father takes His seat, will determine which harvest they belong to, when He suddenly takes His seat to initiate the time of harvest in the end of the age.

The authority to proclaim the gospel of God in every generation has been given to the messengers of Christ as 'the keys of the kingdom of heaven'. Mat 16:19. The central message that belongs to the keys of the kingdom is that a person must be born again to *see the kingdom*, and then be born of water and the Spirit to *enter the kingdom* of God. Joh 3:3-5. It is only sons of God who are seeing and entering the kingdom, by obeying the word of God, who have access to the tree of life in the middle of the heavenly Jerusalem. We read in the book of Revelation, 'Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.' Rev 22:14.

It is important to recognise that the same messengers who have been given the authority to proclaim the gospel of God, have also been given the authority to *bind the tares together* and deliver them to the judgement of God in the time of the end. Jesus said to Peter, and to all His messengers for the church age, 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you *bind on earth* will be *bound in heaven*, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Mat 16:19. It is our response to the gospel of God that determines whether the word is delivering us from the judgement of God or binding us, like the tares, under the judgement of God. 1Co 11:32.

The day of redemption

Significantly, the day of God's judgement upon the tares, followed by His judgement upon the entire world, will also be *the day of redemption* for the faithful remnant within lampstand churches. Isa 63:4. When the Father takes His seat, it will initiate the final cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. We know that Satan only has access to the heavenly places because of the idolatry, and the practice of sorcery, that exists among the Lord's people in the heavenly places. 2Co 2:11. There will be *no place* for Satan in the heavenly places once the Lord's people have been cleansed from their idolatry and sorcery. Rev 12:8. When Satan has been overcome by the faithful remnant in lampstand churches, Michael will stand up to cast him, along with all his fallen angels, out of heaven, forever. Rev 12:7-9,11.

Furthermore, in the *day of redemption*, the church will be delivered from being under the heel of the administration of Babylon that has ruled over all seven world kingdoms. Rev 17:1-5. We know that the inhabitants of Mount Zion are presently *a very small remnant* in the middle of a wicked and perverse generation in the world. Isa 1:9. However, when the Father takes His seat to bring the world to judgement, He will establish the church above every nation. The prophet Isaiah declared concerning Mount Zion, '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 righteous will shine forth like the sun

Returning to our consideration of *the time of harvest* in the parable of the wheat and tares, Jesus said that the wheat will be gathered into the barn. Mat 13:30. When the Father takes His seat, Jesus Christ will stand up from His throne, and move His entire administration into the centre of the Father's throne. Mat 25:10. Rev 5:6. Rev 7:17. This will be a most profound season of visitation among Christ's lampstand churches. Christ will bring every overcomer from His lampstand churches with Him to the Father's throne, for the time of the end. The faithful remnant who belong to Mount Zion will be sealed with the name of the Father as the firstfruits of the true Israel of God. Rev 3:12. Rev 7:1-4. Rev 14:1-5.

In the time of the end, the firstfruits of the true Israel of God will reveal the glory of the Father by proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of God as a testimony in all nations. Jesus said concerning the time of the end, 'Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their

Father'. Mat 13:43. The fruit of the evangelistic ministry of the true Israel of God will be a great multitude, which no man can number, from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue. Rev 7:9. Isaiah continued, '*Many people* shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For *out of Zion* shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.' Isa 2:3.

Jesus concluded His explanation of the parable of the wheat and tares by saying, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear!' Mat 13:43. We note that this is the same way that He concluded the parable of the seed and sower. Mat 13:9. In this manner, Jesus highlighted the importance for every son of God to understand the cultural implications of these parables. The evidence that a believer has received these words of Jesus, and understands these parables, will be *their faith* to live as an obedient son of God in the heavenly Jerusalem. Faith is the outcome of hearing and illumination. Rom 10:17. Notably, it is this faith-obedience that will determine whether a person will participate in the prophetic fulfilment of this parable as part of the wheat, or the tares. Rom 1:5. Rom 16:26.

The Lord's word to us

When we reflect on our own history as a fellowship of churches, we know that the Lord has been restoring our understanding of the gospel of God for almost five decades. This restoration began when Christ called us to remember from where we had fallen and to return, with repentance and faith, to our first love. Rev 2:4-5. Since that time, Christ's admonition has had a profound and polarising impact within our fellowship, and wherever it has been proclaimed. Many people have received the gospel of sonship with great joy and then continued to embrace their unique participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings as sons of God. At the same time, many others have rejected the gospel of sonship and become offended by the necessity to participate in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. 1Pe 2:7-8.

In more recent years, we rejoice that the Lord has given us a better understanding of what it means to return to our first love. We have come to understand that first love describes the fellowship of the tree of life in the middle of the heavenly Jerusalem. Rev 2:7. Rev 22:2,14. We know that the Lord has been calling us to turn from our vain religious traditions and fallen sacramental practices. 1Pe 1:17-18. More importantly, He has been calling us to come to Him and learn how to participate in the

fellowship of the *agape* meal. 1Co 10:16-17. Rev 19:9. Rev 22:17. The degree to which we have responded to the Lord's invitation over this past season, has had a profound impact upon our marriages, our families, and our congregations. Of course, this cultural reformation has also had its own polarising impact upon us.

In our present season, the Lord is continuing to illuminate to us the cultural implications of the gospel of God and our participation in the fellowship of the *agape* meal. We know that if we continue to respond to His word in each season, with repentance and faith, then we will be ready for the time when the Father takes His seat. Mat 24:44. 1Jn 2:28. 2Pe 3:14. When we observe the birth pains in the world today, as it reels from one crisis to the next, along with the oppressive spiritual darkness that is covering the whole of mankind, we know that we are fast approaching the time of the end. Mat 24:8. Isa 60:2. In this context, the Lord is presently saying to us, 'Look up and lift up your heads, because *your redemption draws near.*' Luk 21:28.

The Father's sovereignty

As we have already considered, the day of redemption for God's elect will happen when the Father takes His seat! As the Lord continues to illuminate the prophetic Scriptures to us, by the Holy Spirit, we know that the day of redemption is drawing near! Luk 21:28. Likewise, we know that the kingdom of God is drawing near! Luk 21:31. However, we also know that the exact time when the Father will take His seat, to establish His kingdom on the earth, remains in His own authority. Act 1:7. The Father is not constrained to a prophetic framework. He has the authority to cut the days short or prolong the days. Mat 24:22. Mat 25:5. We can certainly know that the time is fast approaching, but no man can know the exact day or the hour. Mat 24:36.

When the Father takes His seat, it will initiate all the events that belong to the time of the end. In this regard, the Father taking His seat is *the major reference point* for the eschatology of the sons of God in the end of the age. The book of Revelation describes all the events that will happen in the heavenly places, and on the earth, once the Father takes His seat. Rev 4:1-3. Remarkably, when we consider the description of the time of the end in the book of Revelation, along with the specific time periods that are mentioned in the Scriptures, it is unlikely that the time of the end will last for more than fourteen years. That is, once the Father has taken His seat, it is unlikely to be more than fourteen years until Jesus

Christ physically returns to defeat Antichrist at the battle of Armageddon. Rev 19:11-21.

With all of this in view, let us heed the apostle Paul's admonition, when he said, 'Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation [the day of redemption] is nearer than when we first believed.' Rom 13:11. Speaking about the night of the church age and the coming day of the Lord, Paul continued, 'The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.' Rom 13:12. The Lord is asking us to be those who are looking for, and hastening, the coming day of God. 2Pe 3:12. We are called to be sons of God who pray to the Father, by the Spirit, 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' Mat 6:10.

As we continue to endure through the night of the church age, praying for the time when the Father will take His seat, as those who are bankrupt in spirit, we can be encouraged by the prophetic words of the psalmist: 'You will arise and have mercy on Zion; for the time to favour her, yes, the set time, has come. For Your servants take pleasure in her stones, and show favour to her dust. So the nations shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth Your glory. For the Lord shall build up Zion; He shall appear in His glory. He shall regard the prayer of the destitute, and shall not despise their prayer. This will be written for the generation to come, that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord.' Psa 102:13-18.

Chapter I

I will build My church

During His earthly ministry, Jesus asked His disciples, 'Who do you say that I am?' Mat 16:15. Peter immediately declared, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Mat 16:16. Jesus responded to his confession of faith by saying, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock *I will build My church*, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.' Mat 16:17-18.

Jesus Christ is the chosen and precious Cornerstone from whom the whole church is built. Psa 118:22. Isa 28:16. The church is the body of Christ. Col 1:18,24. The body of Christ is a temple of living stones. It is the dwelling place of God the Father. Eph 2:19-22. The church is also *the bride of Christ* which is formed from the body of Christ. The bride of Christ is likened to a city which is called 'the heavenly Jerusalem and Mount Zion'. Heb 12:22. Jesus said to Peter that he would become part of the living foundation of the church as the bride city. This same promise was applicable to each of the twelve apostles. Rev 21:14.

God the Father prepared Christ to be the chosen and precious Cornerstone in Zion, on His offering journey from the upper room to the cross. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, the apostle Peter declared, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a chief Cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on

Him will by no means be put to shame.' 1Pe 2:6. The psalmist declared, concerning the city of Zion, from the Father's perspective, '*His foundation is in the holy mountains.*' Psa 87:1.

Jesus Christ proclaimed, 'It is finished!', from the cross, as the Head of the corporate new creation. Joh 19:30. He had become the Head of His many-membered body, which is the church. When He committed His Spirit into the hands of the Father, He stepped out of His physical body and went to be with the Father. Notably, He also brought every son of God, whom He had brought back with Him from the lowest parts of the earth, to the Father as part of the new creation. Luk 23:43. Heb 13:20. Heb 2:13.

The formation of the bride

When the soldier pierced the physical body of Christ with a spear, as it still hung on the cross, blood and water gushed from His side. Joh 19:34. The blood and water was accompanied by the outpouring of the spirit of grace and supplication which enabled men to look upon Christ whom they had pierced. Zec 12:10. The blood, the water, and the Spirit are the three elements that comprise the river of the water of life.

The river of the water of life flowed directly from the throne of grace, where Christ had taken His seat with the Father, through His physical body on the cross. It is a fountain for sin and uncleanness. Zec 13:1. It is also an eternal fountain of life. Psa 36:9. Rev 21:6. Describing the source of the bride city in the book of Revelation, the apostle John said, 'And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.' Rev 22:1.

The blood, the water, and Spirit that flowed from the throne of God, through the physical body of Christ, are the three elements that are necessary for the formation of the church as the bride of Christ. We recall that, in the beginning, the woman was formed by Yahweh *Elohim* from the rib that was taken from the side of Adam. Gen 2:21-23. The blood, the water, and Spirit that came from the side of Christ are 'the rib' from which the church is formed to be His comparable helper for the work of bringing forth and nurturing sons of God.

Having brought the name of every son of God to the Father on the day of His crucifixion, Jesus Christ was then sent by the Father to begin to build the church on the day of His resurrection. He stepped back into His immortal, physical body as the Head of the church. As Melchizedek, Jesus Christ used the blood, the water and the Spirit that flowed from His side

to begin to build His church. He began by laying the foundation of the heavenly Jerusalem on the earth.

The ministry of Jesus for forty days

Jesus Christ came down from heaven for a period of forty days to personally build the church, as the bride city. We read in the book of Acts that Christ ascended from the Mount of Olives 'after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them *during forty days* and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God'. Act 1:2-3.

The period of forty days is significant. We recall that the first forty-day period in the ministry of Jesus happened immediately after His baptism in the Jordan River. The Holy Spirit led Him into the wilderness for forty days to overcome the temptation of Satan. Luk 4:1-13. He overcame Satan in *the weakness of His mortality* as the Son of Man. Then, the second forty-day period happened immediately after Christ's death, burial and resurrection. He ministered for forty days, in *the power of His immortality*, to build the church.

Jesus Christ *personally overcame* Satan in the wilderness for forty days. In the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, *we* have now been given a participation in the work of overcoming Satan. We know that we overcome Satan in the heavenly places by the blood of the Lamb, the word of our testimony, and 'by loving not our life to death'. Rev 12:11. In a similar way, Jesus Christ *personally built the bride city* during the forty days after His resurrection. Since the Day of Pentecost, we have also been given a participation in the work of building the bride city, by the Spirit, as part of Christ's administration in the heavenly places.

This is an important point. We will propose that the two forty-day periods in the ministry of Jesus are both harbingers of the forty jubilees that belong to the church age. We will consider the significance of the jubilees in more detail in our next chapter. In the fellowship of Christ's offering, the focus for the elect during the church age is *to build* the heavenly Jerusalem and *to overcome* Satan in the heavenly places. Jesus highlighted these two points of focus for the church age when He said to Peter, 'I will *build My church*, and the gates of Hades *shall not prevail* against it.' Mat 16:18. Eph 3:10. Eph 6:12.

The foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem

The apostle Paul described the ministry of Jesus by saying, 'I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that *He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once*, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep' 1Co 15:3-6.

Paul highlighted the fact that Jesus appeared to Peter first, and then to the rest of the apostles. Interestingly, the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Luke both identify that He appeared to the two men on the road to Emmaus *before* He appeared to the rest of the apostles in the upper room. Mar 16:12-13. We know that Jesus appeared to Peter *before* He appeared to the two men on the road to Emmaus, because they came back to Jerusalem and announced to the rest of the apostles, 'The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon.' Luk 24:34.

It is notable that the Lord appeared to Peter first. Peter belonged to the order of twelve that became the foundation of the walls of the bride city. We read in the book of Revelation concerning the heavenly Jerusalem, 'Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb'. Rev 21:14. We know that Abraham lived in the land of promise as though it was a foreign country, because he was waiting for this city which has foundations. Heb 11:9-10.

Jesus then appeared to Cleopas and the other disciple, on the road to Emmaus. It is most likely that these two men belonged to the order of seventy-two disciples. We recall that Jesus sent out the seventy-two disciples 'two by two' to various villages and towns. Significantly, He sent them 'before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go'. Luk 10:1. It was the work of the seventy-two to find worthy households who would become the foundation of house to house fellowship in the early church. Luk 10:2-12.

Jesus revealed Himself to Peter as being representative of the twelve, and then to Cleopas and the other disciple as being representatives of the seventy-two. However, there is no record in the Scripture that He breathed upon them in these interactions. That is, we are not suggesting that these men were born again earlier than were the rest of the apostles. Rather, on the evening of His resurrection day, Jesus appeared to all the apostles while they were eating together.

The apostle John, who was present in the room, recorded that Jesus first said, 'Peace be with you.' Joh 20:19. This was far more than being a comforting or a reassuring gesture to settle their fear and anxiety. Having completed His offering journey, and having been raised from the dead, Jesus was speaking to the disciples as Melchizedek. Having reconciled the disciples to God, Christ had come to bless them with their participation in the fellowship of His finished offering. Rom 5:1-2. He immediately showed the disciples His hands and His side. Joh 20:20.

We know that the pierced side of Christ signifies that the new and living way has been opened for us to draw near to the Father as sons of God. Heb 10:19-22. Furthermore, the pierced side of Christ is significant because it was *from His side* that the blood and water flowed, along with the Spirit, as the full provision for the formation of the bride city. Jesus particularly drew their attention to His side because He had been sent by the Father, from heaven, to build the heavenly Jerusalem.

John recorded that Jesus breathed on the disciples, and then said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' Joh 20:22. In this interaction with their risen Lord, the disciples were born again as sons of God. They immediately became citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. Psa 87:5. Php 3:20. More specifically, Jesus made the apostles to be the living foundation of the wall of the bride city. Rev 21:14. We know that Thomas was not present during this first interaction with Jesus. However, a week later, Thomas met Jesus in the same way. Joh 20:24-29.

Having established the foundation of the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem, it is probable that Jesus then built the seventy-two disciples into the walls of the city. Furthermore, the apostle Paul mentioned that, at some point during the forty days, Jesus ministered to over 500 brethren in one gathering. 1Co 15:6. These men were most likely the firstfruits brethren from the worthy homes across the region that had earlier been found by the seventy-two disciples. Luk 10:38-42. Joh 12:1-2. The 500 brethren represented a large number of firstfruits families who later became integral to house to house fellowship in the early church.

The order of seventy-two in the church age

When the fellowship of the early church in Jerusalem grew rapidly, the apostles recognised the need for deacons to oversee and to coordinate *agape* fellowship from house to house across the city. Act 6:1-2. The apostles asked the congregation to recommend seven men of good reputation who were full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. Act 6:3. Stephen was among this first group of deacons in the early church. Act 6:5.

However, it soon became evident that he also ministered with ascension gift grace. Stephen ministered as part of the order of seventy-two in the early church.

We recall that Jesus, during His ministry, appointed the seventy-two disciples to look for worthy households. Most notably, when they returned to Him with joy, Jesus commissioned them *a second time* by saying, 'Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.' Luk 10:19. This is the mandate that belongs to the order of seventy-two across the entire church age. It is work of the seventy-two to overcome Satan in the heavenly places.

As a messenger who belonged to the order of seventy-two, Stephen overcame Satan in his generation. In the publication, *The ministry of the sons of God*, we considered how Stephen overcame Satan in the heavenly places. He overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of his testimony, and by laying down his life to death. Rev 12:11. As Stephen laid down his life in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, Satan's power over the Gentile nations was broken, in the heavenly places. Act 7. Significantly, it was the martyrdom of Stephen that opened the door for the conversion of Saul. Act 7:58.

Following his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul also ministered as part of the order of seventy-two. He received revelatory grace from Christ as an ascension gift apostle. He was appointed by Christ to be a light to the Gentiles. Act 9:15. Act 13:47. Act 26:17-18. The ministry of the apostle Paul was unique. It was his work to proclaim Jesus Christ to be the Cornerstone of the bride city, and then to establish presbyteries and lampstand churches among the Gentiles. By establishing presbyteries in the right hand of Christ, upon the foundation of the twelve apostles, Paul extended the foundations of the walls of the bride city into every nation. Eph 2:20. Eph 3:5.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, 'According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ'. 1Co 3:10-11. In his pastoral epistles, the apostle Paul addressed men such as Timothy and Titus, as men who had ascension gift grace. The mode of ministry that was exemplified by Timothy and Titus is the pattern for all those having ascension gift grace during the church age.

The ministry of the apostolic administration of Christ in the mode of Timothy and Titus does not replace or replicate the ministry of the apostle Paul. It is not the work of those having ascension gift grace during the church age to 'lay a new foundation'. Rather, it is the work of those with ascension gift grace, in every generation, to *build on the foundation* that has been laid by Jesus Christ through the apostle Paul. Furthermore, in every generation, the apostolic administration of Christ has been called to serve at the gates of the New Jerusalem.

Paul continued, 'Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear, for *the Day* will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is'. 1Co 3:12-13. There are seasons of fiery trial in the life of every believer that will test the nature of their work. However, when Paul spoke of 'the Day', he was particularly referring to 'the great and terrible day of the Lord'. The prophet Malachi declared, ' "Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up", says the Lord of hosts.' Mal 4:1.

Before the coming of the day of the Lord

'The great and terrible day of the Lord' is a major prophetic theme in the Scriptures. In the first case, 'the day of the Lord' was the day of Christ's crucifixion. The cross of Christ was the full revelation of the wrath and judgement of God upon the sin of mankind. The apostle Paul declared that the entire world was crucified with Christ. Gal 6:14. On His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, Jesus Christ took the world, and all that it contains, out into the sea of God's forgetfulness. The present heavens and earth have already passed away in the offering of Christ. Mat 5:18.

Nevertheless, the present heavens and earth are being *preserved* by the prophetic Scriptures to give all men the opportunity for repentance. The apostle Peter said concerning the destruction of the present heavens and earth, 'The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.' 2Pe 3:9. All men have been given the opportunity to escape the judgement of God upon the world by fleeing for refuge into the fellowship of the body of Christ.

The patience of God is an expression of His mercy. As we have considered, the present heavens and earth are being preserved by the prophetic Scriptures. However, the same prophetic Scriptures also reveal

that the longsuffering of God in relation to the sin and wickedness of mankind will come to an end. God's righteous judgement upon the world, which has already been accomplished in the offering of Christ, will be revealed to all men in the time of the end. The great and terrible day of the Lord will commence when the Father takes His seat to judge the world.

Significantly, the Lord has promised to restore the ministry of Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord. The Lord declared, 'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.' Mal 4:5-6. In the time of the end, God will smite the earth with a curse. For example, during the opening of the seals, one quarter of the earth's population will die because of war, famine and pestilence.

The spirit and power of Elijah

When we consider the Elijah ministry, which will be restored before the great and terrible day of the Lord, we recognise that it is not limited to the personal ministry of Elijah the prophet. When Elijah was caught up into heaven at the conclusion of his prophetic ministry, the mantle that belonged to Elijah was passed to Elisha. 2Ki 2:13. Moreover, Elisha received a double portion of the anointing that had been given to Elijah. 2Ki 2:9. Elisha continued to minister in the spirit and power of Elijah. 2Ki 2:15.

John the Baptist was the greatest of all the prophets of old. Luk 7:28. Notably, the angel Gabriel said to Zacharias concerning John the Baptist, 'He will also go before Him [Christ] in the spirit and power of Elijah, "To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children", and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.' Luk 1:17. John the Baptist ministered in the spirit and power of Elijah. He was sent to prepare the people for the coming of Christ. Mal 3:1. Isa 40:3. Luk 3:4.

In a very similar way, the seventy-two disciples were also sent to prepare the way for the Lord. We read in the Gospel of Luke, 'After these things the Lord appointed seventy [seventy-two] others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go'. Luk 10:1. The seventy-two disciples were sent to minister in the spirit and power of Elijah before the coming of the Lord Himself.

Furthermore, when Jesus commissioned them *a second time*, He gave them authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions.

As we have already considered, both Stephen and the apostle Paul belonged to the order of seventy-two. Jesus established the order of seventy-two as the mode of ministry for the entire church age. For this reason, He addressed the presbytery of each lampstand church as those who belong to the order of seventy-two. In relation to the spirit and power of Elijah, Jesus said to the presbytery in Thyatira, 'He who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations - 'he shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels' - as I also received from My Father, and I will give him *the morning star*.' Rev 2:28.

'The morning star' in this verse does not refer to the sun. The morning star commonly refers to the appearance of the planet Venus in the night sky just before sunrise. The appearance of the morning star is the sign that precedes the dawn of the new day. We can certainly liken the ministry of John the Baptist to the morning star. The Scripture recorded, 'This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not the Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.' Joh 1:7-8. The ministry of John the Baptist preceded the coming of Christ as 'the Light of the world'. Joh 8:12.

Likewise, the ministry of John the Baptist, in the spirit and power of Elijah, came before the crucifixion of Christ. The key point is that 'the morning star' describes the Elijah ministry that comes before 'the day of the Lord'. In this regard, when Jesus Christ promised to give 'the morning star' to the presbytery in Thyatira, He was promising to give to them the Elijah ministry. As we approach the time when the Father will take His seat to usher in the great and terrible day of the Lord, the ministry of Elijah is being restored and recovered within Christ's lampstand churches.

The work of the Elijah ministry

The work of the Elijah ministry is to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers. That is, the restoration of the Elijah ministry is for the purpose of recovering families to the fellowship of the tree of life in the middle of the heavenly Jerusalem. Importantly, the recovery of fellowship in individual families is necessary before the fellowship of the *agape* meal can be fully restored as *house to house fellowship* in the church.

It is the ministry of an overcoming presbytery, in the spirit and power of Elijah, that initiates the cleansing and sanctification of the families who belong to the heavenly Jerusalem in Mount Zion. It is essential that every family embraces this provision for their cleansing and sanctification in the season of the Lord's visitation. As we approach the time when the Father will take His seat to judge the world, Jesus Christ is meeting us with eyes like a flame of fire so that we are ready for the day of the Lord.

Every family who embraces this season of cleansing will become a place of safety and refuge in the days ahead. The prophet Isaiah declared, 'When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgement and by the spirit of burning, then the Lord will create above every dwelling place [household] of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies [congregations], 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.' Isa 4:4-5.

When the Father takes His seat, Jesus Christ will stand up from His throne and will move to the centre of the Father's throne. He will take every overcomer from His lampstand churches with Him to the Father's throne for the time of the end. At that time, the overcomers, who have ministered according to the order of seventy-two for the church age, will receive *a double portion* of the spirit and power of Elijah. Isa 61:7. Zec 9:12. When this double-portion anointing has been received, the order of 72 for the church age will become the order of 144 for the time of the end.

We know that the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem have been progressively built since the day of Christ's resurrection. When the 144 000 are sealed at the beginning of the time of the end, it will signify that the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem have been completed. We read in the book of Revelation that the *finished height* of the walls is 144 cubits high. Furthermore, the sealing of the 144 000 will signify that the twelve gates of the bride city are open for the great multitude from every tribe, nation, people and tongue to come into the bride city. The fullness of the city itself is 12 000 furlongs high.

The midnight hour

In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, Jesus described the time when the Father will take His seat, which is also the time of Christ's coming to His servants, as 'the midnight hour'. Mat 25:6. 'The midnight hour' is an important theme in the Scriptures. In the first case, it is the hour of God's judgement upon the world, and is the hour of deliverance

for His people. We recall that it was at the midnight hour that God struck the firstborn of men and beast in all the land of Egypt. Exo 11:4.

Exo 12:29. Only the families who had participated in the Passover meal and had applied the blood of the Lamb to the doorpost and lintel of their house were delivered from God's sovereign judgement on the world kingdom at that time.

The prophet Isaiah described the midnight hour by saying, 'For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and *deep darkness* the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you.' Isa 60:2. The midnight hour is the middle of the night. It is half-way between dawn and dusk. It is notable that the midnight hour is *the darkest hour* of the night. We are reminded that the darkness that enveloped the land of Egypt was 'so thick' that it could be felt! Exo 10:21-22. In a similar way, there is little doubt that the world is now being enveloped in a thick, spiritual darkness.

At the same time, it is the midnight hour when the glory of the Lord, which is the light of the sevenfold Spirit of God, by the Holy Spirit, will be fully revealed by the restored lampstand church before the face of the throne of the Father. Rev 4:5. The primary ministry of the wise virgins who will accompany Christ, when He moves from His throne to the Father's throne, is during the midnight hour. Mat 25:10. Jesus also described, in the parable of the wheat and the tares, the ministry of the elect in and around the Father's throne, after He has taken His seat. He said, 'Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun *in the kingdom of their Father.*' Mat 13:43.

The midnight hour is the beginning of 'the day of the Lord' in the end of the age. Recognising that the midnight hour is the darkest hour of the night, this appears to be a contradiction. However, the apostle Peter declared that 'the day of the Lord will come as a thief *in the night*'. 2Pe 3:10. Likewise, Paul said, 'For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.' 1Th 5:2-3. The day of the Lord will not be darkness for those who have already been called out of darkness and into His marvellous light as sons of God. 1Pe 2:9. Paul said, 'But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.' 1Th 5:4.

However, for those who are in the world, the day of the Lord will be darkness, not light. The prophet Amos declared, 'Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be *darkness*, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on

the wall, and a serpent bit him! Is not the day of the Lord *darkness*, and not light? Is it not *very dark*, with no brightness in it?' Amo 5:18-20.

Paul likened the day of the Lord to active labour pains that come upon a pregnant woman. He said, 'For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.' 1Th 5:3. We know that the period before the Father takes His seat is *the beginning of birth pains*. Mat 24:8. However, when He takes His seat, it will be as though the world has suddenly begun to experience active labour pains! We know that during the opening of the seals one quarter of the entire world's population will perish.

The prophet Joel proclaimed, 'Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty.' Joe 1:15. Furthermore, he said, 'Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand ... the Lord gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?' Joe 2:1,11.

The day of the Lord is the day of His judgement upon the earth. It will commence with the judgement of the seals. Rev 6. The book of Revelation recorded that at the opening of the sixth seal all the kings of the earth and the mighty men will say to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne [the Father] and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?' Rev 6:16-17.

Significantly, during the opening of the seals, the firstfruits of the true Israel of God will proclaim the gospel of the kingdom as a testimony in all nations. Mat 24:14. Rev 6:2. The fruit of their evangelistic ministry will be a great multitude that no man can number. The day of the Lord will polarise the entire world. Joel declared, 'Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.' Joe 3:14. In the day of the Lord, half of the world's population will come into the kingdom of God.

Chapter 2

Blow the trumpet in Zion

In the previous chapter, we considered that the midnight hour, when the Father takes His seat, is the beginning of the day of the Lord. 2Pe 3:10. 1Th 5:2-4. The day of the Lord is the day of His vengeance. However, the day of the Lord is also 'the acceptable year of the Lord'. The acceptable year of the Lord is called 'the year of My redeemed'. The Lord declared through the prophet Isaiah, 'For the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed.' Isa 63:4.

'The year of My redeemed' refers to the final fulfilment of the year of Jubilee for the true Israel of God. The word 'jubilee' means 'an acclamation of joy or a battle cry, especially the blowing of trumpets as an alarm'. We are reminded that the prophet Joel declared, 'Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand.' Joe 2:1.

It is important to recognise that the blowing of the trumpet precedes the year of Jubilee. That is, the year of Jubilee was always announced by the blowing of the trumpet. When the nation of Israel entered the promised land, the Lord instructed them to count seven cycles of seven years. Lev 25:8. The trumpet of the Jubilee was to be blown on the Day of Atonement throughout the entire land of Israel in the 49th year. Lev 25:9. The trumpet announced that the 50th year would be a Jubilee year when

every person returned to the inheritance that had been given to their family in the promised land. Lev 25:10-13.

At the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus stood up in the synagogue of His home town to read from the book of Isaiah. He said, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' Luk 4:18-19. When we compare this with the original passage in the book of Isaiah, we note that the acceptable year of the Lord is also the day of His vengeance. Isa 61:1-2.

Having read this passage, Jesus gave the book of Isaiah back to the attendant and sat down. He then proclaimed to all those who were in the synagogue, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.' Luk 4:21. On this basis, some commentators have suggested that this must have been a Jubilee year. However, Jesus used the prophetic Scriptures written by Isaiah to 'lift up His voice like a trumpet' to proclaim the nature and focus of His entire earthly ministry. Isa 58:1. Having been baptised and anointed with the sevenfold Spirit of Yahweh, by the Holy Spirit, Jesus stood up to announce *the beginning of His ministry* as the Christ – the Anointed One. Dan 9:25-26.

We know that the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ concluded with His offering. The year of Christ's crucifixion was the true fulfilment of the year of Jubilee. It was on His offering journey from the last supper to the cross that He obtained *eternal redemption* for sons of men to become sons of God. Heb 9:12. The offering of Christ was the true Jubilee. The apostle Paul declared, 'For this reason He is the Mediator of the New Covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the *eternal inheritance*.' Heb 9:15. The major focus of the Jubilee is the eternal inheritance of sons of God in the heavenly Jerusalem.

The *forty jubilees* that belong to the church age are a participation for sons of God in the finished work of Christ. In this regard, the wandering of the nation of Israel in the wilderness for forty years, before they entered the promised land, foreshadows that the elect will be scattered in the wilderness of the nations for *forty Jubilee years* before they receive and possess the kingdom of God. Eze 20:33-38. We are reminded that the apostle Paul said concerning the forty years in the wilderness, 'Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.' 1Co 10:11.

The promised land was a type of the kingdom of God that will fill the whole earth in the time of the end.

As we considered in the previous chapter, the church age commenced on the day of Christ's resurrection when He personally began to build His church as Mount Zion. The forty days that Jesus spent with His disciples in laying the foundation of the heavenly Jerusalem also foreshadows the *forty Jubilee years* throughout which He will continue to build His church from heaven, before the Father takes His seat. Of course, we know that the Father is not constrained to a prophetic framework. However, when the Father takes His seat, it will initiate the redemption of the true Israel of God as the *fortieth Jubilee* since the offering of Christ.

The trumpet of the Jubilee

Recognising that the Jubilee was always announced by the trumpet, it is likely that when the apostle John heard the voice of Christ 'like the sound of a trumpet', it announced the first Jubilee that belongs to the church age. The apostle John testified that he heard behind him '*a loud voice as of a trumpet*'. Rev 1:10. When he turned to see the voice, he saw Jesus Christ, clothed in priestly garments, in the middle of seven golden lampstands. Jesus Christ is our great High Priest. Rev 1:12-16. He is presently seated at the right hand of the Father, as a priest on His throne, throughout the forty Jubilees of the church age. Zec 6:13.

It is widely accepted that the book of Revelation was written while John was in exile during the reign of the Roman emperor, Domitian. Historical records suggest that Domitian reigned from AD81 to AD96. This was a time of great persecution for Christians. Many commentators suggest that John wrote his Gospel and his letters first, and then wrote the book of Revelation towards the end of Domitian's reign. However, it is far more likely that he received the revelation of Jesus Christ first, then wrote his Gospel, followed by his letters. In this regard, it is certainly possible that he wrote the book of Revelation at the beginning of Domitian's reign, not at the end.

It is significant that, on the first Jubilee of the church age, Jesus Christ called the presbytery of each lampstand church to return to the inheritance that had been given to them in the heavenly Jerusalem on Mount Zion. For example, Jesus said to the presbytery in Ephesus, 'I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember *from where you have fallen*; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent.' Rev 2:4-5. At the same time, Jesus promised the Ephesians, '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.

The admonition of Jesus Christ to the presbytery of each lampstand church, as recorded in the seven letters in the book of Revelation, has been applicable for the entire church age. Notably, Jesus concluded His admonition to each presbytery by proclaiming the relevance of each letter to all lampstand churches. He said, at the end of each letter, ‘He who has an ear, let him hear *what the Spirit says to the churches.*’ Rev 2:7. This is an important point. Even though there are forty Jubilees that belong to the church age, the content for the entire church age was delivered on *the first Jubilee* and is recorded in the Scriptures. The Scriptures have then been proclaimed by the apostolic administration of Christ, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, as a word of present truth in each generation.

Significantly, the apostle John heard the voice of Christ, like the sound of a trumpet, announcing both *the first and the last* Jubilees that belong to the church age. He said, ‘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”. Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.’ Rev 4:1-2. Amazingly, John was carried in the Spirit to the time of *the fortieth Jubilee* when the Father will take His seat! When the Father takes His seat, it will initiate the day of the Lord, which is also the day of our redemption. Luk 21:28.

The seven trumpets

The ‘trumpet of the Jubilee’ is the first kind of trumpet that we observe in the book of Revelation. Lev 25:9. Rev 1:10. Rev 4:1. The second kind of trumpet that is identified in the book of Revelation is ‘the seven trumpets’ which will be given to the seven angels who stand before God. The seven angels will receive the seven trumpets after the seventh seal is opened by Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God. John recorded, ‘When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.’ Rev 8:1-2. This verse highlights an important point about the timing of the seven trumpets. That is, the trumpets will not be blown until *after* the seventh seal has been opened. The seventh seal contains the seven trumpets.

Notably, the seven angels will not immediately blow the seven trumpets when the seventh seal is opened. Rather, they will wait until the censer that belongs to the true altar of incense has been inverted. John continued,

'Another angel came and stood by the altar, holding a golden censer, and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake. *And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them.*' Rev 8:3-6.

It is important to recognise that the seven trumpets are implicitly connected to the operation of the true altar of incense before the throne of God in the heavenly places. The seven angels who blow the seven trumpets are under the command of the voice that proceeds from the altar of incense. We read concerning the sixth trumpet, 'Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates".' Rev 9:13-14. The voice that proceeds from the true altar of incense is the prayer and worship of the saints under the leadership of the one presbytery with its twenty-four divisions.

Specifically, the seven trumpets will proclaim the judgement of God upon the earth once the golden censer has been inverted. When the censer is inverted, the focus of the prayer and worship of the saints, as the expression of the true altar of incense, will shift from *intercessory prayer* to *imprecatory prayer*. The term 'imprecatory prayer' is used to describe the prayer that invites God to judge His enemies. There are many examples of imprecatory prayer in the psalms. Psalms 69:24. The key point is that the seven trumpets will announce the judgement of God upon the world in response to the imprecatory prayer of the saints. The imprecatory prayer of the saints in the time of the end will include the cry of all those who have been slain for the word of God and because of their testimony. Rev 6:8-10.

The true altar of incense in the time of the end

Let us consider the ministry of the true altar of incense in more detail. During the forty Jubilees that belong to the church age, the focus of our prayerful travail is 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed by Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' Mat 6:9-10. When we pray, 'Your kingdom come', we are looking forward, with eager expectation, to the time when the Father will take His seat to establish His kingdom on the earth. Speaking about the coming judgement of God upon the world, the apostle Peter said, 'Since all these things will be dissolved,

what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, *looking for and hastening* the coming of the day of God.' 2Pe 3:11-12.

When the Father takes His seat, Jesus Christ will stand up from His throne and will move to the centre of the Father's throne. The administration of Christ will then be 'in and around' the throne of the Father. Rev 4. This means that the entire administration of Christ will be focused upon *revealing the Father* and *establishing His kingdom* on the earth. The *name of the Father* will be written upon the overcomers from lampstand churches because it will be their work, in the time of the end, to reveal the Father to the world. Rev 3:12. Rev 14:1. Jesus said, in the parable of the wheat and the tares, 'Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!' Mat 13:43.

In the time of the end, the administration 'in and around' the throne of the Father will be led by the apostolic administration of Christ in one, world-wide presbytery with twenty-four courses, or divisions. Rev 4:4. The major focus of ministry for the entire administration that is 'in and around' the throne of the Father will be *prayer and worship*. In the first case, it will be the worship of the Father. The prayer and worship of all the saints, led by the presbytery with its twenty-four divisions, will be the ministry expression of the true altar of incense in the time of the end.

The apostle John described *the true altar of incense* by saying, 'Whenever the living creatures [the apostolic administration of Christ] give glory and honour and thanks to Him who sits on the throne [the Father] who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders [the world-wide presbytery with twenty-four divisions] fall down before Him who sits on the throne and *worship Him* who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns down before the throne, saying: "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 4:9-11.

We know that this prayer and worship is the ministry of the true altar of incense because the apostle John described the twenty-four elders as having golden bowls of incense in their hands. The golden bowls of incense are the prayers of the saints. Rev 5:8. As we have considered, when the Father takes His seat, the focus of the ministry of the true altar of incense will be the worship of the Father. When the Father gives the seven-sealed scroll to Jesus Christ, as the Lamb of God, the ministry of the true altar of incense will be enlarged. The presbytery will lead all the saints in worshipping the Father *and* in proclaiming the worthiness of the Lamb to open the seals. Rev 5:6-13.

When the Lamb opens the seals, the righteous judgements of God will begin to be manifested in the earth. The opening of the seals will reveal the first phase of the great and terrible day of the Lord. One quarter of the earth's population will die under the judgement of God because of world war, famine and pestilence. Rev 6:8. However, at the same time, the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed as a testimony in all nations. Rev 6:2. Mat 24:14. The evangelistic ministry of the firstfruits of the true Israel of God will gather a great multitude from every nation into the kingdom of God.

The judgement of God will be manifested in the earth during the opening of the seals. However, when the judgements of God are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will 'learn righteousness'. Isa 26:9. A great multitude will learn righteousness because of the intercessory prayer of the presbytery and all the saints. This is an important point. The firstfruits of the true Israel of God will have a unique and specific intercessory ministry in the time of the end. They will be praying and interceding for the great multitude as they come into the kingdom of God during this season of great tribulation and severe persecution.

The great multitude who come into the kingdom of God during the great tribulation will wash their priestly garments and will make them white in the blood of the Lamb. Rev 7:14. Significantly, one of the elders explained to the apostle John that the great multitude will be 'before the throne of God'. They will serve the Father as priests in His temple day and night. Rev 7:15. As the great multitude come into the kingdom of God, they will join the priestly ministry of prayer and worship that belongs to the true altar of incense before the throne of the Father. The intercessory prayer of the saints will continue to ascend as incense during the seven years that the kingdom of God rules over the nations of the world.

The seven years

When the sixth seal is opened, the Lord will sovereignly intervene in the affairs of men to judge the armies of Gog and Magog on the mountains of Israel. Eze 38:18-23. Rev 6:12-17. This sovereign judgement will shatter the power of the seventh world kingdom. The book of Ezekiel recorded that it will take seven months to bury the bodies, and seven years to burn the weapons. Eze 39:9. Eze 39:12-15. The prophet Isaiah declared that the Lord, through His messengers, 'will judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall

they learn war anymore'. Isa 2:4. These seven years of peace belong to the opening of the sixth seal.

For seven years, the economic and political administration of Babylon in the world will become completely subservient to the kingdom of God. All the kings of the earth will learn the same lesson that King Nebuchadnezzar learned when seven times passed over him as the head of all the world kingdoms. Dan 4:16-17. Dan 4:31-32. The rulers of the seventh world kingdom will learn that the Most High God rules in the affairs of men and that He gives it to whomever He chooses. The parable of the minas teaches us that the Lord will reward His faithful overseers with authority over cities. Luk 19:16-19. It is remarkable to consider that the major agenda, and the greatest priority, in all these cities will be *agape* fellowship!

During these seven years, the entire world will be polarised between those who belong to the kingdom of God and those who belong to the ungodly nations of the world. In every place where there are sons of God, who are devoted to *agape* fellowship, the wilderness will rejoice and blossom as the rose. Isa 35:1. In contrast to this, Zechariah prophesied, 'It shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to [the heavenly] Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the Lord strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.' Zec 14:17-18.

At the end of the reign of the kingdom of God over the nations for seven years, the whole world will be completely polarised between the sons of God and sons of men. Every person in the world will have been given ample opportunity to respond to the gospel and to come into the kingdom of God. The opening of the seventh seal will initiate a major transition from mercy to judgement in relation to the ministry of the true altar of incense. The golden censer will be filled with fire from the altar and then thrown into the earth. Rev 8:1-5. As we have considered, the ministry of the altar of incense will shift from intercessory prayer to imprecatory prayer.

After this shift from intercessory prayer to imprecatory prayer takes place, the seven trumpets will announce the final judgements of God upon the earth. During the blowing of the trumpets, the judgement of God will be manifested upon one third of the natural creation and upon one third of all mankind. Rev 8:6-Rev 9:21. The Scripture is clear that the judgement of God that belongs to the blowing of the trumpets will not harm anyone who is a son of God. Rev 9:4. Significantly, the seventh trumpet contains the seven vials. The seven vials contain the fullness of the wrath of God that will be poured out upon Antichrist and his kingdom. Rev 15:7.

Answering the cry of the martyrs

The blowing of the trumpets and, more specifically, the outpouring of the vials, will be the answer to the cry of the martyrs from under the altar. John recorded concerning the opening of the fifth seal, 'I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.' Rev 6:9-11.

We know that some of the great multitude who will come into the kingdom of God during the opening of the seals will die as martyrs. The opening of the seals will be a time of intense persecution. Mat 24:21. It has sometimes been suggested that John saw the souls of the martyrs under the bronze altar. This has been suggested because, in the temple of old, the blood that was 'left over' from the sacrifices was poured out under the bronze altar. Lev 4:7. However, it is certainly possible that John saw the souls of the martyrs underneath the golden altar of incense. It is likely that every mention of 'the altar' in the book of Revelation is a reference to the golden altar of incense that is before the throne of God. Rev 8:3-5. Rev 9:13-14. Rev 11:1. Rev 14:18. Rev 16:7.

Part of the reason why the martyrs were told to 'rest a little while longer' is because there is still a great harvest to come into the kingdom of God. As we have considered, the focus of the ministry of the altar of incense will be *intercessory prayer* until a great multitude has come into kingdom of God from every nation. However, at the end of the seven years, the ministry of the altar of incense will shift from mercy to judgement. The cry of the martyrs from under the altar will be added as 'much incense' to the prayers of the saints on the altar of incense. Rev 8:3. The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, will then ascend as a cry for judgement before God. Rev 8:4.

Unlike the manifestation of the judgement of God during the opening of the seals, the nations will not learn righteousness during the blowing of the trumpets. Rather, the ungodly will refuse to repent, and they will become enraged against God and His kingdom. John recorded concerning the judgement of the trumpets, 'The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their

murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.’
Rev 9:20-21.

When the fifth trumpet is blown, the bottomless pit will be opened. Rev 9:1. The seventh world kingdom will re-emerge from the sea of the nations as an eighth world kingdom under the leadership of Antichrist. The deadly wound that the seventh world kingdom received at the opening of the sixth seal will be healed. Rev 13:3,12. In the eighth world kingdom, the administration of Babylon will be replaced by a completely new social, political and economic system. Rev 13:11-18. Every person will be required to receive the mark of the beast to participate in this new system. Remarkably, there will be one final group of martyrs who will come into the kingdom of God when they refuse to receive this mark.

This final group of martyrs will receive the faith and grace to refuse the mark of the beast because of the word that will be proclaimed by the 144 000 during the emergence of the eighth world kingdom. Rev 14:9-11. Significantly, once this final group of martyrs have lost their lives because of their obedience to the word of God, the period of waiting for the martyrs from every generation will come to an end. We are reminded that the Lord told the martyrs under the altar to wait until ‘the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who would be killed as they were, was completed’. Rev 6:11.

Following the death of this final group of martyrs, the Lord will answer the cry of all the martyrs, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ Rev 6:10. The Lord will answer this cry by proclaiming the end of the period of delay. Rev 10:5-7. Significantly, when the period of delay comes to an end, the true altar of incense will be measured. The apostle John recorded, ‘Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, “rise and measure the temple of God, the altar [of incense] and those who worship there”.’ Rev 11:1.

Once the true altar of incense has been measured, there will be no further opportunity for repentance or salvation. The twelve gates to the heavenly Jerusalem upon Mount Zion will be completely closed to the world. The period of delay will come to an end, and the altar of incense will be measured, immediately before the blowing of the seventh trumpet. We know that the seventh trumpet contains the outpouring of the seven vials which contain the fullness of the wrath of God. Interestingly, during the description of the outpouring of the vials, John recorded that he heard a voice from the golden altar of incense saying, ‘Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgements.’ Rev 16:7.

Chapter 3

Isaiah Chapter 48

When the apostle Paul was sent by Christ as a light to the Gentiles, he proclaimed the gospel of God from the prophetic Scriptures. Rom 1:1-4. When we read the writings of the apostle Paul, he continually referred to the prophetic Scriptures and identified their fulfilment in his own day. However, more than this, as he proclaimed the gospel, in obedience to the commandment of the everlasting God, he described his own ministry as *the manifestation of the prophetic Scriptures*. Rom 16:25-26. This is a most remarkable principle. In his own generation, Paul was a living epistle of the prophetic Scriptures among the Gentiles!

On his first missionary journey, Paul declared, 'For so the Lord has commanded us: "I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth".' Act 13:47. We know that he was quoting directly from the prophetic writings of Isaiah. Isa 49:6. Clearly, Paul applied the fulfilment of this prophecy to himself and to the messengers of Christ in the church age. It is important that we use *the same hermeneutic*, that has been delivered to us by the apostle Paul, when we consider the prophecies of Isaiah. In our next two chapters, we will consider the prophetic fulfilment of Isaiah Chapters 48 and 49 in the church age, and in the time of the end.

The house of Jacob from the wellsprings of Judah

The Lord declared through the prophet Isaiah, 'Hear 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. When the Lord addressed all those who belong to the house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, He was not talking to *the natural descendants* of Israel. From a natural perspective, the house of Jacob did not come from the loins, or the wellsprings, of Judah. That is, Jacob was not Judah's son. Rather, Judah was one of Jacob's twelve sons. Gen 29:35.

We know that the twelve sons of Jacob became the fathers of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. King David and King Solomon ruled over all twelve tribes of Israel. However, in the days of King Rehoboam, the nation was divided between the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. 1Ki 12. The ten northern tribes, led by the tribe of Ephraim, became known as the house of Israel or *the kingdom of Israel*. The southern tribes, led by the tribe of Judah, became known as the house of Judah or *the kingdom of Judah*.

By the time that the prophet Isaiah began his ministry, the house of Jacob had already been divided between the northern and southern kingdoms for well over 200 years. Furthermore, during the lifetime of Isaiah, the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrian Empire. 2Ki 17. The Assyrians scattered the ten northern tribes of Israel among the Gentile nations. For this reason, it is not possible to trace the lineage of the ten northern tribes to any modern-day nation.

This is an important point. Even if it were possible to trace the lineage of the ten northern tribes today, the Lord is not intending to unite the lost tribes of Israel with their Jewish brethren for the purpose of reconstituting the house of Jacob according to the flesh. Rather, through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord declared that He would create *a completely new nation!* The new nation has come from the wellsprings of Judah because it was brought forth through the offering of Jesus Christ, who was born in the lineage of King David, from the tribe of Judah. Mat 1:1. Luk 1:32. Rom 1:3.

As we have considered in previous publications, the Father joined the whole of humanity, including both Jew and Gentile, to the physical body of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane. The physical body of Christ became the embodiment of the *corporate old creation*. On His offering journey to the cross, Jesus Christ then suffered under the eternal

judgement of God upon our sin and uncleanness as He took the entire old creation out into the sea of God's forgetfulness. Rom 6:6.

In the offering of Christ on the cross, the judgement of God upon the old creation brought the whole of humanity to a complete end. Joh 19:30. 2Co 5:17. It is important to recognise that the twelve tribes of natural Israel also came to a complete end in the physical body of Christ on the cross. The cross was the place where the Lord proclaimed to both the Jews, and the ten northern tribes of Israel who had long been scattered among the Gentiles, 'You are not My people.' Hos 1:9-11. Rom 9:26.

However, the judgement of God that brought a complete end to all humanity on the cross, also *overflowed with righteousness* through the offering of Christ. Isa 10:22. The prophet Isaiah proclaimed concerning the judgement of the cross, 'Unless the Lord of hosts had left to us *a very small remnant*, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah.' Isa 1:9. When Isaiah spoke of a remnant, he was not inferring that a small portion of the nation would escape the judgement of God. The remnant refers to those who 'return' with Christ, by resurrection, because they have laid hold of the mercy of God in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

The new nation

As Jesus Christ endured each wounding event on His journey from Gethsemane to the cross, the resurrection life of God in His blood redeemed Him, or brought Him back, from the death of our sin. Heb 13:20. He brought all those who turn to embrace their participation in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, back with Him as part of *the corporate new creation*. 2Co 5:17. The corporate new creation includes both Jew and Gentile in the one body of Christ.

The corporate new creation is the house of Jacob, called by the name of Israel, that has come from the wellsprings of Judah. Isa 48:1. The apostle Paul declared to the Ephesians concerning the inclusion of both Jew and Gentile in the body of Christ, 'For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, that law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to *create in Himself one new man* from the two, thus making peace.' Eph 2:14-15. The one new man reveals the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ for every son of God. Eph 4:13.

While Christ was in the lowest parts of the earth on the cross, He learned our obedience and completed the works of our sonship for all eternity. Psa 139:15-16. Heb 5:8. Speaking about the offering of Christ on the cross, the prophet Hosea declared, 'And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, "You are not My people", there it shall be said to them, "You are sons of the living God". Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel.' Hos 1:10-11.

In the first case, the day of Jezreel was the day of Christ's crucifixion. The one Head of the corporate new creation is Jesus Christ. Col 1:18. Eph 5:23. He *created in Himself* the one new man through the seven wounding events that He experienced on His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. When His offering was complete, He committed His Spirit into the hands of the heavenly Father. Luk 23:46. He sat down in the Father's throne as the Son of God, while His physical body continued to rest in hope on the cross.

As we considered in Chapter 1, blood and water gushed from the physical body of Christ when His side was pierced by the spear. Joh 19:34. The piercing of Christ's side was not one of the seven wounding events. Rather, after Christ's offering was complete, His pierced side opened the new and living way for our participation in the fellowship of His offering. Heb 10:19-20. The blood and water were accompanied by the spirit of grace and supplication. Zec 12:10. These three elements, together, flowed from Christ's finished offering as the fountain for sin and uncleanness. Zec 13:1.

These three elements - the blood, the water, and the Spirit - also flowed from the finished offering of Christ as *the river of the water of life*. The river of the water of life flowed directly from the throne of grace, where Christ had taken His seat with the Father, through His physical body on the cross. In the book of Revelation, the apostle John recorded that he saw 'a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb'. Rev 22:1. The river of the water of life is the everlasting source of life for every son of God.

Furthermore, the river of the water of life is the complete provision for the formation of the church as the bride of Christ. The blood, water, and Spirit that flowed from the side of Christ was 'the rib' that was taken from His body on the day of His crucifixion. On the day of His resurrection, Jesus Christ stepped back into His immortal body to begin

building the church. Using the blood, water, and Spirit that flowed from His side, He laid the foundation of the church for forty days. Following this period of forty days, He ascended from the Mount of Olives to be seated in His own throne at the right hand of God.

The key point is that the fullness of sonship that belongs to Jesus Christ as the corporate new creation is only revealed in this world, and in the age to come, through the heavenly Jerusalem. The heavenly Jerusalem is the bride of Christ. The church, as the bride of Christ, has been formed from the side of Christ to be the vessel for the multiplication of sonship, for eternity. It is remarkable to consider that when the Lord declared, 'Hear this, O house of Jacob', He was addressing a new nation of sons of God, through the prophet Isaiah, before the nation even existed! Isa 48:1.

Not in truth or in righteousness

The Lord continued to describe the house of Jacob, from the wellsprings of Judah, by saying that they 'swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but *not in truth or in righteousness*; for they call themselves after *the holy city*, and lean on the God of Israel, the Lord of hosts is His name'. Isa 48:1-2. The holy city is the heavenly Jerusalem. In this passage, the 'house of Jacob' is applied to the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem who are still being cleansed from their idolatry and sorcery.

In the same way that Jacob was a deceiver and needed his nature to be changed, the house of Jacob needs to be cleansed from all deceit. Jesus explained that Satan is the father of lies because he speaks from his own resource. Joh 8:44. Satan assumes that the Father also speaks from His own resource because he does not understand the fellowship of Yahweh *Elohim* that brought forth the Everlasting Covenant. The Father does not speak from His own resource or function independently. He has been sanctified, within the fellowship of Yahweh *Elohim*, to be the source of the word of truth for every son of God. Joh 17:17.

There are many ways in which the inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem may 'make mention of the God of Israel, but *not in truth*'. Isa 48:1. For example, the apostle John said that 'if we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practise the truth'. 1Jn 1:6. In his first letter, John identified several more examples of practising a lie. He said that anyone who says that they know the Lord, but they do not obey His word, is a liar. 1Jn 2:4. Equally, anyone who says

that they love God, but they do not love their brethren, is also a liar.
1Jn 4:20.

We also 'make mention of the God of Israel, but *not in truth*' whenever we present an image, or a projection, of ourselves to others in the church. The image that we have created for ourselves is not real. It is a lie, and we are trying to deceive others. It is also sobering to consider that we are guilty of propagating a lie whenever we presume to speak from our own resources. We do this when we presume to be the source of wisdom for ourselves, or for others, rather than receiving wisdom from above in the fellowship of the tree of life. Pro 3:13,18. Jas 3:17.

Earlier in the book of Isaiah, we read about the Lord's cleansing initiative toward the unclean daughters of Zion. Speaking about the day of Christ's judgement upon their uncleanness, the prophet Isaiah said, '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 4:1. To eat *our own food* is to make mention of the God of Israel, but *not in truth*. To wear *our own apparel* is to make mention of the God of Israel, but *not in righteousness*.

The righteousness of God is the revelation of sonship. Rom 1:17. If we are wearing our own apparel, we are clothed with the filthy garments of our own self-righteousness. Isa 64:6. Self-righteousness is the expression of the name and works that we have defined for ourselves. In contrast to this, the white robe that we receive from Christ is our priestly garment. It is our mandate to serve as a priest in the Father's temple. We wash our priestly garment in the blood of the Lamb as we embrace our fellowship in Christ's offering and sufferings. Rev 7:14-15. Significantly, our priestly garment is also our wedding garment. Rev 19:7-8.

Jesus Christ addresses His lampstand churches with eyes like a flame of fire because He is cleansing the house of Jacob from all deceit and self-righteousness during the church age. Significantly, it is only the sons of God who are willing to be cleansed by Christ who will remain in the heavenly Jerusalem. Isa 4:3. He is meeting us with a spirit of judgement and burning now, so that we are ready for the time when the Father takes His seat. Isa 4:4-5. It is only those who have learned to walk blamelessly, in the fellowship of Christ's offering, who will accompany Christ to the Father's throne in the time of the end. Mat 25:10. 2Pe 3:14. 1Jn 2:28.

Listen to Me

As we have considered, Isaiah Chapter 48 begins with the words, '*Hear this, O house of Jacob*'. Isa 48:1. Before we consider the content of the message, it will be helpful to identify the One who is speaking and admonishing the church as the house of Jacob. We read later in the same chapter, '*Listen to Me, O Jacob, and Israel, My called: I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last*'. Isa 48:12. We know that Jesus Christ introduced Himself in the same way to the apostle John. He said, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End', says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty".' Rev 1:8.

In the first case, the Son of God addressed the house of Jacob as the Word of the Father. As the One who articulates and expresses the Father's word, He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Joh 1:3. He said, 'Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand has stretched out the heavens.' Isa 48:13. Speaking about the angelic host of heaven, He continued by saying, 'When I call to them, they stand up together.' Isa 48:13.

However, the Son of God did not only address the house of Jacob as the Word of the Father who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. He also addressed them as I AM. In doing so, He was inviting the house of Jacob to draw near to Him on the holy ground of the fellowship of Yahweh. It is I AM who meets us and speaks to us for the express purpose of inviting us to draw near for fellowship with Him. Exo 3:14. He said, '*Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning, from the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me.*' Isa 48:16.

We note the similarity between this verse in the book of Isaiah and the first verse in the Gospel of John. The apostle John declared, '*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*' Joh 1:1. We have considered the fellowship of offering in Yahweh *Elohim* that brought forth the Everlasting Covenant, in the book *The Gospel of God*. In this fellowship of offering, Yahweh the Son emptied Himself to become the Son of the Father. When Yahweh the Son was begotten as the Son of God, this was something *altogether new* in the fellowship of Yahweh *Elohim*. Heb 1:5.

The Son of God was the beginning of all new creation. He became the Seed of God, containing the name of every foreknown son of God. From this beginning in the Everlasting Covenant, the Son of God, as the Word

of God, then proceeded to create the heavens and the earth as the context for sons of men to become sons of God. Gen 1. Once man had been created by Yahweh *Elohim*, the Son of God was then sent by the Father and the Holy Spirit to reveal the secret counsel of Yahweh *Elohim* to us as I AM. Moses recognised this and declared, ‘The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever.’ Deu 29:29.

Further to this, Jesus Christ, as I AM, is our Redeemer. He declared, ‘Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go”.’ Isa 48:17. We know that Jesus Christ is called ‘the Holy One’. He became our Redeemer when He joined us in our death, and then came back from our death through the seven wounding events that He experienced on His offering journey from the last supper to the cross. Jesus Christ has learned our obedience and fulfilled the works of our sonship. Heb 5:8. Isa 26:12. He is the Son of Man who teaches us to profit as we walk with Him on the pathway that He has pioneered for us.

I have declared the former things

Having identified that it is the Son of God who is speaking to the house of Jacob during the church age, let us now consider the content of the message. The Lord said, ‘I have declared the former things from the beginning; they went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass.’ Isa 48:3. The Lord was highlighting an important principle in relation to the revelation and fulfilment of His will and purpose. It is the proceeding word of God that reveals the secret counsel of Yahweh *Elohim* and creates events in history.

When the Lord said, ‘I have declared the former things’, He was referring to the events that had already happened in history. In the book of Isaiah, there is a simple distinction between the *former things* and the *new things*. The former things describe *past people or events*. In contrast to this, the *new things* describe future people or events. Explaining this simple distinction elsewhere in the book of Isaiah, the Lord said, ‘Behold, the *former things* have come to pass, and *new things* I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.’ Isa 42:9.

The Lord has drawn our attention to the historical precedent in relation to the *former things* so that we understand the same principle in relation to the *new things*. The principle is straightforward. The prophet Amos

summarised the key point by saying, 'Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets'. Amo 3:7. We may be inclined to interpret this statement to mean that the Lord has promised to always give His prophets some advance warning before He sovereignly intervenes in the affairs of men. However, it is more than that. It is the prophetic word that was revealed to the prophets, and then recorded in the prophetic Scriptures, which *creates* the future events!

This principle most certainly reveals God's sovereignty in the affairs of men. Dan 5:21. The future events that have been recorded in the prophetic Scriptures will be fulfilled. Jesus Himself, who is the source of the prophetic Scriptures, proclaimed that 'the Scripture cannot be broken'. Joh 10:35. However, there is a further dimension to the prophetic word that we must consider. Prior to the fulfilment of the prophetic word, the prophetic Scriptures are always proclaimed to us by the messengers of Christ as a word of present truth. The word of present truth is not an expression of the creative word of the Son of God. It is an invitation for fellowship.

Notably, the way in which we respond to the word of present truth, as an invitation for fellowship, will determine the impact that future events, which have already been created by the prophetic word, will have on us. Isa 55:10-11. 2Pe 1:19. That is, the fulfilment of the prophetic Scriptures *in the future* will be the manifestation of God's judgement upon us, or His mercy toward us, depending on how we respond to the word of present truth *today*. When we consider this principle, we understand why the Lord gives us the opportunity to hear the word proclaimed before it is fulfilled.

The *first reason* why the word is proclaimed to us, before it is fulfilled, is to give us the *opportunity to repent*. 2Pe 3:9. The Lord said, 'Because I knew that you were obstinate, and your neck was an iron sinew, and your brow bronze.' Isa 48:4. This is an apt description of our fallen human condition as Jacob. We have a hard heart and a stiff neck. We do not have the inclination, or the capacity, to respond to the word with repentance and faith. When the word of God is proclaimed to us, it is accompanied by the prevenient grace that is necessary for us to receive the word and respond to it. The faith that is necessary for us to believe the word is offered to us as a gift. Rom 10:17.

The Lord explained the *second reason* why the word is proclaimed before it is fulfilled, by saying, 'Even from the beginning I have declared it to you; before it came to pass I proclaimed it to you, lest you should say,

“My idol has done them, and my carved image and my moulded image have commanded them”.’ Isa 48:5. An idol is an image that we have created for ourselves that reflects who we want to become. We present this image to others in the hope that they will accept it. We also seek to validate the image that we have created of ourselves through the work of our own hands. Isa 2:8.

The Lord does not want us to confuse the fulfilment of His word with the outcome of the work of our own hands. We are reminded that when the nation of Israel entered the promised land, many of the people quickly forgot the Lord. They became arrogant and proud. Rather than recognising the Lord’s sovereign provision in the land, they believed that *the work of their own hands* had made them wealthy. Deu 8:17. Notably, before they entered the land, Moses proclaimed that this would be the case. The proclamation of the word, in advance, left no room for its fulfilment to be attributed to an idol.

I have made you hear new things

Having identified the principle of the proceeding word being fulfilled in history, the Lord continued by saying, ‘You have heard; see all this. And will you not declare it? I have made you hear *new things* from this time, even hidden things, and you did not know them.’ Isa 48:6. The Lord was now proclaiming *a new thing* that had previously been hidden in the fellowship of Yahweh *Elohim* from before the foundation of the world. 1Co 2:7. Eph 3:9. Col 1:26. Remarkably, as the Lord proclaimed this word through the prophet Isaiah, it was creating events that would happen in the future.

The Lord continued, ‘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 48:7. We need to highlight two key points from this verse. The first point is that this was not the same dimension of the word that created the heavens and the earth in the beginning. It was not the creative word of *Elohim* that commanded the heavens and the earth into existence. Gen 1. Rather, it was the word of Yahweh *Elohim* that established *the history* of the heavens and the earth by creating events in time. Gen 2:4.

The second point to note is that this was *a new word*. It had never been proclaimed by the Lord before this time. It had never been heard by man. The privilege of hearing this word for the first time was given to the prophet Isaiah. We know that the Lord had commissioned Isaiah to

announce and invoke the judgement of God upon the whole nation of Israel. Isa 6:8-10. However, this was not his only mandate as a prophet. The Lord also revealed the prophetic word to him that created future events in the history of the nation of Israel, and indeed, in the history of the church. Of course, Isaiah recorded everything that he saw and heard in the prophetic Scriptures.

Referring to His foreknowledge, the Lord explained to the prophet Isaiah *why He was creating these new events*. He said, 'For *I knew* that you would deal very treacherously, and were called a transgressor from the womb.' Isa 48:8. Even though Jacob belonged to the household of faith, he was a transgressor from the womb. He was a deceiver. His nature needed to be changed in the fellowship of Christ's offering. The same is true for us as the house of Jacob. It is interesting that the Lord proclaimed this new word to Isaiah the prophet, because He knew that we, as the house of Jacob, would be 'a transgressor from the womb'. Isa 48:8.

Significantly, the Lord has *deferred*, or *delayed*, His anger upon our transgression as the expression of His own sovereign mercy. The Lord declared, 'For My name's sake I will defer My anger.' Isa 48:9. He has created a period of delay. The final outpouring of the fullness of the wrath of God upon the world will not happen until the end of this period of delay. The period of delay gives all men the opportunity for repentance. The apostle Paul said, concerning the final manifestation of the judgement of God, 'The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.' 2Pe 3:9.

The key point is that the judgement of God upon our transgression is commuted to circumcision and chastening, during the period of delay, for those who embrace their participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. On His offering journey to the cross, Jesus Christ became the embodiment of all our transgression in His physical body. He was numbered among the transgressors. Isa 53:12. He suffered under the judgement of God upon our transgression. Isa 53:5,8. However, as Christ willingly laid down His life by the grace of God, each wounding event that He experienced from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross became a *circumcising event* to remove the old creation.

Referring to how judgement is commuted to circumcision for those who repent and embrace their fellowship in His offering, the Lord said, 'For My name's sake I will defer My anger, and for My praise I will restrain it

from you, so that *I do not cut you off.*' Isa 48:9. Rather than being cut off in judgement, the flesh is circumcised from us in the fellowship of His offering. Further to this, each wounding event that Christ experienced, from Gethsemane to the cross, also became a chastening event. We note that there is an important distinction between circumcision and chastening. Circumcision is removing the old creation, whereas chastening is training the new creation. Heb 12:5-11.

The period of delay also becomes the context for the trial of faith, which is a refining and purifying process for the new creation. 1Pe 1:6-7. Jas 1:2-4. The Lord continued to say, through Isaiah, 'Behold, I have refined, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it; for how should My name be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another.' Isa 48:10-11. The Lord knows that the house of Jacob is full of transgressors from the womb. However, He will not give His glory to another people because He has chosen the house of Jacob. Rather, the Lord defers His anger to create the opportunity and context to deal with our transgression.

The world kingdoms – King Cyrus

This brings us to some of the specific events that the Lord created to deal with the transgression of Jacob while He defers His anger. We recall that after Jacob wrestled with the Lord, and his name was changed to Israel, he bowed seven times before his brother Esau. Gen 32:24-30. Gen 33:1-3. In this interaction, Esau represented the ungodly nations of the world. Until the Father takes His seat in the end of the age, He has appointed seven world kingdoms to rule over the people of God. Rev 17:9-10. The seven world kingdoms have been raised up by God for the sake of delivering the house of Jacob from its transgression.

We know that King Nebuchadnezzar was raised up by God to be an instrument of judgement in His hand. Jer 25:9. He conquered Jerusalem and took many of the Jewish people captive to Babylon. The exile in Babylon was a judgement upon the Jewish nation because of their transgression. Jer 25:11. However, for those who turned to the Lord with repentance and faith, the judgement was commuted to a circumcising and chastening process in their lives. For the believing remnant, the period of exile for seventy years became a trial of faith.

When this trial was complete, the Lord raised up Cyrus, the Persian, to judge Babylon and release the people from their captivity. 2Ch 36:22-23. The Lord said concerning Cyrus, 'He shall do His pleasure on Babylon,

and His arm shall be against the Chaldeans. I, even I, have spoken; yes, I have called him, I have brought him, and his way will prosper.'

Isa 48:14-15. The judgement of Babylon by King Cyrus was a new event that was created by the prophetic word for the sake of the Lord's people. It is remarkable to consider that Isaiah proclaimed this prophetic word, concerning King Cyrus, approximately 150 years before it happened.

We read earlier in the book of Isaiah, 'Thus says the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held- to subdue nations before him and loose the armour of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut: "I will go before you and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the LORD, who call you by your name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob My servant's sake, and Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name: I have named you, though you have not known Me.' Isa 45:1-4.

Cyrus was an instrument of judgement in the Lord's hand upon the Babylonian Empire. The Lord called him and anointed him for this purpose. The Lord Himself prepared the way before him to ensure that his mission was successful. He did this for the sake of the Jewish remnant who had humbled themselves and turned to the Lord with repentance during their captivity in Babylon. Isa 45:4. The Lord anointed Cyrus for the sake of the elect. Having conquered the Babylonians, Cyrus issued the royal decree that allowed the believing remnant to return to their homeland for the purpose of rebuilding the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Ezzr 1:1-3.

Having been raised up by the Lord for this purpose, Cyrus learned that Yahweh is the God of Israel. Isa 45:3. We recall that King Nebuchadnezzar also came to know that the Most High God rules in the affairs of men. Dan 4:34-37. The fact that Cyrus was anointed by God to fulfil His sovereign will, and that he learned that Yahweh is the God of Israel, does not mean that he came to know Yahweh personally.

The testimony to the ends of the earth

Having proclaimed the prophetic word concerning Cyrus, the Lord continued to admonish His people on the basis that this event would most certainly happen in the future. The Lord said to the believing remnant, 'Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! With a voice of singing, declare, proclaim this, utter it to the end of the earth; say,

“The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob!” Isa 48:20. This testimony would have been relevant for the Jewish remnant when they returned to the land of Palestine after the exile.

However, this testimony is equally relevant for the house of Jacob, who have been scattered to the four winds under the administration of Babylon for the church age. As the Lord is dealing with our transgression, our testimony is, ‘The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob!’ This is the testimony of the true Israel of God. Significantly, the Lord has commanded the believing remnant in every generation to proclaim this testimony to the ends of the earth.

Chapter 4

Isaiah Chapter 49

We read in Chapter 48 of the book of Isaiah that the Lord has commanded the firstfruits of the true Israel of God to proclaim their testimony to the ends of the earth. Isa 48:20. In obedience to this command, Chapter 49 in the book of Isaiah begins with the words of the true Israel of God as they *speak to the nations* . The true Israel of God proclaim, 'Listen, O coastlands, to Me, and take heed, you peoples from afar! The LORD has called Me from the womb; from the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name.' Isa 49:1.

Many commentators apply this verse to Jesus Christ. This is a valid interpretation. The apostle Paul declared that Moses and the prophets all taught 'that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.' Act 26:22-23. However, the interpretation of this verse is not limited to the personal ministry of Jesus Christ. It is equally applicable to the ascension gift administration of Christ in His right hand. Seated in His own throne, at the right hand of God, Jesus Christ gives gifts to men. Eph 4:8. He gives grace to some men to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. Eph 4:11.

Furthermore, Jesus Christ gives His apostolic administration as a gift to the entire body of Christ in each generation. Eph 4:11-12. The apostle Paul belonged to the apostolic administration of Christ in his generation. Christ sent him to the Gentiles to 'open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.' Act 26:18. Significantly, on his first missionary journey, Paul testified, 'The Lord has commanded us: "I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth".' Act 13:47. We note that this is a direct quote from Isaiah Chapter 49.

The first section of Isaiah Chapter 49 recorded the testimony of the ascension gift administration of Christ for the entire church age. The apostolic administration of Christ testifies, 'And He has made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand He has hidden me, and made me a polished shaft; in His quiver He has hidden me. And He said to me, "You are My servant, O Israel, In whom I will be glorified".' Isa 49:2-3. We recall that the apostle John saw Jesus Christ with seven stars in His right hand. Rev 1:16. The prophet Habakkuk declared concerning the Lord, 'His radiance is like the sunlight; He has rays flashing from His hand, and there is the hiding of His power.' Hab 3:4.

We read later in Isaiah Chapter 49 that the Lord says to Zion, 'See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me.' Isa 49:16. Since the beginning of the church age, the walls of the New Jerusalem have been built according to the order of seventy-two. When the 144 000 are sealed at the beginning of the time of the end, the walls of the New Jerusalem will be complete. Rev 7:2-4. Rev 14:1. Rev 21:17. The gospel that has been proclaimed by the ascension gift administration of Christ, during the church age, will then be proclaimed in every nation by the 144 000 in the time of the end.

I have laboured in vain

Interestingly, the testimony that belongs to Christ's messengers for the church age continues, 'Then I said, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain; yet surely my just reward is with the Lord, and my work with my God.'" Isa 49:4. The first half of this statement identifies that the messengers of Christ have not reaped a large harvest from the world during the church age. Mount Zion has been populated by

a very small remnant. Isa 1:9. It will continue to be a remnant church until the Father takes His seat to initiate the time of the end.

During his ministry, the apostle Paul regularly reflected upon the mode of his ministry and the fruit of his labour. Writing to the Galatians, he said that he submitted the gospel that he preached among the Gentiles to the apostles in Jerusalem to ensure that he was not running, or labouring, in vain. Gal 2:2. The sons of God in Galatia were the fruit of Paul's labour as a messenger who belonged to the walls and gates of the New Jerusalem. When many of the Galatians began to walk after the flesh, Paul said to them, 'I am afraid for you, lest I have laboured for you in vain.' Gal 4:11.

Later in this same letter, Paul referred to the Galatians as his little children. He said, 'My little children, for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you.' Gal 4:19. The apostolic administration in each generation has been called to participate with Christ in a unique spiritual labour, to see the birth and maturity of sons of God in Mount Zion. There is little doubt that Paul's ministry brought forth much fruit. For example, the fruit of his ministry in Ephesus was seven lampstand churches in the region of Asia. Act 19:1-10.

However, we also know that many of the believers in the region of Asia turned away from the gospel that they had received from Paul. They ceased walking after the Spirit and began walking after the flesh. Toward the end of his life, Paul said to Timothy, 'This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me'. 2Ti 1:15. The fellowship of the *agape* meal was replaced with the Eucharist. The fellowship of the word of present truth was replaced with theology based on Greek philosophy. And the fellowship of a presbytery was replaced by collegial and hierarchical forms of church governance.

This falling away has continued until our present day. We know that there has been an apostolic administration, in the mode of Timothy and Titus, in each generation of the church. The word of present truth has been proclaimed in each generation. Nevertheless, despite this ministry, the remnant church has never been more than *a small minority* in any nation. Eze 11:16. From this perspective, the apostolic administration of Christ has laboured through the night of the church age with very little fruit. The world has become increasingly godless.

The remnant church has endured the night of the church age under the 'heel' of the nations. In contrast to this, the mixture between the harlot

church and the state has produced some large and powerful religious denominations and organisations. These denominations or organisations belong to religious Babylon. For much of the church age, the power of religion has been used to strengthen the rule of the administration of Babylon over the nations. Even in the seventh world kingdom, which is increasingly secular and humanistic, religion is still one of the seven heads of Babylon that rules over the nations. Rev 12:3.

While the remnant church has been maligned as a small minority in many places, religious Babylon has flourished and spawned many spiritual children. With this in view, we gain some insight into why those who belong to the apostolic administration of Christ, who have laboured through the night of the church age, may say, 'I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain'. Isa 49:4. Nevertheless, this is not the end of the statement. The second part of the statement is a confession of faith. It continues, 'Yet surely my *just reward* is with the Lord, and my work [wages] with my God'. Isa 49:4.

Jesus addressed this principle in the parables. He instructed His servants to be faithful in the day of small things. This principle is applicable for the entire church age. In the parable of the talents, the master commended each faithful servant, by saying, '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 Lord'. Mat 25:21. Equally, in the parable of the minas, the nobleman said to each faithful servant, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in *a very little*, have authority over ten cities'. Luk 19:17.

A common theme in the parables is that Jesus Christ will reward His faithful servants at the end of the church age. The Father will take His seat to judge the world and establish His kingdom on the earth. Jesus Christ will stand up from His throne to bring all the overcomers from lampstand churches with Him to the Father's throne. This will be a profound season of visitation within every lampstand church. It will also be the season of reward for Christ's faithful servants. Mat 24:44-47. Mat 16:27. Rev 22:12. The reward for each faithful servant will be a work in the Father's kingdom.

It is too small a thing

The church age is the day of small things. As we have considered, it is the time when the church is a very small remnant that has been scattered to the four winds. However, this does not mean that the mandate that has

been committed to Christ's messengers is 'a small thing' in the eyes of the Lord. Zec 4:10. On the contrary, the work of the apostolic administration during the church age is glorious in the eyes of the Lord. We continue to read in the book of Isaiah, 'And now the Lord says, who formed me from the womb to be His servant, to bring back Jacob 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).' Isa 49:5.

It is the work of the apostolic administration to gather the remnant of the ten northern tribes of Israel into lampstand churches. However, the mandate that belongs to Christ's messengers extends beyond the restoration of the preserved ones of Israel. The Lord declared, '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 49:6. As we have considered, the apostle Paul quoted this verse on his first missionary journey. He said that he had received this mandate as 'a command' from the Lord. Act 13:47.

During the church age, the messengers of Christ are despised by men, abhorred by nations, and subservient to secular rulers. Isa 49:7. 1Co 4:9-13. However, the Lord has promised that 'kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel; and He has chosen You'. Isa 49:7. This promise will be fulfilled when the Father takes His seat to initiate the time of the end. This will be the time when the Father establishes His kingdom on the earth. Dan 7:22. Jesus described the time when the Father takes His seat as 'the day of our redemption'. Luk 21:28.

In an acceptable time

The Lord said, 'In *an acceptable time* I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you; I will preserve you and give you as *a covenant to the people*, to restore the earth, to cause them to inherit the desolate heritages'. Isa 49:8. The apostle Paul quoted the first half of this verse in his letter to the Corinthians. He applied it directly to his day. Paul declared, 'Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation'. 2Co 6:2. This statement is true, every time the word of the cross is proclaimed. It is the proclamation of the word 'today' that establishes the 'day of salvation' for all those who believe and obey the word. Heb 3:7.

There will be a specific application of the day of salvation when the Father takes His seat at the end of the church age. When the Father takes His seat at the midnight hour of the church age, the day of the Lord will begin. 1Th 5:2. The great and terrible day of the Lord is the day of His judgement upon the world. Joe 2:11. Mal 4:1. However, it is also the day of redemption for the overcoming remnant within lampstand churches, who have faithfully endured the night of the church age. 2Ti 2:12. Rev 3:10. Jesus said, concerning the birth pains in the world, 'Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.' Luk 21:28.

When the Father takes His seat, Jesus Christ will stand up to reward the overcoming remnant from lampstand churches. Significantly, He will write the name of the Father upon their forehead. Rev 7:2-3. Rev 14:1. The name of the Father is the seal of the Living God. We read in the book of Revelation that 12 000 firstfruits will be sealed from each of the tribes that belong to the true Israel of God. Rev 7:4-8. This means that the total of the firstfruits of the true Israel of God will be 144 000. When the 144 000 are sealed, the walls of the New Jerusalem will be complete, and the gates of the city will be opened for a great multitude to come in. Rev 21:16-17.

The Lord has promised to preserve the 144 000 in the time of the end. And furthermore, He has declared that He will give the 144 000 as 'a covenant to the people'. Isa 49:8. This is a most remarkable promise. In the same way that the apostolic administration of Christ has been given as a gift to the fellowship of the body of Christ for the church age, the 144 000 will be given as a covenant to the whole world in the time of the end! When the first seal is opened, the 144 000 will ride with Christ to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom as a testimony in every nation. Mat 24:14. Rev 14:6.

The 144 000 will be the bow of the true Israel of God, in the hand of Christ, as He rides forth to destroy the power of Satan in the seventh world kingdom. Rev 6:2. During the opening of the seals, a great multitude in the world will be delivered from their bondage to Satan in the kingdom of darkness. Col 1:13. Act 26:18. As the multitudes believe and obey the gospel of the kingdom, they will present themselves for cleansing, as they stream into the kingdom of God. The 144 000 will 'say to the prisoners "Go forth"; to those who are in darkness, "Show yourselves".' Isa 49:9.

The fruit of the evangelistic ministry of the 144 000 will be a great multitude which no man can number from every tribe, nation, people, and tongue. Rev 7:9. Significantly, the Lord declared concerning this multitude, '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.' Isa 49:10. We note that this passage is quoted directly in the book of Revelation. It applies to the great multitude who will come out of the great tribulation, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Rev 7:14.

We read in the book of Revelation, concerning this multitude, 'They are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.' Rev 7:15-17. The 'living fountains of waters' describes the river of the water of life that flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb, for eternity. Rev 22:1.

I will make each of My mountains a road

Early in his prophetic ministry, Isaiah declared concerning Mount Zion in the time of the end, '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. In the time of the end, the kingdom of God will be established above all the world kingdoms. The seven world kingdoms are all likened to mountains. Rev 17:9. Significantly, in the time of the end, the Lord will make each of these mountains into a road.

We continue to read in Isaiah 49, 'I will make each of My mountains a road, and My highways shall be elevated.' Isa 49:11. It is interesting that the Lord refers to the various world kingdoms as 'My mountains'. As we have considered, He is the One who has raised up each kingdom to be an instrument of judgement in His hand. The significance of the Lord making each mountain into 'a roadway' is that there will be *a highway of sanctification* from every world kingdom, for sons of God to stream into Mount Zion in the time of the end.

The prophet Isaiah repeatedly proclaimed that the Lord will gather 'the remnant of His people' from every nation, and then He will gather a great multitude which no man can number from those same nations.

For example, the prophet declared, 'It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover *the remnant of His people* who are left, from Assyria and Egypt, from Pathros and Cush, from Elam and Shinar, from Hamath and the islands of the sea. ... There will be *a highway [roadway] for the remnant of His people* who will be left from Assyria, as it was for Israel in the day that he came up from the land of Egypt.' Isa 11:11,16.

Likewise, Isaiah declared concerning the great multitude, 'It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord will thresh, from the channel of the River to the Brook of Egypt; and you will be gathered one by one, O you children of Israel. So it shall be in that day: the great trumpet will be blown; they will come, who are about to perish in the land of Assyria, and they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem.' Isa 27:12-13. The great trumpet in this passage refers to 'the trumpet of the Jubilee'. When the Father takes His seat, Jesus Christ will announce the coming of the final Jubilee for the true Israel of God. Rev 4:1.

Jesus said that in the latter days, men and women will come from 'the east and the west, and from the north and the south, to sit down in the kingdom of God'. Luk 13:29. Likewise, Isaiah said, 'Surely these shall come from afar; Look! Those from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinim.' Isa 49:12. The land of Sinim specifically refers to China. It is notable that the Lord commanded the firstfruits of the true Israel of God 'to look', so that they could see the multitude coming to them from afar. The great harvest in the end of the age will exceed all expectations.

We read in a parallel passage in the book of Isaiah, 'Lift up your eyes all around, and see: they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be nursed at your side. Then you shall see and become radiant, and your heart shall swell with joy; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you. ... All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall ascend with acceptance on My altar, and I will glorify the house of My glory.' Isa 60:4-5,7.

The reference to 'the flocks of Kedar' and 'the rams of Nebaioth' is particularly significant. We recall that Nebaioth and Kedar were the two eldest sons of Ishmael. Gen 25:13. We know that Ishmael was born according to the flesh and that he had no place in the household of faith

alongside Isaac, who was born according to the promise. Gal 4:29-30. However, through the offering of Christ, there will be a harvest from the sons of Ishmael in the end of the age. The ministry of the 144 000 will cause many Muslims to turn to the Lord, and then stream into Mount Zion as sons of God. This will be the Lord's sovereign answer to Abraham's prayer, 'Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!' Gen 17:18.

The children you will have

Returning to Isaiah Chapter 49, the Lord restated the point, by saying, 'Lift up your eyes, look around and see; all these gather together and come to you. "As I live", says the LORD, "You shall surely clothe yourselves with them all as an ornament, and bind them on you as a bride does".' Isa 49:18. The great multitude who stream into Mount Zion, in the time of the end, will become part of the bride of Christ. Rev 19:7-8. However, in the first case, the great multitude are the fruit of the evangelistic ministry of the church, as the bride of Christ. Rev 7:9. As sons of God, they are the children of 'the Jerusalem from above'. Gal 4:26.

In relation to this great multitude of children, Isaiah recorded an interesting conversation between Zion and the Lord. The Lord said to Zion, 'The children you will have, after you have lost the others, will say again in your ears, "The place is too small for me; give me a place where I may dwell".' Isa 49:20. We recall that all the children who belonged to the ten northern tribes of Israel were completely lost, when the nation was conquered by the Assyrians. The Lord declared, 'You are not My people'. Hos 1:9. Jesus Christ gathered up this judgement, upon the ten northern tribes of Israel, into His offering on the cross. His offering also invoked the same judgement upon the children who belonged to the Jewish nation. Luk 23:28.

The cross was the place where the Father proclaimed to all mankind, both Jew and Gentile, 'You are not My people'. However, through the offering of Christ, the cross is also the birthplace for sons of God. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul declared that the Father said, in relation to the cross, 'I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, "You are not My people", there they shall be called sons of the living God.' Rom 9:25-26. Hos 1:10. We know that Paul was quoting from the prophetic Scriptures which were written by Hosea.

The prophet Isaiah was certainly familiar with this same prophetic principle. Both the ten northern tribes of Israel and the southern tribes of Judah became nations that were bereft of spiritual children. However, we are reminded that the focus in Isaiah Chapter 49 is not the motherhood of natural Israel. Rather, the Lord is speaking to Zion. He is addressing the church as the bride of Christ. It is Zion, who says to the Lord, 'The LORD has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me'. Isa 49:14. This is an important point. Jesus Christ laid the foundation and then began to build the church, as spiritual Mount Zion, for forty days after His resurrection. Mat 16:18.

On the Day of Pentecost, the evangelistic ministry of the church immediately brought forth children. The book of Acts recorded that 3 000 people were born as sons of God and then baptised into the fellowship of Christ's offering. In a 'firstfruits measure', the ingathering on the Day of Pentecost was the fulfilment of the prophecy, 'For as soon as Zion was in labour, she gave birth to her children'. Isa 66:8. Following the Day of Pentecost, the early church in Jerusalem continued to grow rapidly. Act 2:47. The believers in the early church were continually devoted to the apostles' doctrine, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayers. Act 2:42.

When the church in Jerusalem began to experience persecution, many of the early believers were scattered into the regions of Judea and Samaria. Act 8:1. After this persecution subsided, the church in Jerusalem began to grow again. However, at the same time, a group of Judaizers progressively became a powerful and influential faction within the early church. Act 15:1,5. Act 21:20-21. They taught that Jewish Christians still needed to keep the Law, which included the regime of animal sacrifices in the temple. By returning to the ordinances of the Law Covenant, this group had been bewitched by Satan. Gal 3:1. They had fallen from the heavenly places because they had reverted to walking after the flesh.

The key point is that, if believers persist in walking after the flesh, then they will lose their sonship. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul said, 'If you live according to the flesh *you will die*; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.' Rom 8:13. Even though many of these believers in Jerusalem had been born in Zion as sons of God, when they reverted to walking after the flesh by keeping the Law, it invariably led to their untimely spiritual death. The pervasive leaven of the Judaizers, within the church in Jerusalem, was the first spiritual disease that caused Zion to begin *losing her children*.

We observe a similar principle within the Gentile churches which were established by the apostle Paul. As an example, when Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years, he established seven lampstand churches in the region of Asia. Act 19:10. Rev 1:11. These seven lampstand churches all belonged to Mount Zion. They were part of the bride of Christ, and their work was to bring forth and nurture sons of God. However, within a short number of years, many of the leaders within each presbytery, along with many of the believers in each lampstand church, reverted to walking after the flesh.

Remarkably, this great falling away began in earnest while the apostle Paul was still alive. Towards the end of his life, the apostle Paul lamented to Timothy, 'This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me'. 2Ti 1:15. The believers in the region of Asia rejected the gospel of sonship that had been proclaimed to them by the apostle Paul, in favour of other gospels. Greek philosophy, sacramentalism, and collegiality, all became deadly diseases that rapidly spread among the Gentile churches. These diseases invariably led to Zion *losing more of her children*.

The sad reality of the church age is that Zion has continued to lose the majority of her children. The believers who have been born in Zion, and then pressed on to maturity as sons of God, by embracing their participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, belong to *the minority*. Php 3:8-14. They are part of a very small remnant. In contrast to this, many of Zion's children have failed to make it past spiritual infancy before they have been deceived by Satan, and then devoured by him. This is true in relation to those who have been born out of the world, and those who have been born within Christian families.

With this in view, let us return to the words of the Lord to Zion, as we approach the end of the age. He said, 'The children you will have, *after you have lost the others*, will say again in your ears, "The place is too small for me; give me a place where I may dwell.' Isa 49:20. This is a most remarkable statement. After losing so many children, there will be a great multitude of children who will come out of the world, to be born and nurtured by Zion. This great multitude will not fit in the land that was promised to Abraham. In the time of the end, the spiritual children of Zion will fill the whole earth. Dan 2:35.

The Lord continued to say to Zion, 'Then you will say in your heart, "Who has begotten these for me, since I have lost my children and am desolate, a captive, and wandering to and fro? And who has brought these up? There I was, left alone; but these, where were they?".' Isa 49:21.

Having been a very small remnant for so long, the church will be surprised by the magnitude of this great harvest of sons of God who will come out of the world, and *how quickly* they will come into the kingdom. Paul declared, concerning this harvest, 'He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth.' Rom 9:28.

I will lift up My hand

The Lord has answered Zion's question by saying, 'Behold, *I will lift My hand* in an oath to the nations, and set up My standard for the peoples; they shall bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders. Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers; they shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD, for they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me.' Isa 49:22-23. The faithful remnant, who have endured the night of the church age, will not be ashamed when Christ stands up to establish the Father's kingdom on the earth. 1Pe 2:6. 1Jn 2:28.

Significantly, the establishment of the Father's kingdom on the earth was guaranteed by the oath that God swore to Abraham on Mount Moriah. We have considered the fellowship of offering on Mount Moriah in the book, *The Gospel of God*. Once the offering of the Lamb of God was complete, the angel of the LORD called to Abraham, a second time, from heaven. Gen 22:15. God swore by Himself to confirm, by the word of the oath, the promise that He had previously made to Abraham. He declared again, 'In your Seed [Christ] all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.' Gen 22:18.

The offering of Christ on Mount Calvary is the full and complete provision for sons of men to be born as sons of God. When the Son of Man was lifted up on the cross, He was raised up to be the standard, or banner, for the gathering of all nations into the kingdom of God. Isaiah proclaimed, 'In that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, who shall stand as *a banner to the people*; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious ... He will set up *a banner for the nations*, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.' Isa 11:10,12.

Specifically, this banner will be seen by all nations when the 144 000 proclaim the gospel of the kingdom after the opening of the first seal. Rev 6:2. The fruit of this evangelistic ministry will be a great multitude

from all nations. Rev 7:9. Having been formerly raised and nurtured by the ungodly nations of the world, a great multitude will be born as sons of God and brought into Zion to be raised and nurtured by her.

Psa 87:4-5. Further to this, Isaiah identified that the kings and queens of the earth, who had previously functioned like foster parents for this great multitude, will come and bow down at the feet of Zion. Isa 49:23.

After the opening of the sixth seal, Mount Zion will be clearly established above all the kingdoms of the world. Isa 2:2. The church, as the heavenly Jerusalem, will rule over all nations for a period of seven years. Mat 5:5. The rulership of Mount Zion over the nations, in the time of the end, was also guaranteed by the oath that God swore to Abraham on Mount Moriah. God said to Abraham, 'I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants *shall possess the gate of their enemies.*' Gen 22:17. This is an integral part of the oath that God has sworn to the nations.

Chapter 5

The river of the water of life

When the offering of Jesus Christ was finished, He committed His Spirit into the hands of the Father. Luk 23:46. He stepped out of His physical body and went to be with the Father. Blood and water gushed from His side when the soldier pierced His physical body with a spear. Joh 19:34. We know that the blood and water were accompanied by the outpouring of the spirit of grace and supplication. Zec 12:10. 1Jn 5:6. The blood, the water, and the Spirit are the three elements that comprise the river of the water of life. The river of the water of life is an everlasting fountain of life that flows from the finished offering of Christ.

We have already considered the significance of the river of the water of life in Chapters 1 and 3 of this book. However, as we begin this final chapter, it will be helpful to restate the key point. The river of the water of life flowed directly from the throne of God, where Christ had taken His seat with the Father, through His physical body on the cross. Describing the source of the river of life, the apostle John wrote in the book of Revelation, 'And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb'. Rev 22:1.

The offering of Christ was the full manifestation, *in time*, of the offering of Yahweh *Elohim* from *before* the foundation of the world. 1Pe 1:18-20.

The source of the river of the water of life is the dialogue and offering of Yahweh *Elohim* that brought forth the Everlasting Covenant. The river proceeds from this fellowship as the word of the Everlasting Covenant. In this regard, the source of the river is *outside of time and eternity*. However, the word then proceeds from this fellowship *into time*, and *for eternity*, as an everlasting fountain of life for sons of God.

For this reason, we can observe the passage of the river of the water of life in history. The defining characteristic of this river, as it flows through history, is that the water increases and *multiplies in volume*. Unlike every other river that we observe in the natural world, the river of the water of life does not increase in volume because it is fed by tributaries which receive their water from rainfall. The *only source* of water in the river of life is the fellowship of offering in Yahweh *Elohim*. The water *multiplies in volume*, through the finished offering of Christ, as it becomes the life of *a multitude of sons of God*.

Jesus said to the woman at the well, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, "Give Me a drink", you would have asked Him, and He would have given you *living water*.' Joh 4:10. The river of the water of life is the everlasting source of life for every son of God. Remarkably, a son of God who is receiving life in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, also becomes a minister of this same life, by the Spirit of God, to others. Jesus said, 'He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' Joh 7:38.

Ezekiel's vision of the river

The prophet Ezekiel saw the river of the water of life. He testified that the angel of the Lord brought him to 'the door of the temple'. Eze 47:1. The temple in the book of Ezekiel is a typological description of the Father's household of faith since the days of Abraham to the time of the end. In the book, *The Gospel of God*, we have considered how Abraham replaced Adam as the father of *a new humanity*. From Abraham to Christ, the new humanity included the sons of men who walked in the faith of Abraham as sons of God, by adoption. After the offering of Christ, it is only the sons of men who have been born of the Spirit as sons of God, who belong to the new humanity. Joh 3:3-8.

The true temple is the Father's dwelling place among His people. Eph 2:19-22. The door of the true temple is Jesus Christ. During His earthly ministry, Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.' Joh 14:6. When Ezekiel stood at

'the door' of the temple, he had been translated, in the visions of God by the Spirit, to stand with the apostle John at the foot of the cross. In the same way that the apostle John saw the blood, the water, and the Spirit, flowing from the side of Christ, the prophet Ezekiel also saw the river of the water of life flowing from the finished offering of Christ.

When we consider the description of the temple in the book of Ezekiel, we note that the altar is right in the middle of the temple. Notably, Ezekiel did not see or describe the ark of the covenant. Jer 3:15-17. There was no ark of the covenant because the glory of Yahweh filled the entire temple. Eze 43:1-5. Ezekiel heard the God of Israel proclaim, 'Son of Man, this is *the place of My throne* and *the place of the soles of My feet*, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever.' Eze 43:7. The children of Israel in this passage refer to the true descendants of Abraham, in Christ. They are the true Israel of God. Rev 7:4-8. Gal 6:16.

Ezekiel saw the union of the throne of God and the altar. It is the throne of God that sanctifies the entire temple to be His dwelling place. It is notable that the altar is in the middle of the temple. When the offering of Christ was complete, He sat down in the Father's throne. When the soldier pierced the side of Christ, the river of the water of life began to flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Rev 22:1. In the same way, the prophet Ezekiel saw the water flowing from the altar in the middle of the temple. We could equally say that he saw the water flowing from the Lamb in the middle of the Father's throne. Rev 5:6.

Interestingly, Ezekiel saw the water flowing from the south side of the altar and then under the threshold on the right side of the temple. Eze 47:1. The water was flowing toward the east. We note that when facing the east, the south side was the right side. We know that Jesus Christ is presently seated at *the right hand of the Father*, in His own throne. Heb 8:1. Eph 1:20. Col 3:1. He has taken His seat as our great High Priest in the middle of His lampstand churches. This is a significant point. During the church age, the river of the water of life is ministered by Jesus Christ, as our great High Priest, through the lampstand administration that is in His right hand. Rev 1:16,20.

This brings us to an amazing point. As our great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, Jesus Christ can *transcend time* to offer the fruit of His finished offering on the cross to any person, at any point in time. Heb 7:16-17. He is I AM. One of the best examples of this in the Scriptures is when Jesus Christ, as Melchizedek, met Abram after the slaughter of the kings. He brought out bread and wine to Abram, which

was the fruit of His finished offering. Gen 14:18. In the fellowship of this *agape* meal, He blessed Abram and prophesied that he would become the possessor of heaven and earth. Gen 14:19.

We have considered the steps of the faith of Abraham in detail in the book, *The Gospel of God*. The steps of faith for Abraham led him all the way to Mount Moriah, where he offered all the sons of men back to the Father, to be born as sons of God through the offering of Jesus Christ. The key point in relation to the river of the water of life is that Abraham replaced Adam as the father of a new humanity. When we consider Abraham's pilgrimage of faith, we begin to observe the water of the river of life flowing in history. It started as a trickle with one man and his family. Heb 11:8-10.

From Abraham to Christ

Ezekiel recorded that the angel of the Lord then brought him out of the north gate of the temple and led him around to the outside of the outer gateway that faced the east. Eze 47:2. The water was flowing toward the east in an ever-increasing stream. The angel had a measuring line in his hand. He measured 1 000 cubits and brought Ezekiel with him through the water. The water came up to the prophet's ankles. Eze 47:3. We know that a cubit is a measure of distance. It was originally the distance from a man's elbow to the tip of his middle finger. The cubits in the book of Ezekiel were slightly longer because they included an additional handbreadth. Eze 40:5.

As a measure of distance, 1 000 cubits is approximately 500 hundred metres. We know that the total length of the river in Ezekiel's vision was 4 000 cubits. If this is interpreted literally, the total length of the river would be just over 2km. This is certainly not a literal measure of distance in the promised land, because the distance from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea is at least 30km. It is reasonably straightforward to conclude that the cubits in Ezekiel's vision of the river of life are *a measurement of time*. Jesus Himself used cubits as a measurement of time when He said, 'Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature [that is, the length of a life-time]?' Mat 6:27.

When the angel measured 1 000 cubits along the river, he was marking a period of 1 000 years. We have already considered that the beginning of the water flowing from the altar for the new humanity was in the days of Abraham. In very broad terms, 1 000 years from the days of Abraham brings us to the time of King David. David was chosen by God, from the

tribe of Judah, to rule over the whole kingdom of Israel. 2Ch 6:6. Psa 78:70. We recall that God promised Abraham that in his Seed (Christ) all the families of the earth would be blessed. Gen 22:18. In addition to this, He promised David that his Seed (Christ) would build up his throne forever. Psa 89:3-4.

When the angel of the Lord measured a further 1 000 cubits, the water came up to Ezekiel's knees. Eze 47:4. Approximately 1 000 years after the time of King David, Jesus Christ was born in the lineage of Abraham and David. He is called the Son of Abraham and the Son of David. Mat 1:1. However, during His earthly ministry, Jesus also highlighted that He is I AM. He existed before both Abraham and David. Jesus said to a group of Jews who claimed to be sons of Abraham, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM'. Joh 8:58.

In a similar way, Jesus asked a group of Pharisees who said that the Messiah would be David's Son, 'How then does David in the Spirit call Him, "Lord", saying: "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool"'? If David then calls Him "Lord", how is He his Son?"' Mat 22:41-45. This is an important point. Even though we observe the passage of the river of the water of life in history from Abraham to David to Christ, He was still the One who ministered the water of life to both Abraham and David as I AM, from the fellowship of Yahweh *Elohim* before the foundation of the world.

In relation to the history of the river of the water of life, the Gospel of Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus Christ as the Son of David and the Son of Abraham. Mat 1:1. Notably, Matthew recorded that there were fourteen generations in the lineage of the new humanity from Abraham to David, fourteen generations from David to the captivity in Babylon, and then fourteen generations from the captivity until Jesus Christ. Mat 1:17. This would mean that there was a total of forty-two generations from Abraham to Christ. Of course, from a purely anthropological perspective, there would have been more than forty-two generations of the sons of men. However, Matthew was only recording the lineage of the sons of God by adoption.

From Christ to the end of the church age

When the angel measured another 1 000 cubits, the water came up to Ezekiel's waist. Eze 47:4. Remarkably, when the angel measured the final 1 000 cubits, the water had become a great river that was too deep to be crossed. Eze 47:5. The prophet needed to swim in the river.

The increasing depth of the river, from the knees to the waist of the prophet, to a great river that was too deep to be crossed, reveals the multiplication of the living water for the 2 000 years of the church age. The fellowship of the water of life in sons of God has continued to grow and multiply, albeit among a *very small remnant* who have been scattered to the four winds.

While the prophet swam in the river, the angel said to him, ‘Son of man, have you seen this?’ Eze 47:6. The angel was specifically drawing the prophet’s attention to the significance of the end of the church age. Like the prophet Ezekiel, we also need *spiritual illumination* to understand this unique period in the history of the new humanity. Immediately after asking this question, the angel returned Ezekiel to the bank of the river, where he saw ‘very many trees on one side and the other’. Eze 47:7. The *very many trees* on each side of the river reveal *many manifestations* of the fellowship of the tree of life.

When he saw the trees, there is little doubt that Ezekiel was looking back along the banks of the river and observing all the manifestations of *agape* fellowship, from the time of Abraham to the end of the church age. For example, we remember that Melchizedek brought out bread and wine to share an *agape* meal with Abram. Gen 14:18-20. Many years later, Moses took the seventy elders up the mountain and they ate and drank in the presence of the God of Israel. Exo 24:9-11. Later again, David testified to the Lord, ‘You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.’ Psa 23:5.

After the Day of Pentecost, the early church in Jerusalem was devoted to the apostles’ doctrine, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayers. Act 2:42. We read in the book of Acts that the believers continued ‘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. We know that the fellowship of the *agape* meal was quickly replaced by the sacramental practice of the Eucharist, by many church leaders in the first century. For example, Jesus rebuked the Ephesian presbytery by saying, ‘I have this against you, that you have left your first love.’ Rev 2:4.

Referring to the fellowship of the tree of life in the middle of the heavenly Jerusalem, Jesus admonished the Ephesian presbytery to, ‘Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent.’ Rev 2:4-5. We know that this word of

Christ would have been received with repentance and faith, by a *very small remnant* during the church age. In the same way that there were forty-two generations of faith from Abraham to Christ, we expect that there will also be forty-two generations of faith from Christ to the time of the end.

At the same time, we know that the admonition of Christ to the Ephesian presbytery has been rejected by most believers who have professed to be called by the name of Christ during the church age. There is no *agape* fellowship among the unclean daughters of Zion who call themselves by the name of the Lord, but who insist on eating their own food and wearing their own clothing. Isa 4:1. In this regard, we note that Ezekiel did not see *very many trees* until the prophet had measured the full 4 000 cubits along the river. There have certainly been some trees along the river since the days of Abraham, but the *very many trees* belong to the time that is 4 000 years after Abraham.

This is a significant point. The major restoration of *agape* fellowship among Christ's lampstand churches occurs toward the very end of the church age! The prophet Isaiah declared, concerning the day of Christ's judgement at the end of the church age, 'In that day the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious.' Isa 4:2. We know that the branch of the Lord describes Christ's lampstand administration. The *very many trees* on the bank of the river of the water of life signify that the fellowship of the tree of life will be recovered and restored in *many families* and *many congregations* as we approach the time of the end. Mal 4:5-6.

Into the Arabah

The angel then explained to Ezekiel where the water will flow after the fellowship of the *agape* meal is restored among the remnant of God's people in lampstand churches. He said, 'This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed.' Eze 47:8. It is important to take note of the progression of the river in this passage. After the prophet saw *very many trees* on the bank of the river, the water flowed into the valley, and then it entered the sea. The Hebrew word that is translated 'valley' in this passage is *arabah*. It means 'the desert'. It describes a desolate wasteland.

It is evident that the *Arabah* is not the same as the sea. The water flows through the Arabah *before* it enters the sea. The sea represents the

nations of the world. Specifically, in this vision, the river flows into the Dead Sea, which is symbolic of the great multitude of people in the world who are dead in their trespasses and sins. In contrast to the sea, the Arabah is referring to the unclean daughters of Zion who have become a desolate wilderness. The prophet Isaiah declared, 'Your holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and beautiful temple, where our fathers praised You, is burned up with fire; and all our pleasant things are laid waste.' Isa 64:10-11.

The fact that the river of the water of life flows through the Arabah before it reaches the sea is significant. After the restoration of the fellowship of the *agape* meal has begun, as signified by the *very many trees* on the river bank, the Lord will open a door for the gospel of sonship to be preached among the unclean daughters of Zion. Rev 3:8. The river of the water of life will bring a measure of revival as it flows through the Arabah, before it reaches the sea of the nations! Jesus said to the presbytery in Philadelphia, 'Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie - indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.' Rev 3:9.

Isaiah declared, concerning this revival in the Arabah, 'The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert [lit. Arabah] shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; ... the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert [lit. Arabah] ... A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness ... And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads.' Isa 35:1,5-6,8,10.

The waters of the sea will be healed

Once the water has flowed through the Arabah, it will enter the sea of the nations. The angel explained to the prophet Ezekiel, 'When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed. And it shall be that every living thing that moves, where the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes.' Eze 47:8-9. As we have already considered, the sea in this vision refers to the Dead Sea. From a historical perspective, it is notable that the Dead Sea was formed as a

consequence of God's sovereign judgement upon Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Abraham.

We recall that Lot initially settled in the region of Sodom and Gomorrah because it looked like the garden of Eden. Gen 13:10. It was a vast and fertile plain by the river Jordan. However, the inhabitants of this region were exceedingly wicked and grossly immoral. Gen 18:20-21. Gen 19:4-5. In due course, God judged the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Scriptures recorded that fire and brimstone fell on the entire plain out of heaven. Gen 19:24-25. We know that Lot's immediate family was mercifully rescued from Sodom by the Lord and His messengers. However, when his wife disobeyed the Lord's messengers and turned back toward the city, she became a pillar of salt. Gen 19:26. She was condemned along with the world at that time, and came under the same judgement of God as the rest of the city.

The account of Lot's wife is certainly relevant for us today. We know that Jesus specifically said, 'Remember Lot's wife'. Luk 17:32. Lot's wife did not turn into a pillar of salt because she *glanced briefly* over her shoulder as they fled from the city. Rather, she was condemned because she *disobeyed* the messengers of the Lord and *turned back in her heart* to her own familiar culture. She was unwilling to accept God's righteous judgement on the world, which included His judgement upon her extended family who had laughed at Lot's warning, and had chosen to remain in the city. Gen 19:14. Her unwillingness to let go of her family culture meant that she could not lay hold of God's merciful deliverance from it. When Lot's wife turned back to save and preserve her life and family, that she had fashioned for herself, she became a perpetual reminder of God's judgement for all generations. Luk 17:33.

Interestingly, the outcome of God's sovereign judgement upon the region of Sodom and Gomorrah is that it became the lowest place on the earth's surface. The Dead Sea is completely landlocked. It is so salty that no fish or plants can live in it. In this regard, the Dead Sea is certainly an appropriate description for the sea of humanity. The judgement that fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah was invoked upon the entire world by the offering of Christ. During His ministry, Jesus spoke of this judgement by saying to His disciples, 'Whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgement than for that city!' Mat 10:14-15.

When the Father takes His seat, it will initiate the judgement of the great and terrible day of the Lord. Joe 2:11. Zep 1:14-15,18. The day of the Lord is the day of the Lord's judgement upon the world. However, in midst of the Lord's judgement upon the world in the time of the end, the gospel of the kingdom will be preached by the firstfruits of the true Israel of God, as a testimony in all nations. Mat 24:14. This great proclamation of the gospel of sonship in every nation is the way in which the river of the water of life will enter the sea of humanity. The river of the water of life will bring healing to the waters that belong to the sea. Symbolically, the salt water that belongs to the Dead Sea will become fresh water that is full of life.

A great multitude of fish

Notably, the angel declared to Ezekiel, 'There will be a very great multitude of fish'. Eze 47:9. A great multitude from every tribe, nation, people, and tongue will come into the kingdom of God. The angel continued to describe this time, by saying, 'It shall be that fishermen will stand by it [the Dead Sea] from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be places for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many.' Eze 47:10. En Gedi is situated on the western side of the Dead Sea, and En Eglaim is situated on the eastern side. Some commentators have observed that these two places signify that the fishermen will cover the entire sea. We also note that both names mean a type of 'fountain'. Indeed, in the time of the end, the fountain for sin and uncleanness will be opened for all nations. Zec 12:10.

The fish of 'the Great Sea' is not simply a reference to the many kinds of fish in the Mediterranean Sea. It is referring to a multitude of sons of God, from the Great Sea of humanity that covers the entire world, who will come into the kingdom of God. Speaking about the evangelistic initiative into the Great Sea, the prophet Isaiah said, 'Sing to the Lord a new song, and His praise from the ends of the earth, *you who go down to the sea*, and all that is in it.' Isa 42:10. Then, speaking about the harvest from the Great Sea, Isaiah declared, 'Then you shall see and become radiant, and your heart shall swell with joy; because *the abundance of the sea* shall be turned to you, the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you.' Isa 60:5.

When we consider the fishermen in Ezekiel's vision, who are spreading their nets right across the Dead Sea, we are reminded of the parable of the dragnet. Jesus said, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was

cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be *at the end of the age*. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.' Mat 13:47-50. The gospel of sonship that will be proclaimed by the messengers of Christ will polarise the entire world.

During the opening of the seals, a great multitude will come into the kingdom of God. After the opening of the sixth seal, God will establish the administration that belongs to Mount Zion over all the nations of the world. Isa 2:2-4. The entire world will know that the Most High God rules in the affairs of men. Isaiah said, 'The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.' Isa 11:9. Hab 2:14. For seven years, the main agenda and priority in a multitude of cities across the world will be *agape* fellowship. However, this does not mean that every person will repent and come into the kingdom of God. During this time, many people will harden their heart and become embittered against the Lord and His people. Rev 9:20. They will refuse to be healed by the river of the water of life.

The angel explained to Ezekiel that the entire sea will not be healed. He said, concerning the sea, 'Its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt.' Eze 47:11. The swamps and marshes describe all of those who will congregate together on the edges of the sea, having refused to be healed by the river of the water of life. In contrast to the sons of God, who have rivers of living water flowing from their heart, those who reject the gospel of sonship in the end of the age will remain as sons of the devil with bitter water flowing from their heart. Rom 3:14. Jas 3:11. Their speech will reveal the bitterness in their heart as they curse God and His people.

The people who reject the gospel of sonship in the time of the end will then align themselves with Antichrist when he revives the seventh world kingdom, as an eighth world kingdom, in direct opposition to the kingdom of God. Rev 13:3,12. The ungodly who do not want to become sons of God, will consider Antichrist to be their saviour. Notably, the seven vials which contain the fullness of the wrath of God will be poured out upon Antichrist and his kingdom, in the hour that immediately precedes his reign over the nations of the world for three and a half years. Rev 16. When the vials are poured out upon Antichrist and his kingdom, the whole world will become a desolate wilderness again.

During the reign of Antichrist, every son of God will continue to be nourished and protected in the wilderness of the world by the river of the water of life. We are reminded that when the great multitude come into the bride city in the time of the end, 'they shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.' Rev 7:16-17. The 'living fountains of waters' describe the everlasting supply of the resurrection life of God in the fellowship of Christ's offering.

The desolation of the entire world, when the vials are poured out, will have no impact upon the river of life because its source is in the sanctuary. The water flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of the heavenly Jerusalem. Rev 22:1. The river of life flows from the side of Christ, who is the Tree of Life. It continues to supply the fruit of the tree of life to every son of God for all eternity. The angel summarised the entire vision of the river of the water of life to Ezekiel, by saying, 'By the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month *because their water flows from the sanctuary*, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing.' Eze 47:12.