

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

Glory, honour, power and majesty be continually, ascribed to the Lord our God. We thank him for this wonderful privilege of sharing with you in His word. We are beginning a new series of teaching which will concern itself with aspect of the events of the last days. We will be talking about the Second Coming of Christ, and the fullness of salvation blessings that come with it. We will be touching on all of those things which the scriptures indicate are events of the last hour. But there will be some introductory considerations.

In the first three editions, we will be handling an important topic: ***Understanding the Times***. The purpose is to share along such lines as to make everyone see that we are in the final hour of the church age.

Now, in "God's Pattern Church," we had cause to meditate on the parable of the house built on the rock. A house built on the rock represents a life lived in adherence to the teachings of the Lord. That is, to allow Christ's teachings to influence one's daily living. The house built on the sand represents persons who are careless with the word of the Lord and so with their morals. Another emphasis along the same line has to do with the belief system of his people. We shall have a re-cap of what was observed about the character and faith structure of a believer.

When we talk of character structure, we are saying that God is concerned about developing in us, the holiness of life that we find so greatly manifested in the Lord Jesus Christ in the days of his flesh. When we talk about faith structure, the concern is about our belief system. What a man believes in influences his conduct. So they are interrelated.

In "God's Pattern Church", we dealt with some erroneous practices in the churches today. We sought by the light of God's word to bring correction. In this volume, we are focusing on the hope of the believer, what Paul in Titus calls "that blessed hope". The hope of the believer. In looking at the blessed hope, and the events associated with this, we will concentrate on setting forth what the Bible really teaches. We hope by so doing, the voice of truth will save many from the hold of erroneous doctrines. Truth thoroughly known sets free and motivate a soul to a more purposeful walk with God.

We had thought of taking up these erroneous teachings and examining them one by one. That may seem confrontational. But the word of God will be ministered bit by bit, covering the teachings of scriptures on the events of the last days and how these things concern us. We trust that as we see the glory that God has planned for the church, we will put away childish things (1Corinthians 13:11). Paul said, "In understanding let us be men, but in evil let us be babes". Erroneous doctrines prey upon immature, untaught minds (Eph. 4:14).

So we are saying that many cherished position in scriptures, doctrines that have been taught by men will have to be abandoned as God's Word shines forth. Yes, we trust that as the true and proper picture of the provisions in God's word for the perfection of the church is set forth, the Lord's people will know that the time of playing church is over. There would be a great arising, a great reaching out to lay hold upon our inheritance.

We begin this mediation by drawing attention to four specific teachings that the Lord Jesus gave during the three and a half years of His ministry on earth. There are four discourses in which the Lord Jesus Christ taught extensively about the kingdom of God.

The first is the teaching on the life style of the kingdom as set forth in what we commonly call "the Sermon on the Mount". This teaching went on for three days. It is covered in Mathew chapters 5,6 and 7. Of course, we have some account of it in the other synoptic gospels.

Then, the second discourse we find in Mathew 13, and that itself is, a series of parables on the kingdom of heaven. Essentially the Lord Jesus Christ sketched the picture of the whole period from the day of Pentecost until the time the kingdom of heaven is installed over all the earth. Those seven parables have strong prophetic signification. They are also covered in Mark 4 and Luke 8.

Then the third teaching is on what is generally called "the Second Coming of Christ", or more appropriately, the events of the last days. That is covered in Luke 21, Luke 17, Mark 13 and Mathew 24.

These three teachings are recorded in all three of the synoptic gospels. But there is a fourth; incidentally not mentioned in the synoptic gospels but given full coverage in the gospel according to Saint John. It is the teaching on the Holy Spirit, and understanding the place of the Holy Spirit in the events of the last hour. This teaching is covered in John chapters 14, 15 and 16.

Looking closely at all the discourses, we find in them a special emphasis that the Lord Jesus Christ wants to get across to us. We are shown how the believer is to conduct himself now, by virtue of the fact that the king is resident within him. Christ in us, the hope of glory. If he be Lord inside of us, then the kingdom has begun to be set up within us. Ultimately, it will be set up over all the earth. If he is king within us, then there must be a growing expression of our submission to His benevolent rule as we partake of the kingdom life.

So the life style of the kingdom is revealed in Mathew 5, 6 and 7. Then in Matthew, 13, we are shown that there will be times of spiritual decay in the church, but, towards the end of the church age, there will be the recovery of truth, and of that life style that truth births in man. In Luke 21, Mark 13, Mathew 24, we are shown things that border on the Second Coming of Christ (using a phrase we are more familiar with). And there, we are given a key by which we are able to understand when the time sets in for His glorious appearing.

So, in this topical study, "understanding the time", we are not thinking of making some predictive prophecies. But we will so speak by the help of the spirit of God, as to make an impression upon our hearts and minds that we are living in the very (last) hour. We are to know that there are certain things that belong to our day as the Lord Jesus Christ completes the work of redemption in His church.

Let us now turn to Luke 21. We will do a little bit of reading here and there, get quickly at the key verse and by the means of it, set forth a proper understanding of the times. Luke 21. We will take the reading from verse 29. Actually, the entire chapter deals with the Second Coming of Christ, the events of the last hour. But, we are just taking a portion that emphasises the Lord's interest in our becoming aware of the hour in which these things will be taking place: things that relate to the Lord Jesus Christ setting up his kingdom over the nations, and the attitude of life we should possess when we find ourselves in such an hour, so, from verse 29, we read straight on to verse 36.

²⁹And he spoke to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; ³⁰When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. ³¹So like wise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. ³²Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled.

There is a generation that will see these prophetic signs. That generation will also witness everything that the Lord's words have indicated would be fulfilled. They will witness the fulfilment of this prophetic scripture that all of mankind have waited for these many years. Verse 32 is not about some persons physically alive when the Lord was speaking. Rather, it speaks of that generation that will see the shooting forth of the branch of the symbolic tree involved with events of the last hour. Verse 33.

³³Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. ³⁴And take heed to yourselves, lest at anytime your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. ³⁵For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

The very tenor of verse 34 suggests to us that whereas the hour or the day that will usher in the kingdom may not be known to anyone, yet the Lord does not want His own to be unaware, to be ignorant of the specific time period the prophecy refer to. He shows that ignorance of the times and seasons may set in only when his people are given over to worldliness and materialism, here indicated as surfeiting. That is saying, indulgence in the illicit pleasure of this world blinds. There is that which is legitimate, but there is that which borders on sin and careless living.

The passage talks also of drunkenness. Of course that relates to being drunk with the cares of this world just as much as it does with alcohol. There is just as much danger in being drunk with worldliness as in being drunk with alcohol. We are told that only when there is surfeiting and drunkenness that the day comes upon the Lord's people unawares. That is, if we are living in consecration, then our spiritual senses will be alert; such will be enlightened in their spirits to know the things that belong to our day.

It is interesting to note that God always point to the second coming of Christ as that which must influence the lifestyle of his people. Although the church is two thousand years old, nevertheless the things that are taught here are designed to govern the lifestyle of God's people all through the course of the church age. More so at this time of the end.

"Watch ye therefore and pray". Why should we watch? Verse 35 provides the answer... "For as a snare shall that day (and a prophetic day span over many years) come upon all them that dwell upon the face of the earth."

A Vital Prophetic Key

Having shown that there is to be a close connection between understanding the times we are in and the life style it is supposed to birth in us, we now touch on the key that makes us know that we are in the very last hour. Verse 24 of Luke 21 provides the key. Of course, what the Lord Jesus Christ did in his

teachings was to provide us with keys that unlock all of the prophetic writings in the Old Testament and the apostolic writings in the New Testament. Without the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, many prophetic passages of scripture will be like a Jigsaw puzzle to us. But He brings both the Old and the New, and in His teaching, He marries them. In the synoptic gospels and the gospel according to Saint John are enough keys to open up all prophetic scriptures.

We come to verse 24 of our passage it says ...and they... Who are the persons referred to by this word "they"? The reference is to the children of Israel. The people called Israel now has always been, a people who entered into covenant relationship with God, through the intermediary of Moses, on Mount Sinai. From that time, the children of Israel became, as it were, the kingdom of God over the world; a nation set apart unto God.

So here, the Lord speaks to us concerning certain of His dealings with the nation of Israel. By it, we are assisted to know something about the last hour. So, let us take the reading again.

²⁴And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

The reference here is to an event that took place in AD 69/70, when the polity of Israel was destroyed, and her citizens were led captives into all nations. Now, this is a fact of history that many are conversant with. We are told that Israel shall be led away captive into all nations, and that speaks of a scattering.

Then He says, "and Jerusalem... that portion of land that was the centre of all their religious and political activities, Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles.... The word "Gentiles" simply means the nations. In scriptures, mankind is divided into the Jews and the non-Jews. The non-Jews are the gentiles, while the Jews are the children of Israel (or putting it more correctly) they are those children of Israel that remained relatively true to the covenant when the ten northern tribes had gone into marriage with the world).

So, the "Gentiles" simply means "The nations". Reading verse 24 again and substituting the word "nations" for "Gentiles". We read "... and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the nations until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled".

What does it mean for the Gentiles to tread down Jerusalem under foot? It means that the physical land call Jerusalem will be under the occupation of non-Jewish nations until what is here described as "the times of the gentiles be fulfilled." And from AD 70 until 1948, the land of Israel, the whole of Palestine was occupied by non-Jewish nations. And, even in 1948 when the Jews were re-gathered and brought into their own land and proclaimed a sovereign state, Jerusalem as a city, was still under the occupation of the Arabs. Israel is today contending for a full occupation of Jerusalem even though it has much of the City under its political control

(It was not until about twenty years ago that Jerusalem returned back to the control of the Jews. It was then proclaimed the eternal capital City of the Jewish State of Israel 1980).

Now, we are told that Jerusalem shall be trodden down under foot of the gentiles, shall be subjugated by non-Jewish nations, "*until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*" Thus, at the time that Jerusalem comes back to the occupation and sovereignty of the nation of Israel, we are to know that the times of the Gentiles have expired.

But what does this phrase "the times of the Gentiles" mean? There are three crucial time periods in the history of redemption. A great attention is given in scriptures to detail the things that pertain to these time

periods. One, we have the beginning, the creation of man, down unto the fall. All of that is given coverage in the first few chapters of the book of Genesis.

Then, the second is the advent of the Son of God in what is generally called the first coming of Christ, when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. That situation came in order that, the Word of God becoming flesh, might be the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. He came to lay down his life as a ransom for the redemption of humanity.

Then the third time period is what is called "*the last time*", our principal concern in this meditation. And as the Lord Jesus Christ gives us the key that opens the whole world to the events of the last hour in Luke 21, 24 we must go back to the scriptures to trace the origin of this phrase "the times of the Gentiles".

The Times of the Gentiles Marked Out

So, turn with me to Ezekiel 21. We know that God in the out working of the plan of redemption apprehended Abraham, and then apprehended the seed of Abraham, which became the nation of Israel. His dealings with the nation of Israel mirrored God's attitude towards the rest of the nations. Through Israel, He desired to reach all the nations.

Israel failed as a nation, but God's word shows that there is another Israel: the spiritual Israel. The spiritual Israel is the church. But in those times of God's symbolic dealings with the nation of Israel, that nation was the representative kingdom of God over the earth. God demonstrated how He administers the affairs of the whole world through His dealings with the nation of Israel. But a time came when the nation ceased to be God's representative kingdom. They were sacked from that exalted position and God said, "another nation shall come that shall bear fruit to my redemption plan. In Ezekiel 21, we find the time when Israel ceased from being a covenant nation unto God, in terms of being the instrument through which God will take over the nations of the earth.

Ezekiel 21:25-27 says,

²⁵And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel...

The reference here is to the last king over the nation of Israel before Nebucadnezzar was used of God to overthrow the polity of Israel. Israel was led into captivity in Babylon. From that time up till now, there has been no king over Israel.

Here in Ezekiel 21, the prophecy was being given many years before the events took place. And the prophet said that at the time of a certain king (which King is Zedekiah), God would take away the kingdom from Israel and give the right to world-wide rule to the gentile nations. His focus will then be on the nations and no longer on Israel. So, let us read verse 25 again.

²⁵And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end...

God has always pardoned the iniquity of Israel. But here He says, "In the time of this particular king, iniquity is to have an end". That is, He will bring swift judgement to terminate the vicious cycles of unfaithfulness of the nation. All of that is prophesied in Leviticus 26. We read verse 26 of Ezekiel 21 now

²⁶Thus saith the Lord God, Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is Low, and abase him that is high.

The Gentile nations were in a low estate in God's redemptive economy. They were cut off from the covenant and commonwealth of Israel. They were without hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12), And to the average Jew, a gentile is regarded as a dog. But here the prophet says, "exalt him that is low and abase him that is high" (the Jewish nation being the high one, exalted to the privileges and glory of the covenant). From that time (about BC 608), God exalted the gentile nations and cast down the Jewish nation.

We read again verse 26 together with the twenty-seven verse.

²⁶Thus saith the LORD GOD, Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same (anymore): exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. ²⁷I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more until he come whose right it is: and I will give it him

We will be continuing with a consideration of this passage in the next edition. But suffice to say for now that Ezekiel 21:25-27 shows to us in prophecy, when the times of the gentiles was to begin. At the time of Ezekiel was prophesying, Israel was still God's representative kingdom, but a judgement against her was already determined. It was already clear that the kingdom would be taken away from Israel and given to the gentiles. And of this, the prophet prophesied.

From the time when this prophecy was fulfilled (in 608 BC when Nebuchadnezer overthrew the kingdom of Israel) began the times of the gentiles. From that time Israel ceased to be a special nation to God until when at the end of the times, a special place will again be given to that nation. And in verse 27 we are told that the times of the gentiles will continue until when "He who has the right to rule " over the world would come. This brings us to a specific word on this in Luke 21:24

The great empires of this present world and the sovereign rule they exercise over the earth are coming to a close in this end of time. 1980 is a significant year in prophetic scripture. Details of this, we shall examine in the next meditation. The Lord bless you and do you good in Jesus name. Amen.

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UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

We will be going straight to our meditation. We are continuing our study on the topic: "Understanding the times" God is a God of purpose. And the meaning of that is that God does all things after the counsel of His will. Everything God does and the ordering of the events of our world are but reflections of the purpose He has in mind. Now, we know that God's eternal purpose is in Christ Jesus.

Our burden in these ministrations is to cause us to be thoroughly aware of the times we are in, and of the things the Lord is doing in His church, so that we might be better prepared to submit to the Lord's dealings. God expects us to be well positioned to receive the fullness of life, which He has prepared for His people.

Turn with me to Acts 1:6-8, our attention will be on the eighth verse. The context is the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. After his resurrection, for forty continuous days, a little period of time in each of those forty days, the Lord showed himself alive to the disciples. And on the day of His ascension the disciples asked the question that led Him in His answer to give us two things of vital importance in understanding how God programs His works.

Of Times And Seasons

God is a God of time, in the sense that His redemptive purposes are all worked out within specific time frames. After redemption is over, we enter into what we might call "timelessness" or eternity. This is important. So let us read Acts 1:6-8

⁶When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? ⁷And he said unto them, it is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. ⁸But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Jesus told them "it is not for you to know times and seasons, which the Father has set in his power". The Greek word translated "time" here is *chronos*. Its emphasis is on the time duration, ***the time interval*** in which God carries out certain specific activities in relation to redemption. Here in Acts 1, we are given the

word in plural form: it is not for you to know times and seasons. So we can say that there are various epochs in God's redemptive dealings with man. This must be clearly understood.

In each of these time periods, the Lord carries out certain activities. The word season in Acts 1:7 is the Greek word Kairos. The emphasis is on the **characteristics of a given period**, the events that transpire. More specifically, it refers to what God does directly in relation to redemption or what God does in the ordering of the events of human history.

So, there are times and there are seasons. We should know that God works within certain time frames that He has before had marked out. For example when you look at Acts 2:1, it reads this way, "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come". There was an event that was to take place, that is, the outpouring of the spirit. But this could only occur when the day of Pentecost was fully come.

God waited for that day. It was fifty days from the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. It is interesting to note that fifty days after the deliverance of Israel from bondage to Egypt, God gave them the ten Commandment. So the Law is to the Old Covenant what the Holy Spirit is to the Covenant. The law was given on the day of Pentecost. So, when the antitype, (the fulfilment of that which the Law was only a shadow of) was to set in, God waited for the actual time.

It is important to know that God works with time as He has laid it out. When we are brought by the spirit of God to have an understanding of a time period in the plans and purposes of God in redemption, then, we are to seek from the word of God, the events that belong to that time period. This motivates us to yield ourselves to the LORD along lines in harmony with His redemptive will.

You may want to take note of these passages. They draw the attention to the importance of time in the dealings of God. Whereas all forms of prophecy are important, time prophecies positively impacts those who are brought into their understanding. For example, in talking about others signs of the times, we are told that there would be wars and rumours of wars. Now, there seem to be no period of human history when that has not been true. But when we come to time prophecies, they show us that certain things can only be fulfilled at the appointed times. May the Lord help us to see what time we are in.

Still in this connection note the following. In Galatians 4:4 we are told that when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his son born of a woman, made under the law. God waited until that specific time He had in mind for the Logos to be made flesh. Jesus came forth in due time that He might be the sacrificial Lamb; the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

Also in Titus 1:3, we are told that there are some "due times" in which certain activities are to take place. We have another reference in 1 Timothy 6:15. God has hidden Himself (as it were) in thick darkness, in this sense, that much of His works is not known by mankind except those enlightened by His word. But the time will come when He will show His Almightyness in taking over the affairs of the world in a very direct way. He shall set up the kingdom of His son over the whole earth.

There is yet another reference in Timothy 2:5-6 demonstrating that the various times and season is marked out also for the declaration of what Christ did for us in His death and resurrection.

The purpose of all these is to make us aware that God never does anything in redemption except as it agrees with the times and season that He himself has before hand marked out. And we can go into several other scriptures to show that God is a God who has programmed the workings of redemption.

And now, let us go to the passage of interest, Luke 21:24. We are using this verse to locate this time period and to note specifically that it is the time when the church age will wound up. After this, the reign of Christ (Head and Body) over all the earth commences. Over a period of one thousand years, the Lord Jesus Christ and the glorified church will reign over the kingdoms of this world. The church age winds up introducing that age. So, come with me to Luke 21:24.

²⁴And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

In the last edition we showed that the nation referred to here is Israel. Israel "shall fall by the edge of the sword and shall be led away captive into all nations". The scattering of the Jewish nation of Israel took place in AD 70 about thirty-six to thirty-seven years after the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. And from that time up till 1948, there was no nation under the heaven called Israel.

In 1948, by a divine working expressed through the committee of nations, the sovereign state of Israel was declared. Quite a number of Jews had moved into their own Land. That was a very important development because Luke 21:24 says they shall be led away captive into all nations. But then, another element was introduced. It says, "and Jerusalem... the physical land called Jerusalem, the centre of their religious and political activities all throughout the Old Testament age, that city, Jerusalem, shall be trodden down of the gentiles, *"until..."*."

We saw earlier that "*gentiles*" is a word that is used to describe the non-Jewish nations. There are two great races so to speak: the Jewish race and the gentiles. And, we are here told that "*Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*"

We saw in the last edition that until Jerusalem comes under the sovereign rule of the nation of Israel, we cannot say with any degree of assurance that the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled or to say emphatically that the end of time is come. That is a key provided for us by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It has awaited measurable fulfilment until after the six day war. And in 1974, much of Jerusalem came under the sovereign rule of the nation of Israel. 1974 therefore, marks a very important era in the history of God's dealings with man.

And, please take note that there are three tiers of interest in prophecy: we have the church, we have the nations (the Gentile nations), and we have the Jewish nation of Israel, Our emphasis for now is on the nation of Israel and by extension, the Gentile nations. But when we have by it discovered the time we are in, we will be able to concentrate attention upon the church. We remain very focused on what God wants to pass across to His people. Knowing the times is a means to an end. Our goal is to open up the church to the fullness of the blessings of redemption that Christ is bringing to the consecrated in this hour.

Now, we desire to show when the times of the gentiles commenced. On the authority of Luke 21:24 we also see its end point. Since in 1974, Jerusalem virtually came under the sovereign rule of the nation of Israel, we can say that God was indicating by this, that the end of times of the Gentiles is in full view.

Lets get a little more detail than we did in the past edition. Please turn with me to Ezekiel 21:25-27. From this scriptures (Ezekiel 21:25-27, we can see that the times of the Gentiles ha run over fifty jubilees, fifty periods of fifty years. Over two thousand and five hundred years was given to the Gentiles (the-Jewish nation) to exercise world-wide rule. Let's take the reading again. Ezekiel 21:25-27.

And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come when iniquity shall have an end.

The phrase "*iniquity shall an end*", suggests two things. First that God pardons iniquity. He brings judgement upon iniquity in order to recover His people and then brings in a season of mercy again. But, there comes a time, because of persistence in doing evil, iniquity is brought to total judgement. And that is what is revealed here.

Leviticus 26 shows that there are five cycles of judgement that God would bring upon the iniquity of the nation of Israel. After these five cycles are exhausted, He will give them over to captivity. So here, they were to go into captivity for seventy years in Babylon. And, in addition, the monarchy was to be brought to an end.

From the time this prophecy was fulfilled six hundred and eight years before the Lord Jesus Christ came in his first advent, there had been no king over Israel. The rule of Monarchs, the period of Monarchy, ended with Zedekiah, the wicked and profane prince under reference here. 2 Chronicles 36 covers all that. But here, Ezekiel was giving the prophecy many years before it happened. Until 608 BC, God dealt with the nation of Israel as a covenant nation. But from that time, God dealt with individuals in that nation according to their measure of faithfulness. Israel ceased to be a covenant nation under God as from BC 608.

And we find the reference to this in Mathew 21:43 when the Lord Jesus Christ told them "The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you and given to a nation that shall bring forth the fruit thereof". So, the church is a continuous reminder to us that the nation of Israel has been sacked. God has raised up another nation, a spiritual nation in its stead, to bring to God what He could not get from Israel. In the twenty-sixth verse, Ezekiel continues

Thus saith the Lord, Remove the diadem, and take off the crown...

The diadem is the glory of the monarchy, while the crown is the very physical evidence of the kingship. And here, Ezekiel says, removed the diadem and take off the crown.

This shall not be the same: ...

That is, things shall not be the same anymore in Israel. After the captivity, there were Governors and Tetrarchs, but Israel never had a king. And she was under the Roman Empire at the time the Lord Jesus Christ came in his first advent. So in fulfilment of this prophecy, things were no longer the same with Israel after the inglorious reign of Zedekiah. The prophet continues in verse 27.

Exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high

You will notice that the word "him" above is rendered in italic in the scriptures while the other words are in normal Roman letters. That means that it was supplied by the translators to give the rendering fluency. But the thought is that the "*he*" that is low is not an individual but the gentile nations.

Whereas Israel has been a peculiar nation unto God, that estate was to be lost. Time was now to be given to the gentile nations to show how much man, plagued with the effect of the fall, can exercise benevolent rule over his fellow man. Can man rule over man and there will be a lasting peace in the earth? That is the great question. And God has shown by the times of the Gentiles that man's rule over man while he is still under the influence of sin, can only end in irredeemable collapse and annihilating catastrophe. But God in trueness plans an intervention.

Now, concerning the overthrow of the kingdom of Israel, the Lord said in verse 27 that He will do it in three consecutive judgements. (And it is in the third judgement that we see the prophecy in verse 25 fulfilled, in the reign of Zedekiah). So the prophets says in verse 27,

²⁷I will overturn, overturn, overturn it.

We notice that God used Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon to sack the nation of Israel. But he did it in three consecutive battles. From the first time he began his military campaign against Israel to the third and last time spanned a period of twenty-five years.

In the first instance, Nubuchadnezzar went to Israel to destroy the cities of Israel and to carry away some valuable things in the temple. This happened under king Jehoachin, 2Chronicles 36 list out these three separate assaults against Israel. It was at the third campaign against Israel that Israel was completely destroyed, and at that time Zedekiah was king over Israel.

So, in verse 27, it is predicted that in three separate assaults against Israel, the kingdom will be taking away from her.

²⁷I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.

The time period in which the Gentiles are to rule over the earth was to be terminated by the crucial entrance into the world affairs of the one who has the right under God to rule the whole earth. This is important. The "he" there who is to come is Christ, Head and body, the corporate Christ: the LORD coming to set up his kingdom upon the earth and the church ruling with him.

The following scriptures are relevant to the consideration of the matter at hand, first; Daniel 2, especially from verse 31 to 45. There we find that four world empires were to emerge during the times of the Gentiles. In Daniel 7, we are shown again these four world empires in another symbolism. It is in reference to these four world (gentile) empires that were divinely permitted to rule over all the earth after God overthrew the kingdom of Israel, that we have the phrase "*times of the Gentiles*".

The four world empires are the Babylonian empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Grecian Empire, and the Roman Empire, whose reign has been stretched over a long time.

According to verse 23 of 2Chronicles 36, we know that a particular kingdom has set in when it begins to have dominance over all the earth. We also see this in Daniel 2:39. So, we are talking about world empires, not merely a major kingdom, but such kingdom that had a sovereign rule over all the earth. And there has been four such, the last being the Roman Empire.

The Roman Empire has had two lives already. And there is in the background the emergence again of that empire. That does not perturb us, because we know that God will destroy it completely when it fully re-emerges. God will install His kingdom over all the earth upon the ruins of these kingdoms.

In interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel simply said "in the days of these kings" (Daniel 2:44) which means that even when a kingdom or empire has lost its sovereign rule over the earth, it remains a power, seeking to re-establish its dominance. But in the days of these kings, God shall set up a kingdom that shall reign over all the earth.

That promised kingdom was inaugurated when the Lord Jesus came in his first advent. He it was who introduced the kingdom of heaven, opening the door for men to be united with Him in the glory of the kingdom. And the kingdom shall be set up (installed) when the perfected church with Christ reigns over all the earth.

That is the first point. In the days of these kings, the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom. It shall be a stone cut without hands (Daniel 2:45). That is the first of two facts we are seeking to establish. Then, the second point: This is drawn from how the kingdom of Israel was overturn by God's judgement in 3 separate assaults until it was completely brought low.

Now, we can show that the first and second world wars were by God, used to forcibly checkmate certain world powers and their tyrannical controls over mankind. We know that the Roman Empire that is again in formation will come to prominence. But the Lord our God will destroy it completely in what might be called the third world war. But, a lot of activities will take place in the church unto her perfection and glorification before that time. And it is the church in power that will signal the final battle. That stone cut out without hands, as the prophet puts it, shall smite and break down completely the remains of the kingdoms of these worlds.

We will close on that note. From 1974 began to be that generation that will witness the fulfilment of all prophetic scriptures. How long is a generation? The longest in scriptures is one hundred and twenty (120) years, the shortest has been forty (40) years. But we know that the Lord will do a quick work and cut it short in righteousness. Our burden is not so much as knowing the time duration. We are more concerned with alerting the church as to the great work of perfecting the willing hearted which Christ is carrying out on earth today. The earnest expectation of all creation waits for this class of believers to be revealed (Romans 8:19). Beloved arise and continually yield to the Lord's voice and works in these crucial days.

3

UNDERSTANDING

THE

TIMES

Glory, honour, power and majesty be continuously ascribed to the name of the living God. In this edition, we will be concluding our meditation on "Understanding the Times. Towards the end of this meditation we

shall be drawing attention to the use in the old covenant era of the blowing of trumpets in connection with times and seasons. For now, lets go to Luke 21:24-28

²⁴And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled...

We know from the last two editions that the persons referred to above are the Jews, the nation of Israel. We saw what the phrase the "*times of the gentiles*" stand for, and that Luke 21:24 is a time prophecy something that is indicative of events of the last days. The preposition "*until*" acts like an adverb modifying the phrase "trodden down of the Gentiles". And we said that it was in 1974 (strictly speaking) that the nation of Israel knew that Jerusalem had come under their full political reach.

The closing month of 1973 witnessed a decisive battle against Israel by the Arabs hoping in vain to break through and capture part of Jerusalem. But after that time, it was clear to the nation of Israel that Jerusalem is under their sovereign control. Six years later in 1980, Menachem Begin proclaimed the whole of Jerusalem as the eternal capital city of the nation of Israel. So, whether we take it from the 1974 or from the 1980 view point, or from the six day war in 1967 when most parts of Jerusalem came under the occupation of the nation of Israel, we know that that time period indicates to us that the times of the Gentiles has only a fleeting remains.

We have shown in previous editions that the times of the Gentiles began six hundred and eight years before the first advent of Christ and have run on up till about 1980. And our purpose is to show that we are in the time of the end. We will take the reading of Luke 21 a little bit further to find the events that the Lord said would be taking place in the earth during that time, Luke 21:25-27

²⁵And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars: and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity: the sea and the waves roaring. ²⁶Men's hearts failing them for fears, and for looking after those things, which are coming on the earth: for the powers of the heaven shall be shaken. ²⁷And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory...

The Son of man is the Lord Jesus Christ. The conjunction with which verse 27 begins shows that it is linked with the events of verses 25 and 26. This is saying that the events revealed in those two verses lead to what is shown in verse 27: "And then shall they see the son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory". Verse 28 is the verse of choice. It says

²⁸And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

There is an expected response from the class of people assisted to see what is transpiring in the earth today. They are called upon to "look", to "lift up the head". Now we may not know when this generation began. But we know, by the Spirit of God and the light of the prophetic scriptures, that we are in that generation that will close up the church age. It is a season of great import to the church of Jesus Christ. It is with power and great glory that the church will manifest Him in the last hour. There is a whole lot of work to be done in the church. What we see now of ourselves, and what we see in the Church World are

far removed from what God desires. But God is working to beautify and fill with glory a people earnestly desiring a place with Him on the throne.

Now, some other questions come to mind in the light of what was shared in the second edition. How may we know that the last two world wars have any reference to the gradual overthrow of the kingdoms of this world? Is it sufficient to say that and Chronicles 36 describing the overthrow of the kingdom of Israel in three separate military campaigns is typical and points out how God will overthrow the kingdoms of this world? Are we to find in the scriptures some other passages that touch on the same thing?. No doubt, these several questions are warranted. We shall show that it is not only from Ezekiel 21:24-27 that we can draw this conclusion, but that it is specifically referred to in the book of Haggai.

Haggai and Zechariah were two prophets that ministered to the nation of Israel after the Babylonian captivity. Thus the message of Haggai has much relevance to the church. We shall be reading from Haggai 2. For those who are familiar with this book, a little reading will show to us that his prophetic message relate to things that will be taking place in the church at the time of the end. The passage refers to Christ activities in His Church and in the midst of the nations at the end (the closing period) of the church age. Haggai 2:4-7

⁴Yet now be strong, O Zerubabel, saith the LORD, and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the Land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD of host: ⁵According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye come out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. ⁶For thus saith the LORD of host; yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;

The phrase "*yet once*" means He has done it previously. But the reference here is to the final onslaught of the divine in the overthrow of the kingdoms of this world, as we shall show more clearly. He says, "yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and earth, and the sea, and the dry land. The reference is to the kingdoms of this world both ecclesiastical (religious), political, civil and economic; whatever combines to give us the present world systems. All of these will be terribly shaken in the last hour. And at the same time, the Lord will be doing a similar work in His church: first, in the visible church systems to overthrow unfaithfulness and moral decay. Secondly to lead a cleansed and worshipping church into a greater and greater communion with Him until she receives perfection of Life.

This passage (Haggai 2:6) is quoted in Hebrews 12:22-28. Paul says, the phrase "yet once more", signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things, which cannot be shaken, may remain. And he concludes, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom, which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear".

So Haggai 2:6 says God shall shake not just the ecclesiastical heavens but political expressions of the present world system. In verse 7, He says,

⁷And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations

shall come...

Christ is the desire of all nations, seen from the divine standpoint. The cry of all the nations for the rule of Christ is seen in this same word "desire". Nations will cry out for Christ. Christ is the desire of all nations. When man shall be totally disenchanted with man's rule over man, they will cry out for the kingdom of Christ. Things shall be very terrible. All that we have heard and known of wars and rumours of wars up till now are like a child's play when compared with the events that shall close up this church age and introduce the kingdom age. Let us take verse 7 of Haggai 2 again. It says

⁷And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.

The house is the church. He says He will fill it with glory. He fills that which is relatively or totally empty. But here, the reference is to the church. We have not yet seen glory as God has purposed that His church should bear. Glory will be poured upon the church. This He will do when He would have cleansed the church. There is now so much of the way of the world in the church. He would deliver the hearts of the obedient from a marriage to the world that has eaten up the visible church systems. He would turn our hearts, minds and total focus to Himself. He will fill His house with glory. Verse 8.

⁸The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts.

The words silver and gold here, though can be applied to physical wealth, are used to refer to redemptive truths and the divine nature. Silver in scriptures is the metal used to typify redemption, while Gold is used to typify the divine nature. Full revelation of the redemption in Christ shall be given to the church. For God has the power to make it known. And the life that corresponds to truth revealed shall be imparted unto the overcoming church. Verse 9 is a passage that we find upon all lips, but which is little understood. It says.

⁹The glory of this later house shall be greater than the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place I will give peace, saith the LORD of host.

That is the context. All Bible believers know that the reference in Haggai 2:9 is to the glory that is to be witnessed by the church. The latter house refers to the church at the time of the end. The former house is the Old Testament church, or viewed from another perspective, the early church. But the glory of the latter house shall be greater than the former.

All of this appears to be doctrinal. But the import is this. When we have seen by time prophecies that we are in the last hour as we have found indication in Jerusalem having being proclaimed the eternal capital city of the nation of Israel, we are to know that the Lord will be involved in quite some work in His church. And our burden is to show what He is doing in this last hour and how we can respond to Him.

We will read the closing verses of Haggai 2, which speak specifically concerning the overthrow of the kingdoms of this world. Haggai 2:20-22

²⁰And again the word of the LORD came unto Haggai in the four and twentieth day of the month, saying, ²¹Speak to Zerubabel, governor of Judah, saying, I will shake the heavens and the earth (remember verse 6, Here, the LORD is saying the same thing and He goes further to show us how He is going to bring it to pass. He says in the next verse): ²²And I will overthrow the

throne of kingdoms (this He did in the first world war), and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen (this He did in the second world war); and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and the rider's shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother (this he will do in the third world war).

So, three distinct campaigns by God shall bring to finality the overthrow of the kingdoms of this world. Revelation 11:15 say the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. Notice the last phrase in verse 22. It says "everyone by the sword of his brother".

It can be shown that the Roman Empire has had two lives. But it is building up itself again. And Revelation 17 details to us the emergence of the Roman Empire, how it is going to be constituted. It shows to us that the Japhetite nations (European nations) shall be the main stay of that empire. And it goes on to show how the rebirth of the empire and its sovereign rule shall be crushed in due course. Revelation 17, 18 contains all of the details, but we are not drawn into those considerations now. The time interval between Jerusalem coming up under the occupation of nation of Israel, and when the third world war will take place, that time interval, is a season of great opportunity for the church. And that is our emphasis.

But somebody may say, "What do you mean that the Roman Empire has had two lives? If you will turn with me to Daniel 7, we shall in the twelfth verse see something that is of great importance concerning God's dealing with the kingdoms of this world. Daniel 7:12.

¹²As concerning the rest of the beasts...

The reference is to the first three beast or world empires that preceded the Roman Empire which is the fourth beast. These three beasts are the Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persian and the Grecian Empire. So, we are told in verse 12.

¹²As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had there dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time

What we find in history is that as one World Empire goes down, another is raised up. That is what happened to the four world gentile empires emerged. But when an empire comes down, even though it no longer has dominion over the whole earth, it remains a power, a force, and continues to stir up itself. This is what is meant by the phrase, "their lives were prolonged for a season and time". And this agrees with what we find in Daniel 2:45. When the stone cut without hands smite the great image (representing the kingdoms of this world), it breaks in pieces the iron and the clay, the brass, the silver and the gold.

So, for each of this world empire, when the dominion is taken away, the life is prolonged for a season and a time. For the Roman Empire, the most elastic of the four world empires, we find it re-emerging, each time becoming stronger than it was before. And Revelation 13:2 assures us that when it comes up in the final form, it will have all the strength of the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian and the Grecian empires. It will represent the kingdoms of this world in its full glory. That is why it is said to have the characteristic of the lion (the symbol used to represent Babylon in her royal glory), the bear (the symbol of the Medo-Persian empire) and the Leopard (the symbol of the Grecian empire).

That empire had its first life as a purely political world power. Through the Roman Emperors, Roman ruled the whole earth. But sometime in the fifth century, the kingdom was over thrown. But it re-emerged in

another form, as a religious kingdom. Papal Rome took over from Imperial Rome and continued its brutal reign until when it suffered great defeats in the 17th and 18th centuries.

But we are shown that the empire shall emerge again. The Roman Empire is re-emerging. And we can authoritatively say that the European Union forms the essential base for the emergence of this world empire. That can be shown from Revelation 17, but it is not our burden for now. All we are saying is that the Roman Empire shall emerge a third time, but God shall smite it. And Revelation 17 says there will be such a loss of confidence among the constituting nations that they will begin to fight against each other (the same picture given in Haggai 2:22).

Verse 28 of Luke 21 says, "When ye see these things begin to take place, look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh". That is very important when that begins to happen... And whereas we know that there was a sign in the rebirth of the nation of Israel in 1948, we cannot mistake that powerful witness of Jerusalem coming under the sovereign rule of the children of Israel. We have seen it; we must begin to lift up our heads.

The reference here is not the physical head, for there is no relationship between lifting up the physical head and experiencing redemption. The head is here used to represent our minds. We must begin to occupy our minds with the issues of our perfection and full redemption, the very things the Lord brings with Him in His Second Advent. Look up from the earth realm. So many are earth bound. There are those who dwell upon the earth. But look up! Set your focus upon the Lord for our full redemption draweth nigh.

Now, we move on to something we mentioned at the beginning. That has to do with blowing the trumpet. Let us read Numbers 10:1-10

¹And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, ²Make thee two trumpets of silver; of a whole piece shalt thou make them: that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps. ³And when they shall blow with them all the assembly shall assemble themselves to thee at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. ⁴And if they blow but with one trumpet, then the princes, which are heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather themselves unto thee. ⁵When ye blow an alarm, then the camps that lie on the east parts shall go forward. ⁶When ye blow an alarm the second time, then the camps that lie on the south side shall take their journey: they shall blow an alarm for their journeys. ⁷But when the congregation is to be gathered together, ye shall blow, but ye shall not sound an alarm. ⁸And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow with the trumpets; and they shall be to you for an ordinance forever throughout your generations. ⁹And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppreseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the LORD your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies. ¹⁰Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt-offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace-offerings; that they may be to you for a memorial before your God: I am the LORD your God.

Now, we will simply gather a few thoughts and that will be sufficient for our

Present purpose. He says, "Make thee two trumpets of silver". First of all, let us look at the symbolism of silver and the fact of the trumpet. Silver is the metal in scriptures used to symbolise redemption. The trumpet assists amplification of the voice. Thus a trumpet made of silver denote the message of redemption.

Under the Old Testament, it is the sons of Aaron, the priests that blow the trumpet. We find a direct instruction concerning this in the eight verse. We find also that, the trumpet is used to indicate that a season has set in. It says "in the days of your gladness", the reference is to festal occasions: the feast of Passover, the feast of Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles, including all the other four feasts built into those three feasts. Those are the days of their gladness

Then He says further, "and in your solemn days". That speaks of the Sabbath days. Even the Sabbath days were to be introduced by the blowing of the trumpets. And when a feast day falls into a weekday and not a Saturday, that weekday is declared as a Sabbath and the trumpet is blown to announce it. Then He says "in the beginning of your months". And he says when ye blow this trumpet; it should be over your burnt offerings, over the sacrifice of your peace offerings that they may be to you for a memorial before the Lord.

That is all we will be taking for now. In closing we return to that which we began with in this meditation. We are in the last hour and Christ has so much work to do in the church. After about two thousand years, majority of the believers are still babes. Yet, in the natural, we do not expect a forty-year-old man to get married to a two-year-old girl. In the ancient times, we see a situation where people "throw firewood down" for a baby girl just born with the intention to marry her when she comes of age. But, we are talking seriously now. The church that would be the bride of Christ must be fully grown in Christ.

And concerning this, God is opening the scriptures at this last hour. When we see these signs, the believers are to detach themselves from the earth, they should not be earth bound. They should not be part of them that dwell upon the earth, that is, them that live their lives around what to eat, what to wear etc. and do not give adequate attention to the spiritual prosperity of their souls.

The Lord says, "Look up for your redemption draweth nigh". That concerns you and me in this last hour. And all we ask for is "Lord, make yourself known to your church in this last hour, fill her with glory as you have said that the glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former". We do not see it so now, but it shall be so, for your word shall not fail". The Lord bless you, in Jesus name. Amen.

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4

UNDERSTANDING

THE

TIMES

We are continuing in our discussion on the blessed hope but actually taking some introductory considerations. The introduction, which will till cover some further editions, is important. A matter of such importance as the blessed hope should have no shadow cast upon it in any way. Lack of understanding hinders proper response to divine things.

The Old Testament (the law and the prophets) and all of God's dealings with Biblical characters in that era foreshadow God's dealings with His people in the New Testament age. This is of much importance. For example, take the man Abraham. We know at the beginning, he has just one wife: Sarah. But at some point in his life, Agar, who was actually a house help to Sarah, came in. And after Sarah died, Abraham married another wife, Keturah.

Now these were actually three women that lived. But we know that God's dealings with Abraham and all the Biblical records concerning him foreshadow His dealings with His people under the 2 covenants. For example in Galatians 4, we are told that both Sarah and Agar are allegories. Sarah typified the New Testament while Agar typified the Old Testament. And, after the death of Sarah we find Keturah coming in to give some special emphasis to the antitype of that covenant that Agar represents.

So, all of God's dealing with the people of Israel and those Biblical characters presented in the first thirty nine books of the Bible are, strictly speaking, shadows of the Lord's people and of their experiences under God in the New Testament. This should be noted carefully.

We may look at the Old Testament as serving two purposes. One, God is showing to us in the great doctrines taught by Moses, Aaron and the prophets, shadows of the great themes of redemption. The elaborate ritual and ceremonies, the festal occasions are but types and imageries of real events in the New Testament age touching on the redemption that is in Christ. We can look at the Old Testament therefore as the New Testament concealed in shadows. And in the light of the teachings of the New Testament, we find that God's dealings with the children of Israel under the Old covenant had the general characteristics and boundaries of the great themes of redemption in the New.

Again, we can also look at the New Testament as the Old Testament revealed. So that, when you take any subject matter in the New, you will find that there is an adequate discussion on that same subject in the Old. Thus both the Old Testament and the New Testament writings provide the full range of truth on any subject matter To discuss something in one without an appropriate reference to some passage in the other might border on wrong emphasis. The scripture has provided that by the mouth of two or three witnesses let every matter be established. More importantly, there is no subject matter in the New but that it is to be found in the Old. Even if it is just one aspect of that matter, we will find it in the Old. Thus, we may not be able to fully appreciate a subject matter in the New, without reference to the Old.

There is a scriptural backing for the above observation. Take for example, Paul. He wrote about half of New Testament scriptures. But he said the authority he had for all the things contained in His epistles, is that they agree with the principles of truth that God has laid down in the Old Testament. Paul knew he was an apostle; was called of God and anointed of Him to preach the gospel, but he said all he taught and preached were derived from what was written in the Law and the prophets.

Let us go to the scriptures to see where Paul made this important observation. Acts 26:22. The occasion was the defence of Paul in the presence of Festus and King Agrippa who were dignitaries in the Roman Empire. Paul was converted on the way to Damascus when he was on mission to persecute the church.

On the way to Damascus to arrest believers, God apprehended him. And from that time, all of Paul's life was turned the right way up, and he began to preach Jesus Christ. Certain of his teachings on grace and related subjects were seen by the Jews (who still held rigidly to certain of the Old Testament practices) as heresies. And they were minded to kill him. It was on such an occasion when he was dragged before Festus and subsequently before Agrippa that we find this statement made in verse 22 of Acts 26.

²²Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.

Now, Paul is saying here that there is no doctrine taught by him, whether he was talking of the gifts of spirit, the five-fold ministry, or things that pertain to the perfection and glorification of the church, but that it derived its authority from the Old Testament scriptures.

I Corinthians 10 further confirm the above observation. There Paul said that the events that transpired for those forty years during the wanderings of the children of Israel through the wilderness to the promised land, answer to specific events taking place in and among God's people all through the gospel age. And, of course, saints of this church age have identified this position as true. This song comes to mind now "Guide me O thou great Jehovah, pilgrims through this wilderness".

So, the wilderness journey of the children of Israel answers to the wilderness journey of the New Testament church. We are not passing through any physical wilderness, but from the point we are saved to the point we enter into the fullness of the inheritance reserved for us by God, our pertinent experiences during that time are by the word of God pictured as a wilderness, showing that there is something better, fuller, richer in the mind of God for us than all that we have experienced up till now.

In Hebrews 10, Paul says "for the law... And the word" Law" here covers the first five books of the Old Testament. They constitute the spiritual foundation for the writings of the prophets and the ministry of the priests all through the Old Testament age. There is no prophecy in the Old Testament but that it has its roots in the first five books called Law. The Law founded the words that came forth from the mouth of the prophets. For the law came out of Zion and the word of God from Jerusalem, we are told in Isaiah 2:3.

So the law was the foundation for all that did labour under the Old Testament in teaching and preaching. And so Paul says in Hebrews 10:1

¹For the laws having a shadow of good things to come, And not the very image of the things can never with those sacrifices, which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect.

So here we are told that all the provisions in the book of Genesis, Exodus,

Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy could not make the comers there unto perfect because they were images of the real substance. Colossians 2:17 say they are a shadow of things to come; but the body (the substance) is of Christ,

Whenever we look at any aspect of God's word in the New, we must seek to find out what is revealed of the same matter under the Old. We must search the scriptures, going through the writings of the prophet, the apostles and other writers on the same subject matter

That is the meaning of Hebrews 1:1, in many ways and in different parts God caused His word to be spoken in time past. So, this prophet had a little of the manifestation of truth in his teachings concerning a particular subject matter in redemption leaving other details to be supplied by other prophets. And this is how all scriptures come to us, here a little and there a little

And all of these things we are saying relate to what we have on hand: the blowing of the trumpet. Quite some wrong emphasis and false teachings, which abound are associated with the events of this last hour. This is why we are very deliberate in our approach to establishing any word of doctrine.

Thus, as we continue on this great subject: the Blessed hope, we must look into the scriptures in sufficient details in order to have a clear understanding of the things that belong to our Salvation, perfection and glorification.

So, come with me to Numbers 10:1-10

¹And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, ²Make thee two trumpets of silver; of a whole piece shalt thou make them: that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps. ³And when they shall blow with them all the assembly shall assemble themselves to thee at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. ⁴And if they blow but with one trumpet, then the princes, which are heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather themselves unto thee. ⁵When ye blow an alarm, then the camps that lie on the east parts shall go forward. ⁶When ye blow an alarm the second time, then the camps that lie on the south side shall take their journey: they shall blow an alarm for their journeys. ⁷But when the congregation is to be gathered together, ye shall blow, but ye shall not sound an alarm. ⁸And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow with the trumpets; and they shall be to you for an ordinance forever throughout your generations. ⁹And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppreseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the LORD your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies. ¹⁰Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt-offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace-offerings; that they may be to you for a memorial before your God: I am the LORD your God.

We will go straight to verse 8. There it says it is the sons of Aaron that were commanded to blow the trumpet. This is important. Not Aaron, but the Sons of Aaron that did blow the trumpet. The closing verses of chapter 10 tell us how a typical occasion of the blowing of the trumpet set in. Notice that we are told that the blowing of the trumpet was for the journeying of the children of Israel.

So moving from the red sea through the wilderness to the land of promise answers to the believer's progressive experiences of the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. The closer we are to "the Promised Land", the closer we are to the fullness that God has prepared for us in Christ Jesus. We see Israel's journey in a new perspective. They journeyed to life. They were coming from the realm of death, and they journey to life.

When the trumpet is to be blown, it is Moses that first gets the signal. If while waiting upon the Lord, the Shekinah glory, which is as a column of light in the holiest of all, begins to lift, by this Moses is able to know that God wants them to move, to break camp and journey into another place of encampment that He would show them. Moses would say on such occasion "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered, let them that hate him flee before him".

Then he comes out, shares that insight with Aaron who begins to intercede, because fraught with danger and great conflicts were the movements of the children of Israel. Israel moved unto their inheritance but not without opposition. Aaron upon receiving that word would now tell his sons to blow the trumpet.

Aaron and Moses are two types of the same person, the Lord Jesus Christ. They were simply figures of the Lord Jesus Christ in their respective ministries. And it is important to note that it was neither Aaron nor Moses that blow the trumpet but the sons of Aaron. But they took their instructions, got their inspiration for the blowing of the trumpet from their father Aaron.

Now again we see in the second part of verse 8 that this blowing of the trumpet was something that was to be observed throughout their generations. So, for about one thousand five hundred years, month in, month out, all throughout that long period, Israel observed this ordinance. And whenever we see something repeated in so many ways and spanning over a long period, it is indicative that it has prophetic signification.

The next thought is in verse 10. We read verse 10 again

¹⁰Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn day and in the beginning of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets...

That gives us an idea that in Israel there is a close relationship between times and seasons when they set in and the blowing of the trumpet. The trumpet was never blown in vain. It had a signification. On the first day of each month, they blew the trumpet. On the day of their gladness they blew the trumpet. Then on festive occasions, here called "on your solemn days", they blew the trumpet. And when there is war, they blew the trumpet; they sounded an alarm with it. This is important.

Now, what do all of these things stand for? First, we want to observe that the solemn days or the festal occasions in Israel were grouped into three seasons. The season or festive period of Passover, which covered eight days, the season, or feast of Pentecost, which covered just one day and the season (feast) of Tabernacles which covered twenty-two days.

These three great festal occasions answer to three distinct experiences the church must undergo before coming into fullness of redemption. Historically we can say that the feast of Passover is already fulfilled in the church. 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 says that Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. And when

The Lord Jesus Christ would die on the cross, the event took place on the day the children of Israel were commanded to celebrate the feast of Passover under the Old Testament.

They, they slew a lamb, applied the blood on the lintel and side posts of their houses, as it is written, "when I see the blood, I will pass over you". On that same day the Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cross. And fifty days after, on the very day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was outpoured upon the waiting church. The phrase that opens Acts 2:1 *and when the day of Pentecost was fully come*, shows us that the event of the out pouring of the Holy spirit was the antitypical fulfilment of the Old Testament feast of Pentecost.

So, relative to the church, the feast of Pentecost has been already fulfilled. More correctly, we can say that for the church corporately, the feast of Passover has been fulfilled, but for the individual, the day he gives his life to Christ and experience the new birth, he begins to celebrate the feast of Passover. And for the believer, the day he comes into the experience of the baptism with the Holy Spirit, he begins to celebrate the feast of Pentecost.

So, while the feast of Passover and Pentecost may be futuristic in relation to any one individual, if the person is not saved or if the person is not baptised with the Holy Spirit, nevertheless, relative to the church, these spiritual events have already been fulfilled. But there is a third event that answers to fullness of redemption the feast of tabernacles.

Under the Old Testament, the Feast of Passover had two other feasts attached to it, the feast of unleavened bread and the waving of the sheaves, (also called first fruits). In other words, when the season of Passover sets in, all its three feasts: the Passover itself, the feast of unleavened bread and the feast of first fruits are what is in view. All of them are celebrated in the season of Passover.

Then, the Pentecost feast stood alone, while the Feast of Tabernacles, like the Feast of Passover had two additional feasts associated with it: the feast of trumpets and the feast of atonement. The season of Tabernacles is introduced by the feast of trumpets, followed by the atonement, and then the tabernacle proper.

All seven feasts (Passover, Unleavened bread, the first fruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacle) were announced by the blowing of the trumpet as we found in Numbers 10:10 and also in Leviticus 23:4. But, apart from this general blowing of the trumpet to announce the feasts, there was a particular feast that answers to the trumpets, a particular season set aside for the blowing of the trumpet.

Now, when we take that and consider it along with the fact that the trumpet is blown also to announce the beginning of the months, we know that there is a close connection between the blowing of the trumpet and the various events that took place in Israel from season to season.

We want to bring this meditation to a close. But we will take on a few more things that will assist in preparing us for the next meditation. You will recall that in the last edition we said that the trumpets, which were two, were made of silver. And we said that silver is a metal in the Old Testament that is used to typify redemption. Notice, the trumpet simply amplifies the voice, it is the voice of the priest that sounds out. The trumpet only gives a distinction to that sound, to amplify it.

Thus, we can say with all authority that all of the redemptive experiences that the church is to have are to be proclaimed by the ministry of God's word. As we shall show in the next edition, the blowing of the trumpet and the ministry of the prophetic word are associated concepts. What was found in the Old as just the blowing of physical sound is in the New having the emphasis of the voice of the Son of God through prophetic channels. It is the declaration of God's mind and purpose relative to some aspect of redemption that has set in.

The blowing of the trumpet in the Old relates to times and seasons. The blowing of the trumpet in the New is the ministry of the prophetic word emphasising a new season in the redemptive activities of Christ in His church. Light must precede any redemptive blessing the church must experience. This is quite important. In the next edition we shall continue on this matter of the blowing of the trumpet. The LORD bless you, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

BLOWING OF THE TRUMPET

We are continuing in our introductory consideration of the theme: our blessed hope. We will be looking again at the blowing of the trumpet. Our starting text will be Isaiah 61. This passage of scripture that we will be interesting ourselves with is also quoted in Luke 4. Accordingly, we will be looking at the two texts, Isaiah 61:1-3

¹THE SPIRIT of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the Meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to Proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound ²To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; ³To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

Now, if we turn to Luke 4, we find that Isaiah's prophecy here relates to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Luke 4:16-21, there is an event recorded at the very beginning of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ in the days of his flesh.

¹⁶And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and as, his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read. ¹⁷And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he had opened the book, he found the Place where it was written, ¹⁸The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, ¹⁹To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. ²⁰And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down, and the eyes of all then that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

Now, you will notice if you have followed the first reading that the portion that the Lord Jesus Christ read in Isaiah 61 is the first verse and the first part of the second verse. In other words he stopped in the middle of verse 2. But why did the Lord stop his reading in the middle of a verse? The reason is because he was reading out in Luke 4, the aspect of Isaiah 61 that pertained to his ministry in his first advent.

From the first verse of Isaiah 61 to the point in verse 2 where Luke 4:19 stops refer to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ in the days of his flesh, while the second part of verse 2 down to the end of Isaiah 62 refer to the ministry he fulfils in his second advent. This is important. We read again that part of Isaiah 61 that defines the ministry of the Lord in his first advent, in the days of his flesh. Isaiah 61:1-2.

¹THE SPIRIT of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the Meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to Proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound ²To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;

We find that it is at this point that the Lord stopped the reading as recorded in Luke 4. So, that punctuation (the comma) shows the limit of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ in his first advent, seen from the standpoint of the prophecy in Isaiah 61.

But we are interested in that phrase that we find in Luke 4:19 which is also the first part of Isaiah 61:2 – to preach the acceptable year of the LORD. In Isaiah 61:2 it says, "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord". What does this phrase mean?

The "acceptable year of the Lord" relates to a special season that comes up in Israel every fifty years. The reference is to the Jubilee. The record concerning it is in Leviticus 25. The jubilee was proclaimed during the celebration of the feast of Tabernacles. We know that the feast of Tabernacles consisted of three parts: the feast of the blowing of the trumpet, the feast of Atonement and the feast of Tabernacle proper.

In Leviticus 25, we are shown that at the end of the forty-ninth year, during the time of the feast of Tabernacle, specifically on the day of atonement, after the atonement sacrifices have been completed at about 6 p.m., just when the fiftieth year sets in, the priests were to take the trumpets and blow out a great proclamation saying all captives are set free, all debts are cancelled.... If you read Leviticus 25, you will be greatly impressed about the times of great joy that comes upon the children of Israel on such occasions. Every man returns back to his possession.

So much is packed into that Leviticus 25, but our purpose in this consideration is this. Under the Old Testament, men blew physical trumpets to announce the arrival of the year of jubilee, a time of great joy. But all that they did in these several circles of fifty years were a shadow of something to be fulfilled in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here in Luke 4, Jesus proclaims the acceptable year of the Lord. He proclaims the Jubilee first to the church, and through the church, jubilee will be proclaimed to the nations.

So what in the Old Testament was the blowing of the trumpet is here referred to as the sounding of the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus Christ by his voice did sound the trumpet of release to sin captives, to captives who are bound by various maladies and diseases, who have mental and social problems. So, Jesus Christ proclaimed the acceptable year of the Lord. And we are using this passage to introduce us to the thought we finished with in the last edition. That is, the blowing of the trumpet is the proclamation of the gospel in the power of the Spirit, to fulfil prophecy.

Still confirming this point, let us turn to Revelation 1:10-13. John says

¹⁰I was in the spirit on the Lord's Day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet. Then verse 11 tells us what the great voice was saying. The voice was ¹¹Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first, and the last: and, what thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodecia.

Then in verses 12 and 13, John says concerning this great voice as of a trumpet

¹³And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

Notice that in verse 10, John says he was in the spirit and he heard the voice of the Son of God as of a great trumpet. So, what the Old Testament priest did in the blowing of physical trumpet is under the New Testament fulfilled in the sounding forth of the voice of the Son of God in the gospel, ministered by persons who have come to the estate of ministry (the ministry of the Apostles, Prophets, Evangelist, Shepherds and Teachers) and who in coming to this estate walk faithfully with the Lord and are raised up further to become a voice gift to the church. This is important. These ones (typified by the sons of Aaron) are those who blow the trumpet.

Again in 1 Corinthians 14:8,9, we read something that shows clearly that the blowing of the trumpet under the New Testament is the proclamation of God's will in redemption by men and women suitably anointed to do so. 1 Corinthians 14:8 says

⁸For if the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? ⁹So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how will it be known what is spoken?

The context is the proclamation of the gospel, moving in ministry within the local congregation. And Paul is here saying when we seek to minister, let us minister for the edification, the building up of the people. That it is important to God and to His purpose that the word of God comes forth clearly, stirring up the people unto obedience. Verse 6 of the same chapter will give us that indication.

But in verse 8 that we read, we find that there is a play on word. Paul, drawing his inspiration from the provisions in the Old Testament concerning the blowing of the trumpet, says "for if the trumpet gives an uncertain sound who shall prepare himself to the battle". That is a play on words, because, the two Hebrew words that translates "trumpet" gives the following distinction; one, the Hebrew word 'Yobe," which is used in Leviticus 25 and translates the word trumpet in that chapter is the same that gives the word "jubilee" so, the word is a derivative of the word "Yobe" and is the Hebrew word for trumpet.

The emphasis in the word "Yobe" is that there is a continuous sound, a continuous blast of the trumpet, until all that are intended to be reached by that message have heard the voice of the trumpet and understood it. That is important. Also, in the Old Testament, we often find the phrase "blow the trumpet and say..." meaning that in the blowing of the trumpet, there is a proclamation of words declaring what the voice of the trumpet is all about. For example Joel 2:1 says *BLOW ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound*

an alarm in my holy mountain. Again the fifteen verse of the same chapter says Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly.

So, the word "Yobe" is about the going forth of the continuous sound of God's word for a divine purpose. Then again, in a transference of figure, what is blown is shown in the effect it produces on the people: the jubilee, the great time of release, the release of humanity from the power of sin and death.

Then the second word translated trumpet in the Old Testament is "Shofa". The reference is to the fact that it must be incisive, clear, distinct, bold and serving the Lord's purpose. There must be clarity, there must be boldness, and there must be a distinction to the sound. And that is what Paul is here saying in 1 Corinthians 14:8, "if the trumpet does not trumpet, if the trumpet does not give a distinct sound, if the trumpets give an uncertain sound, who shall prepared himself to the battle".

So, the sound of the trumpet is the proclamation of the gospel by anointed vessels, persons who have walked with God, who having been called to the estate of ministry, have held on to God in faithfulness until they have been given effectual entrance into God's plans and purposes.

Just one more reference and we will conclude this meditation. Whenever we see the word trumpet used in the New Testament, the reference is to the proclamation of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus in its entire ramification. Please turn with me to Isaiah 58. There, we are shown two things that reveal that the blowing of trumpet is symbolic of the ministry of God's word. Isaiah 58:1

¹Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression...

So, it is clear here. The prophet was to lift up his voice like a trumpet. And we saw in the last edition that the trumpet sound is simply for amplification, what is important is the message that goes forth.

Now, we take a second thought. We will be looking at this matter of the blowing of the trumpet and the events that will transpire at this last hour. We would come gradually to a clear appreciative understanding of what Christ is doing in the church today and how it concerns us. The next scripture of interest is Amos 3:3-8. We shall be considering these scriptures in the light of Revelation 10:7, seen contextually.

Now, recall that in the reading of Numbers 10, we showed clearly that it is the sons of Aaron, and not Aaron, and not Moses, that did blow the trumpet. We shall see the importance of that when the time comes. Now we shall read Amos 3:3-8.

³Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

There must be communion and compatibility between the messenger and the message. God is not interested in the demonstration of his power merely, but also in the manifestation of his character. And, here, we are told that those who are called into the service of God, in the passage of time, if faithful, are called into this aspect of the ministry, being a voice gift to the church, ministering with distinction, pointing the Lord's people to these things that He is doing among his people. May we be faithful, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 4 reads

⁴Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing? ⁵Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth where no gin is for him? Shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all? ⁶Shall a trumpet be blown in the

city and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not don it?
⁷Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but hath he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets. ⁸The Lion hath roared, who will not fear.

Here the word "Lion" is used to represent the majestic personage of the Lord Jesus Christ and his ministry. He says, "The Lion hath roared, who will not fear" Then he goes in a parallelism to explain the import of the first part of verse 8. He says

⁸The Lord GOD hath spoken who can but prophesy?

So, we see the twin purpose in the release of God's word. God speaks to effect something in His plan; man hears it in his spirit (remember the experience of John in Revelation 1:10), and by what he has heard, he is enabled to prophesy. Other elements appear, but we shall pick them up from verse 7 after we have read Revelation 10. Now come straight to Revelation 10:1 – 7. John says

¹And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: ²And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth

Revelation 5 tells us that the little book has to do with the final aspects of the work of redemption. It must be so, for John cried when there was no one worthy to open the book. And he was told "behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof". And, we notice that praises went up unto God on account of this, attesting to the fact that he the Lamb, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, hath redeemed us to God by his blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.

So, the opening of the little book and the final acts of the work of redemption are related issues. Here in Revelation 10, the book is already opened in the right hand of this glorious personage, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Lord Jesus Christ. He places his right foot upon the sea (He owns the nations) and his left foot upon the earth (He owns all of mankind). And we are told in verse 3 that he "cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth".

Of course, John was in the spirit when he was seeing and hearing all of these things. If somebody were sitting next to him he would hear nothing. These are spiritual realities made visible to John's sight and audible to his ears by the operation of the gifts of the spirit. So we are told that he cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth:

³and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices. And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices. ⁴And the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not. ⁵And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, ⁶And swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the

things that therein are, and the earth and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer.

The phrase "time no longer" means that God will not place His work under any delay at the time when so much of the promises of redemption are to be fulfilled for the waiting church. There is time no longer. God is doing a terrific and a swift work in the midst of his church. However, many of His people are bound to traditions and empty church practices. But God in His great mercies will deliver us, clean up our eyes and stir up our spirits to begin to look unto Him for the great work of perfection that He will bring about in the church.

Now let us read Verse 7 of Revelation 10.

⁷But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets

Notice in the above verse that there is a reference to the ministry of the seventh angel. From Mathew 24:31, we understand that his seventh angel is a many membered body. That is, it is speaking of plural ministries, men and women raised up by God, anointed to serve His interest at this last hour; persons who are voice gifts to the church.

They will be few, compared to the many confused voices upon the earth today. But there would be many who go forth as God's angels. They would be known by their humility and selfless devotions to God's purpose. Only one person is exclusively important in relation to the Father's plans and purposes, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is raising up a many-membered body of servants and pouring His spirit and power upon them to speak his words and to turn many unto His righteous cause.

Notice the scriptures says in Revelation 10:7, "that the mystery of God should be finished". What is a mystery? A mystery in the context of the Bible is something in the plan and purposes of God previously held secret but now opened to the understanding of the Lord's people. It is a mystery of God when it is a revealed matter and when it answer to redemption. So all the prophecies in the scriptures relative to the Lord setting up the church, overthrowing the nations and setting up his kingdom over all the earth, all those prophetic declarations, constitute the mystery of God. The body of Christ is the mystery of mysteries, being God's instrument for bring about all the above mentioned things.

And here, in saying that the mystery of God should be finished, it means that the mystery of God would be completely fulfilled. But, we must know that these things relate to redemption. That is the meaning of mystery here. Notice, it says, "As he hath declared to his servants the prophets". And, if we turn to Amos 3:7, we will find the same thing mentioned. It says,

⁷Surely, the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.

So, the mystery consists of divine activities in redemption. When He sets out to do these things that are His secret He makes known His mission unto His servants (not a servant as of one individual but His servants, as a many membered body) the prophets. His servants receive these things as the revelation of God's words, plans and purposes, and what they begin to declare of this plan is called prophecy, as we

find in the closing part of Amos 3:8. "The Lord GOD hath spoken, (as of a sound of a great trumpet,) who can but prophesy".

So, the provisions in all scriptures, all prophetic writings, all writings in scriptures, point ultimately to Christ's enthronement over the nations. But all that the Lord hath spoken as of his plan (for known to God from the foundation of the earth are all his works) have been committed to writing. And, the ministry of God's servants today as they hear him in the spirit, will consist in declaring things that are already written. And the final authority for all they will have to say is as the written word bear them witness. May the Lord bless you, in Jesus name. Amen.

6

BLOWING OF THE TRUMPET

We will continue in our meditation on the Blowing of the Trumpet, an ordinance that the Lord instituted for the children of Israel, which ordinance was observed throughout the one thousand five hundred years of the Old Testament history. It was during their journey through the wilderness into the Promised Land that Moses gave this ordinance to the children of Israel as he was commanded of God to do.

We have previously observed that the blowing of the trumpet answers to the proclamation of the message of the kingdom in the power of the Holy Spirit, by persons that have come to the estate of voice gifts. We have said that the five fold ministerial gifts of Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds and Teachers are the starting line in ministering Christ first to the world, and, as the church is birthed, to the Lord's people principally. But what constitute another level of walk with God sets in when those that are called to the estate of ministry are habitually faithful.

So, a voice gift enables a servant of God to proclaim the Lord's message for the season in such a way that it might be called the sound of a trumpet. In a general usage, every teaching and preaching of God's

word, is like blowing a trumpet, in as much as Christ is preached. But, when we look closely, the blowing of the trumpet may be reserved for the prophetic word coming forth to direct the Lord's people in their walk with God, in their preparation to receiving the fullness of Christ at this time of the end.

The prophetic lesson covers so many issues. But these several things can be divided into two broad lines. We find the closing verses of Numbers 10 assisting us in this classification. Numbers 10:33

³³And they (that is the children of Israel) departed from the mount of the LORD three days' journey and the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD went before them in the three days' Journey, to search out a resting-place for them...

To help our understanding, the phrase "resting place", is the term used to describe the glorious encampments that the children of Israel had in those forty years of their wilderness journey. Strictly speaking, from the time they were delivered from Egypt after crossing the Red Sea, there were forty-two stations they encamped in. And each of the forty-two stations speaks of something in the walk of the believer with Christ. Each resting place was a rest indeed. But we find that the Lord moved them from one resting place to another. The Lord was in effect moving them from one realm of walk with Him to a higher realm.

It was not possible then for any of them to stay back in a particular resting place and say, "Oh this resting place is beautiful enough". The journey was to the land of promise, the land that flows with milk and honey. So, no matter how wonderful an experience may be in the wilderness, it was only part of the great purpose of God. And, in any case, if some of the children of Israel had stayed back in any resting place, refusing to move forward, they would discover that the manna that fell to feed them was not a property of the wilderness. God gave it to them in His compassion; it was a divine provision for them during those forty years. And wherever the cloud of glory is, there the manna fell.

If we turn this over to the New Testament times, we will find that the Lord's people having known God to a measure, are quite often prepared to settle down. So we may say that there are forty two resting places, spiritually speaking, in which the Lord's people have settled down, some just near the "red sea" others setting at various points in the wilderness, some coming so close to the land of promise but never entering.

May the Lord assists us to know that whatever we have known of redemption in the Lord Jesus Christ is only a measure. Until there is evidence in our lives of perfection of character, knowledge, wisdom, understanding and deliverance from corruptibility and death, we have not yet reached that rest that the Lord Jesus Christ has provided for us in Himself. Fullness of life, fullness of union with Christ in all of his glory is the ultimate rest God has provided for us.

So, there were various resting places, but there was the resting place in the land of promise. Paul says we who have believed do enter into rest. But he says again, there remaineth a rest unto the people of God (Hebrews 4:3-9). Each time the cloud of glory lifted and moved to a new resting place, God was moving His people into a new experience in him. It would always be in relation to their understanding of His plans and purposes and their enjoyment of the redemptive blessings He has provided for them.

That is the background, and with that, we read the thirty-third verse of Numbers 10 again. Take note of the fact that it was the Ark of the Covenant that searched out a resting place for the people. The resting place they were taken to from time to time was related to their situation, to the conflicts they were having and the need to lift them up out of their adverse circumstances into a higher level of enjoyment of God's blessings where they would have more satisfaction, more fulfillment.

If you are not having fulfilment in your Christian life, it is because God wants to take you up to another realm in him. There can be no ultimate satisfaction until perfection sets in. The Lord has promised He would perfect His work in us before the close of the church age. So, let us read again from verse 33 to 36

³³And they departed from the mount of the LORD three days' journey: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them. ³⁴And the cloud of the LORD was upon them by day, when they went out of the camp. ³⁵And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. ³⁶And when it rested, he said, Return O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel.

When the Israelites moved from one place to the other, it was the Ark of the Covenant that led them, going before them to search out a resting place. It was the Shekinah glory, that column of light that was in the holiest of all that lifts up and gives indication to Moses that they were to break camp. God leads them to yet another resting place where they are to experience more of the Lord's gracious provisions for them. Every such movement was fraught with danger, because there was always opposition from the nations. So, when they moved forward, Moses was taught to say "Rise up Lord, let your enemies be scattered, let them that hate thee flee before thee". That is the prophetic prayer that Moses brought before the Lord.

The blowing of the trumpet, which heralded each of their journeyings, was for the welfare of the people. God goes into warfare for the deliverance of His people. The enemies of God's people are sin, unfaithfulness, uncleanness, lusts, oppression, sicknesses, death, worldliness and all such things that remind us of the fall. These are the enemies of the Lord's people. There are also institutionalised oppositions, persons who are ever creating hostile environments for the Lord's people to operate in.

To the extent any individual, body of people, group, nations, state, institutions etc set themselves against God's word, to that extent they become the enemies of God's people. But what principally are the enemies of God's people are what we identified earlier on: worry, unbelief, oppressions, sickness, death. All of these things are enemies of the Lord's people.

So, when the ark moves forward, it is in order to bring God's people to a greater enjoyment of victory and rest. Then next, when they got to a new encampment, something additional happens. Moses would have to lift up another prophetic prayer unto the Lord saying "Return O Lord to the many thousands of Israel". This speaks of the Lord empowering His people to know those experiences that belong to the new resting place.

Generally we may say that the journey of the children of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land stands for the deliverance of the church from the world, and the Lord increasingly making Himself known to His own until they are brought into the land of promise. The land of promise speaks of the fullness of the Lord's mind and purpose in redemption, as they are made known to the church. It is the fullness revelationally.

But you will notice that when the children of Israel got to the land of promise, they fought battle before they could take possession of the Land, before they could enter into their rest. So, rest in the land of promise refer to experiential entrance into the fullness of the mind and purposes of God in redemption. So, one is revelation; enabling the Lord's people to pray aright, worship aright, seek the Lord aright and fight aright, while coming into perfection and glorification in actual experiences is the fullness of the rest that God has prepared for us. This distinction should be noted carefully.

We can say in a summary that the blowing of the trumpet was both for the warfare and the welfare of the Lord's people. Or, putting them into one, we can say that the blowing of the trumpet is for the warfare of the Lord's people preparing, enabling them to enjoy the blessing of redemption. That takes us straight to what we began with in the last edition.

Recall that we saw in Isaiah 61 and 62 a detailed summary of the ministry of the Lord Jesus in his first and second advent. It is particularly important to note that just the first verse and the first part of the second verse of Isaiah 61 covers the ministry of the Lord in his first advent, while the remaining verses of Isaiah 61 and all of Isaiah 62 reveal his post-resurrection ministry, more especially his ministry in His second advent.

It is because so much of the prophecy of scripture had to do with His Second Advent that the children of Israel made a very costly mistake during the time of his first advent. They reasoned that if he were the Messiah then, as the scriptures have shown, he would be overthrowing the kingdoms of this world and establishing Israel as the premier nation over all the earth. But all of that work belonged to the post resurrection ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, not to be fulfilled in the first advent

The first phrase in this scriptures that reveal the ministry of the Lord in his Second Advent (Isaiah 61:2(b)-63:6) is the proclamation of the day of vengeance. Why vengeance? Because the Lord will avenge his own. They have been made to operate in a hostile environment; they have had certain contradictions in their lives. But when He comes, He would manifest the fullness of His saving power, first, for the overthrow of His enemies that dwell inside of His people (the enemies of sin, fear, worry, unbelief, error, worldliness, death etc), then He releases that same power for the over throw of systems, institutions and kingdoms that are set against His will.

So, "vengeance" is a principal character of Christ's end-time ministry. And that is why when we talk about the blowing of the trumpet and we go to the book of Revelation, we find that each trumpet sound is usually accompanied by judgement. The warfare of His people is to ensure that His people enjoy more and more of His redemptive blessings.

If we go to Isaiah 63:4 and Revelation 19:11-16, we see this same thing. The Lord in His coming goes to destroy. He destroys to save his people. We read from verse 1 of Isaiah 63, and as we read, recall the picture given in Revelation 19:11-16. There, we are shown one clothed with a vesture dipped in blood and we are told his name is the Word of God. So, we read Isaiah 63:1-4, with emphasis on verse 4.

¹WHO is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This that is glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save (In Revelation 19:11, it is said that in righteousness he judges and make war) ²Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments Like him that treadeth in the winefat? ³I have trodden the Winepress alone...

These are strong spiritual imageries used to depict divine judgements. Just as grapes are pressed to squeeze out the juice, so does the Lord trample upon the kingdoms, dominions, systems, institutions and persons that are against His will to break their strength and squeeze out their pride. So, he says in the next verse

³I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. ⁴For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come.

So, the day of vengeance coincides with the year of his redeemed. And though quite a lot of activities will be taking place among the nations, we shall be concentrating on the Lord's activities among His people (the church). He seeks to open them up to a greater understanding of His will; His plans and purposes. He leads them into more and more experiences that make them overcomers indeed. He comes leading them to perfection, delivering them from the power of death causing them to stand in the glory of the fullness of Christ. Thus empowered, the people are enabled to bring about a new age. For the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. That is what accompanies the full blowing of the seventh trumpet.

Now let us go to Revelation 10. There are a few things we need to tidy up as we bring this meditation to a close. In the seventh verse we read the following

⁷But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.

In Revelation 8, we are shown seven angels given seven trumpets who prepared themselves to sound. But here in Revelation 10:7 we are shown the sounding forth of the voice of the seventh angel. From the last meditation, we saw that each angel represents a body of servants. They refer to human persons, washed in the blood of Jesus, filled with His spirit, apprehended for the ministry of the word, found faithful and brought into fuller service in the kingdom of God. So, an angel here would stand for human persons in divine service, bearing divine glory as a burden.

Of course, there are spirit angels, angelic spirit creatures under the service and administration of God, but the Greek word "angelos" which is here translated "Angel" accommodates both spirit and human persons. The emphasis in the word is that the person so described carries a message. He is a messenger. And we know that in relation to the proclamation of the message of the gospel of the kingdom to men, human messengers in the church are in reference.

So when John was commanded to write to the angels of the churches (Revelation 1:20; 2:1), he was not told to write a physical letter to spirit angels but to the plural leadership of the various churches that God targeted for an expression of His will to all the church. That is important.

Each of the seven trumpets in Revelation 8 relates to the final acts of redemption. More so, the seventh. And in Revelation 10:7 we are told "in the days of the voice of the seventh angel...." So, the trumpet is not just a physical trumpet sounded for ten minutes, one hour, one day or one week, but something that proceeds for a long time. That is why verse 7 reads: "in the days of the voice of the seventh angel".

God has provided that through the proclamation of Christ unto His people, faith will be stirred up to lay hold upon that which has been revealed of His saving power. By faith we are saved, by faith we shall be perfected. But that faith must draw upon something revealed of Christ. The Bible says faith cometh by hearing and hearing by Christ preached.

So, recall: "when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished. That is, all the prophecies in scriptures detailing God's purposes in redemption would be fulfilled. Possibly, at the present time, over forty percent of the prophecies in scriptures are not yet fulfilled. So, we are in a momentous period in the history of the church when there will be great unveiling of God's power and great things wrought in the midst of God's people. He says, "When he begins to sound, the mystery of God would be finished as he hath declared through the mouths of His servants the prophets".

The next thought is in the fifteenth verse of Revelation 11 showing that the sounding of the trumpet when it terminates ushers in the kingdom of Christ. It says

¹⁵And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven saying the kingdoms of this world are Become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever.

Now let us take two passages out of the so many passages that deal with our blessed hope and see the place the blowing of the trumpet occupy in the realisation of that hope 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

¹⁵For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we, which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. ¹⁷Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.

In 1 Corinthians 15 we are shown also the place that the blowing of the trumpet occupies in the final acts of the redemption of the Lord's people, bringing those who walk with him faithfully to perfection. 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

⁵¹Behold, I shew you a mystery...

We have seen in the last edition that a mystery does not make the believer a mystic. A mystery is a revealed fact in redemption speaking about Christ and how through him God is raising us up. So, a mystery is a revealed redeeming truth. And Paul here says

⁵¹Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed ⁵²In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: For the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

The Lord will lead us to examine how this change revealed in verse 53; the corruptible putting on incorruptible, the blessing that pertains to our perfection and glorification, would be fulfilled. God will cause the sound of the trumpet to wax louder and louder. And we say in closing that the great need of the hour is for men and women to be raised up of God for the church, who are voice gifts, giving distinct sound of what the Lord wants to accomplish among His people in this last hour. And the Lord by His power shall realise this in a willing, humble and faithful people, in Jesus name. Amen.

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7

THE BODY OF HIS GLORY

The burden of our meditation has been "our Blessed Hope". The last six editions have been an introductory consideration of this great subject, and we are still on the matter of introducing the subject. In this edition, we will be examining the topic "The Body of His Glory"

There is a verse of scripture that set forth one of the three most important events in human history seen from the divine standpoint and from that of the Lord's people. The three events are the Word taking on humanity, Jesus' death on the Cross of Calvary and Jesus' resurrection. The verse of scripture that tells us of the first is John 1:14. It reads this way;

¹⁴And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth).

We may ask, "Who in the scriptures is referred to as "the Word"? The first three verses of John 1:1-2 introduces this personage to us. We are told

¹In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²The it was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, without him was not anything made that was made.

So then, the Logos, the Word that became flesh, is the instrumental agency in all of creation. The beginning referred to in John 1:1 predates the beginning we find in Genesis 1:1, because all of the animate and inanimate creation (the vast universe) came through the Logos. Straightaway, we may say therefore that the Logos is the very God. He is the visible expression of the invisible God. God dwelling in all of His glory cannot be seen except when He veils His glory. His creatures, both Spirit angels and humans can only see him, even as they know him in the personage of the Word, the Logos. The Logos is God revealed to creation.

But, why did such a great One, the divine, the Most High God, become flesh? Before answering the question, probably we should take another scripture that assist the mind to relate the divine nature to the human nature and to see what a vast world of difference exist between these two natures. For God to take on human flesh there must be something of a very great purpose in it. And to contemplate that, that complete change of nature is beyond man. Man should stand in wonder and in awe of Him. All who are seriously minded should stop in their track to ask this great question: why did the Word become flesh?

In 2Corinthians 8:9, Paul used a figure of speech to describe the glory of the divine nature set in contrast to the frailty of the human nature. We read

⁹For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

It is clear to the discerning that Paul was not here referring to Jesus being wealthy with this world's riches. The reference is not to dollars, pounds sterling, naira and kobo. Of course as the Logos, the Almighty God, he does not stand in need of any such thing. So the riches here are used to typify the attributes, glory and excellence of the divine nature. Though He was rich in the divine nature, for our sakes he became poor. Just as the riches do not refer to physical wealth, the poverty mentioned here does not refer to lack, as man would count it. It is used in a contrast to the divine nature. The human nature is poor compared to the divine nature. But Christ gave up the riches of the divine nature to take on the human nature.

Now, why did the Lord Jesus Christ take on this poverty? Before we answer that let us observe that this Word that became flesh had been involved in human affairs right from the time of creation. In the first four thousand years of human recorded history, we see the Logos in thousands of appearances to His creation, making Himself known to His choice vessels, His servants, telling of things that pertain to the invisible God, His kingdom and man's redemption.

The first set of appearances was to the man Adam. It is all recorded in the first three chapters of Genesis. When He first appeared to Adam, He said, "Be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over all of the visible creation, over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, over all cattle and over all things that creep upon the face of the earth". Again, we find in another appearance the Lord walking in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day. And Adam said, "I heard thy voice walking in the garden".

So, the Logos, the divine one had always communicated with man, whether to Abraham, to Moses, to Joshua, to Isaiah, to Jeremiah, to Malachi, name any one of His choice instruments. And in all of these divine appearances, it was the Logos carrying out his redemptive activities among men. It was Christ veiled in these appearances ministering to His own.

The great riches of the Old Testament scriptures with the included themes of redemption were made possible by the activities of the Logos. No wonder we find Jesus saying to the Jews in the days of his flesh "Abraham longed to see my day. He saw it and was glad". And the people said, "Ah, ah, you are not yet fifty years old, and you talk of Abraham seeing you". And he answered them, "before Abraham was, I am' (John 8:56-58). He did not say "before Abraham I was" but "before Abraham I am", thus revealing himself as the One that made His Presence known to Moses in the burning bush as the I am.

Jehovah Adona, Jehovah Jeoshua Messiah, is the divine agency in all of God's dealings with man all through the Old Testament age.

Why then did He become flesh? Now, first of all, let it be known that it is evident that he could not have taken on flesh in order to give us the New Testament scriptures as some think. In any case, all of the

twenty-seven books of the New Testament were given after his resurrection. Were it merely to make the word of God known, to make the mind of God known, He would have done this as He had previously done in the Old Testament era. But we are shown by God's word that He became man that he might lay down his life a ransom for all. He came to die.

In Hebrews 9:24-26, on the Lord taking up human nature, we read the following,

²⁴For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us ²⁵Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; ²⁶For then must he often have suffered since the foundations of the world: but now once (that is once for all time, never again so to do) in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

We rejoice greatly that the sound of the preaching of Christ is going to all humanity. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved". If He took on humanity in order to sacrifice Himself for the deliverance of man who fell in the Garden of Eden, then it is important for all to hear him, believe him and receive him into their hearts.

It is evident that if the Word did not become flesh, he would not have died on the cross of Calvary. And if he did not die, there would have been no resurrection. So, of the three most important events of all times, the taking up of humanity by the Lord Jesus Christ, is the greatest of all wonder.

Now, come with me to Philippians 2:5-11. We will be reading yet another scripture to further strengthen what has been said, of this great and complete change of nature. Jesus did not become half man and half God. That is not the force of John 1:14 "And the word became flesh". When he took on humanity, he was completely human, except that, unlike others of the human race, he had no sin. This is something of a great wonder.

Philippians 2:5-11 says

⁵Let this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: ⁶who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: ⁷But made himself of no reputation... (That is what taking on humanity means. He made himself of no reputation), and took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men: ⁸And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. ⁹Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given a name which is above every name: ¹⁰That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; ¹¹And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

He took upon him the form of a servant, he was made in the likeness of men and that for the purpose of death. Having fulfilled this mission we are told that God also hath highly exalted him. The resurrection took him back to the glory of the divine. Since this is so, we may rightly suppose that His resurrection did not clothe him with a human body. In contrast to the body of His humiliation, we may speak of the body taken up by Him in resurrection as glorious. There must be a telling difference between the two.

Let us look at Him again, if He became man to die, what did He become in resurrection? For it is only in understanding the nature of His present estate of being that we may better appreciate the hope set forth in all scripture, concerning the perfection and glorification of the church.

Let us turn to Mark 16. We will be looking at the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ to the disciples after his resurrection. And we are going to learn a few things that would be of help. In Mark 16:9-12, we read

⁹Now when Jesus was risen early in the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. ¹⁰And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. ¹¹And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believe not. ¹²After that he appeared in another form unto two of them as they walked, and went into the country ...

That is recorded also in Luke 23 and concerns the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. Here it says he appeared in another form (Now, when he appeared to Mary Magdalene, someone who had seen Him just some few days back, He was not recognised. (John 20:14-16) This indicates that the bodily form Jesus was seen in, differed from what He was known to possess before His death. Magdalene saw him but it was when He spoke that she recognised him. This is something associated with the nature of the resurrection).

He walked with the two disciples and suddenly appeared beside them as one who was coming from behind them, and talked with them. Notice the two disciples who had been with him few days earlier could not recognise him. This is because Jesus must have appeared in a body different from the one he had before. In other instances, he appeared in yet other forms, thus providing an interesting insight into our subject.

Let us go to Luke 24. We are discussing the post-resurrection nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. With what body did he come? Luke 24. We read from 33-36. This was after the Lord had appeared to the two disciples on he way to Emmaus

³³And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, ³⁴saying, the Lord is risen Indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. ³⁵And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was made known by them in breaking of bread. ³⁶And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, peace be unto you.

From the reading, it is clear that the disciples were together in a room with the doors locked when the Lord suddenly appeared in their midst. And they could not recognise him because he was appearing in a form different from what they knew before. But from his words, they were able to know it was Jesus. You may want to probe further in John 20:24-29; John 21:4 and other appearances of Jesus.

We go straight now to Acts 1 to see the final account just before he returned to heaven. Acts 1:1-3

¹The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

²Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: ³To whom also he shewed himself alive

after his passion (suffering) by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God

Paul listed these appearances of the Lord to his disciples as been in eight distinct occasions. Now, we know that he did not remain visibly with the disciples in all of those forty days. There is a sense in which we understand that Christ was always present with them throughout the forty days, but they were only able to see Him physically and be conscious of his presence when He appeared in visible human bodies to speak to them. Whenever he had something to communicate with them, he would appear in a human form, best suited for that particular occasion. This is important.

Throughout the three and a half years of his ministry upon the earth, the twelve disciples were always with him and when he stepped out, the other disciples came from their various homes to accompany him in his preaching mission. But in those forty days, knowing that there were so many things to teach the disciples, he did not live with them in a physical way. He did not, as he did before, go to the house of Mary, the house of Lazarus, of Mary and Martha, spending he night there. No, when he has something to say to them, he appears in human form, communicates to them and returns back into his spirit nature and glory. This same Jesus the one that was taken to glory is the one the angel said would come in like manner.

It is important for us to know that Jesus in the glory of the divine can be everywhere present at the same time. This is the distinctive character of immortality. Paul in 1Cor. 15 teaches on five aspects of the resurrection glory. In talking about the resurrection body of the Lord Jesus Christ which is the same type of body the overcoming church will put on in full resurrection, he says (1Cor. 15:35-41)

³⁵But some man will say, how are the dead raise up? And with what body do they come? ³⁶Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: ³⁷And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: ³⁸But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. ³⁹All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. ⁴⁰There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another, ⁴¹There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory.

Now follow verse 42 carefully. The emphasis here is on the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and of those believers who partake of the first resurrection to share with the Lord the glory of immortality.

⁴²So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption (so, the body of the resurrection is incorruptible). ⁴³It is sown in dishonour: it is raised in glory (the body of the resurrection is a glorious one): it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: ⁴⁴It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body....

So the body with which the Lord Jesus Christ was raised up is a spiritual one. It is divine and all glorious. Although he veiled that glory in those forty days in which he appeared to his disciples, the Lord is clothed

with the divine body in all of its majesty. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body, Paul says. The natural body is made of flesh and blood. The spiritual body is not made of any such material, even though the divine can appear in a visible human body of flesh and bone. Such appearing is usually for a specific purpose and is often for a very short period, after which he returns back into His spirit estate.

So, Christ resurrected in a spiritual body: a divine body, a glorious body. Psalm 104: 2 says it is a body of intense light. Psalm 104:1,2 reads

¹BLESS the LORD, O my soul, O LORD my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. ²Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment.

In visions communicating to us the glory of His being. He is described as the one *who maketh the cloud his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of he wind.*

Yes, the Lord is clothed with glory, honour, majesty and great excellence. He dwells in unapproachable light. If he is to appear to us now, it must be that we shall see him in a vision for if He appears as he is, the glory will be very blinding. Recall the experience of Paul on the way to Damascus. The Lord Jesus Christ just made a flash of Light to go forth from His body, and that was what cast him down and blinded him. Recounting that experience in Acts 26: 13, Paul said the Light, which appeared to him, was above the brightness of the sun yet it was not the full and naked expression of the Lords appearing. We know that this same Jesus, the glorified Son of God, will come again in His exalted estate for we shall see Him as He is (Acts 1:9-11, I John 3:1-2).

In summing up, lets observe again: the resurrection body of the Lord Jesus Christ is incorruptible, it is glorious, it is full of power, not a natural but a spiritual body. And verse 45 of 1 Corinthian 15, caps it in the following words

⁴⁵And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit (that is a life giving Spirit).

Springing from His resurrection Jesus Christ is made a life giving spirit. This glory is also in view for the church. We will read Philippians 3:20-21 to underscore this point.

²⁰For our conversation (our citizenship, our commonwealth) is in heaven from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹Who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned Like unto his glorious body, according to the working Whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

When He comes, we are told He will change our vile bodies to be conformed like unto his glorious body. This is exciting. He comes in the glory of His excellency to lift up the overcoming church so that she will evermore associate with him in that estate of glory. This is what we read in 1 John 3;1-2

¹BEHOLD, what manner of Love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the Son of God: therefore the world knowth us not, because it knew him not. ²Beloved, now are we

the Sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is...

There is an erroneous view of immortality as being a quality of life shared by human souls and angelic spirits. Rightly seen, immortality is the exclusive preserve of God. Not even the angels are immortal, for they have dependent lives. This is clear. If they were not to have dependent lives, it would not be possible for Satan and his angels to be destroyed in the lake of fire. But immortality is a promise held out for the church.

We believe that these scriptures are factual and must be taken the way they are. We shall be like him. We shall see him as He is. He shall change our vile bodies. We shall come to the full glory of the spirit nature. We shall share in his incorruptibility and shall be brought into immortality.

The emphasis in this meditation is for us to appreciate that Christ Jesus the Lord is no more flesh and blood and will not take up the human nature. When he comes, he shall come in His majesty; with the power and glory that befits His divine nature. We will close this meditation by reading Acts 1:9-11. Whatever the Lord does by words and by deeds are instructions to us. And, it is quite instructive for us to see that this same Jesus that was taken up to glory in the beauty of the divine nature shall come in the same manner.

The meaning and purpose of all of these we shall see clearly as we continue in this series of teachings. When we see the glory very clearly, it will have a humbling effect upon us. We would with cleave to the Son of God who qualifies us to have a share in the glorious inheritance that he has set before us. Act 1:9
11

⁹And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. ¹⁰And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? ¹¹This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

May the Lord grant us the joy of seeing him and associating with him and being ever with him in his eternal glory, In Jesus name. Amen

7

THE DIVINE,

ANGELIC AND HUMAN NATURES

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In the last meditation, we looked at "The Body of His Glory". The reference was to the resurrected body of our Lord Jesus Christ. We began by saying that John 1:14 is a very important passage in scriptures. It is a record of one of the three most powerful events in human history, seen from the divine standpoint. John 1:14 reads this way

¹⁴And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

We dwelt much on the fact that the Word became flesh. From the first verse of the chapter, we know that the Word refer to the Lord Jesus Christ "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men". So, John was recording something concerning Jesus Christ.

And we reasoned if thousands of divine appearances served God in all of His dealings with the nation of Israel and with all of humanity throughout the period covering the Old Testament age, what specific need then was there for the Word, the Logos, the pre-existent Christ, to become human in a complete change of nature?

The scriptures point to the fact that he became man that he might lay down that life for a redemptive purpose. He died to save us. His death on the cross of Calvary was to procure deliverance from sin and death for the human race that fell in Adam.

Apart from the word becoming flesh, 'Jesus' death on the cross of Calvary, and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, there is no single event in all of humanity that has attached to it the same importance as any of these.

Then we said "If Jesus died that we might be saved, and if the thirty-three and a half year of His human existence was for that purpose, it is necessary for us to know what happened in His resurrection. By going through some passages of scriptures, we were able to see that the Lord Jesus Christ resurrected with a spiritual body, a body full of glory and excellency which he veiled all though those forty days of his appearing to his disciples.

We saw that he never had a continuous dwelling with the disciples all through those forty days. He would appear, teach, instruct, and expound on things that relate to the plan of redemption and the kingdom, and then draws away from their sight. There were several cycles of this appearing and disappearing. In each of those appearances, he came in a different body and was recognised only by his deeds or words. By

this conduct, He impressed upon the minds of the disciples the fact that he is no longer human and they should not attach to him any specific human form.

Of course we know that if just after three days of his death, he appeared to the disciples and they could not recognise him, it was because he appeared to them in a body different from what they know of him.

We may say that the resurrected estate, a spirit nature and in this case, a divine spirit is endowed with the power to manifest itself diversely. Thus His many appearances in human form should not be taken to mean that Christ took back His human nature in His resurrection. The pre-human Logos was a divine spirit and into this same glory did the Lord Jesus Christ enter in His resurrection. Acts 1:9-11 assures us that He will come in this same glory. He comes to change our vile body to become like unto His glorious body. We will change, not Him. We inherit the kingdom, not in this flesh and blood estate, but as spirit.

The implication of the fact that Jesus Christ can never again take on humanity shall be seen in later editions. But we are simply emphasising the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ will unite the Church to Himself, sharing with her the glory of His divinity. It will be the rare privilege of the church to see him as he is, to relate to him evermore as he is, bearing the same image, likeness and glory. This is infinite Love and we bow in deep worship to the Most High God for this awesome wonder.

Let's explore a little bit of this glorious inheritance in Christ Jesus. What is the divine nature? And again, in this connection, it will also interest us to look at the angelic nature, and the human nature; three distinct natures among other natures. It will prove valuable to discard any view about these natures not thoroughly supported by scriptures. Only the truth of God's word and the life it births in man that will remain unshaken in this last hour

If we go first to 2Peter 1:2-4, we read the following words,

²Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,
³According as his divine power hath given unto us all Things that pertain unto life and godliness,
through the knowledge of him that has called us to glory and virtue: ⁴Whereby are given unto us
exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature,
having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Now, the divine life or glory is associated only with the Most High God. We read from Ephesians 1:21 for example, that the divine nature is far above the estate, glory and honour of angels. In the last edition, we said that angels have dependent lives. Another way of putting that is to say that they are mortal beings. They are sustained in life by the glory of God. But God has life in himself and does not depend on anything outside of Him for His continuous existence. Life inheres in God.

Scriptures require us to see the angels as mortal since Satan and his angels who were created in that same order can and would be destroyed in the second death. (Revelation 20:10). The mere fact that this class of beings can be destroyed supports the notion that angels are mortal. Furthermore, if we go to 1Timothy 6, we find that immortality is the exclusive property of the divine. God alone hath immortality. Giving charge to Timothy in 1Timothy 6:14, 16, Paul says

¹⁴That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: ¹⁵which in his times shall shew, who is the blessed and only potentate, the king of king, and Lord of Lords; ¹⁶Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can

approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

So, the Lord alone hath immortality. When the Logos will communicate something to the angels face to face, he appears to them. That is to say the angels can only see God in the likeness of a vision or when he appears to them in a form they can more easily associate with. This is important.

The realm of the divine is so far above those of the angels. (See Eph. 1:19ff). And immortality is that property in God that makes him to be present everywhere at the same time without any measure of Loss. He is the source of all living. He has life in himself. God does not inhale oxygen in order to survive. He does not depend on anything whatsoever. Rather, He upholds and sustains the material universe by the word of His power. The material universe itself is just a visible expression, a part expression of the vastness of the invisible heaven, the heaven of God.

If you will come with me to John 5, we will find in verse 26 a clear definition of what immortality is (And we say that this is the telling characteristic of the divine nature – immortality).

²⁶For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;

Thus, God has life in Himself, and we are shown in Romans 2:6, 7 that the church is given the promise that in Christ Jesus, she will be exalted far above angels to the glory of immortality, to have life in *'himself'* Romans 2:6,7 says

⁶God, who will render to every man according to his deeds; ⁷To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:

The common saying that the soul of man is immortal is utterly false and misleading. Neither man nor angels are immortal

Next, we will be looking at the nature of angels. We are told in Hebrew 2:7 in comparison between the angelic nature and the human nature that man is made a little lower than the angles. Scriptures illustrates how this "Little" difference in glory shows itself in a very remarkable manner. (When we see that the divine nature is far above the nature of angels, and we are told further that the angelic nature is only a little above the human nature, then our minds are made all the more fruitful to appreciate the exceeding greatness and riches of the divine nature. What is said in Hebrews 2:7 we find again in Psalm 8:4,5

⁴What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? ⁵For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and has crowned him with glory and honour.

In the history of the children of Israel, there was a time in their battles when they sought God's intervention. He sent an angel to assist them in their battle against Assyria. And we are told that a single angel in a one night destroyed one hundred and eighty five thousand Assyrians. Now, that should recommend to our mind the might, power, glory and honour of the angelic estate. This being so, we can

only imagine what a glory that must be associated with the divine nature, if it is by the same scriptures described as being "far above the angelic order". No wonder Paul could say in 1Cor. 6:2 "Know ye not that we shall judge angels".

But who are angels? We answer that angels are spirit beings specially created by the Lord God. They dwell in the heavens of God. Now, there are two distinct dwellings. The first is the material world. We have invisible creatures dwelling within the material world. Mention can be made of demonic spirits, principalities and powers that dwell within the material world. They are dependent on the material world for their existence. But the angels of God dwell in the heavens of God, which is the second place of dwelling. The heavens of God are all about us but not within the marital universe. This is putting it simply.

We will take some scriptural readings to assist our minds. The first is Mathew 24. There we are told that the angels dwell in heaven, that they are spirit beings. And that is said in contradistinction to humans who dwell in the visible material world. Mathew 24:36 reads thus.

³⁶But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the

angels of heaven, but my Father only.

We still meet the same phrase in Mark 12:25, it says "For when they shall rise from the dead (a particular class of persons is being referred to here, not just all of the human race), they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels which are in heaven".

So, there are angels who dwell in the heavens of God, in that invisible realm that does not belong to the material world. This invisible heaven of God engulfs the material universe and has the capacity also to express itself in the material world. It is for this reason that we say the heaven of God is all around us. It is hidden from creation, but it can reveal itself at any point of time and space.

However, the fact that this class of angelic beings dwell within the invisible sphere of God's heaven does not mean they see or associate with God, for they do not have the same nature that God has. In fact properly understood the invisible sphere of the heaven is a highly stratified realm. There are various dimensions of glory in the heavens.

Now, we know that angels when they appear in the visible sphere of the earth do so in the form of men, especially when they appear to speak to man. Sometimes the scripture calls them men, emphasising the form in which they appear. And the scriptures tell us further that when humans see angels in the human form of appearance, what they have seen is, in fact, a vision.

We will just take two quick readings to illustrate that. You may want to read Acts 10:3 and then verse 30. Verse 3 says Cornelius saw in a vision an angel of God coming in to him. But while recounting the experience to Peter, he said in verse 30, "behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing". In Luke 24:4 and 5, in some of the first appearances of the Lord to his disciples after his resurrection, we have this recorded.

⁴And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments...

The glory of their appearance showed that there was no change in nature even though they are seen in human form. It is always possible for a higher nature to manifest itself in a lower nature. The divine can manifest his presence in the form of a spirit angel or a human person. So, also, angelic spirits can

manifest themselves in human forms. So, the glory of the nature of these angels shining through their clothing is what is shown to us in verse 4. Now, when the disciples were to report their experience in the twenty-third verse, this is what the inspired writer says. Verse 22, and 23

²²Yea, and certain woman also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulcher; ²³And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive.

The reference is to what these two men in shining garments spoke to them in verse 5. These men appeared to them but in their report it was said to be a vision of angels. Another scriptural reference we may read on our own is Luke 1:11-22.

So, angels always appear in form of men, retaining their nature and glory, but veiling it from man, because, it will be dazzling for man to behold an angel in his unveiled glory. This is important. When men see angel therefore, what they see is only a vision. They do not see these beings as they really are. And this is what is said in the scriptures we referred to above.

More things may be said about angelic spirits but what has been mentioned so far is sufficient for our present purpose. We can add to these by saying that angels do not have all wisdom, all knowledge. Mathew 24:36, which we read earlier, say the hour knoweth no man, not even the angels of heaven. In Ephesians 3:10 we are told that certain aspects of the work and word of redemption are made known to these creatures through the church. Again Peter says that the things that pertain to the salvation of the church, the great and glorious calling God has extended to the church, are things the angels desire to look into (Peter 1:9-12).

So, angels do not have infinite wisdom. In Job 4:18, the Bible says God charges His angels with folly. Fullness of wisdom, fullness of knowledge, fullness of understanding dwells only in Christ, the divine One.

Of, course, we know what the human nature is. The soul of the flesh is in the blood. The vital life principle working upon the spirit of man gives him ability to relate to the spirit world. But in the fall, man loses that. In regeneration, which takes place at the new birth, man's spirit is brought to life.

Before we round up this meditation, something needs to be said about the divine nature. We will simply put it this way. The divine life consists of two parts: the divine character and the divine body. And, in 2Peter 1:4; we are told that we are partakers of the divine nature. The emphasis there is character. That is the principal aspect of the believer's spiritual development in this age. He is to take on the divine attributes of character, wisdom, knowledge and understanding as Christ is preached.

But divine character or the divine nature is to be housed in a divine body. The redemption of our body is an end aspect of the work of redemption. That is, the redemption of our body is the last experience the church comes into before coming to incorruptibility and life. Thus, we notice that it is God's plan is to first of all perfect us in His character before we can be clothed with the divine body.

Again, in the divine realm, as it shall be finally constituted, we must distinguish between the Godhead, that emphasises the essence of the divine from other members of the divine class (the church) who express attributes of His character, wisdom, power in all fullness. This is important.

We will round up on this note. When the Lord Jesus Christ comes, He comes to fashion our vile bodies that it might be conformed to His glorious body. This agrees with Romans 8:23 which closes with an indication that the redemption of the body is something to earnestly long for. And we have just shown that

the divine character must be worked into the church before she can put on the divine body or else there will be a conflict in nature.

Seeing then that when Christ comes, the emphasis is on the fashioning of our bodies to be conformed to his resurrected body, it is important for us to understand that prior to the change of our bodies, there is so much of work that the Lord must carry out in and among us to bring us to moral perfection. We may put it this way. Moral perfections qualify us to receive the divine body.

Let us now bring in the time elements in all of this development. There is the time period in the Second Advent of Christ, identified as the first phase in which Christ works to perfect His church. Then there is the hour of the church associating fully with Christ in the glory of the divine and fully manifests Him on earth. This is the second phase. The third and final phase is the kingdom reign, the millennial rule begins and runs its course.

These three distinct time periods in the Second Advent (or coming) of Christ are clearly marked out in the New Testament scriptures. Interestingly there are three Greek words used in the New Testament that offers clear insights into the divine program drawn in connection with Christ's Second Advent. This will be taken up in the next edition – God bless you richly.

9

THE PAROUSIA, EPIPHANEIA AND BASILEA

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We are continuing in the series of discussion on the blessed Hope. In the last edition, we saw that the church (the overcoming church) is to experience a complete change of nature, from human to divine. Not from humanity to another humanity, but from the human nature to the divine nature, which nature up till the time of the revelation of the church, the exclusive sphere of the manifestation of the Most High God.

The divine derives from the immortal realm. All other realms are mortal. The glorious event of the lifting of the Church to divinity is the grand finale of the work of redemption. The prophetic word indicates that the power of the Most High God will accomplish this by an overshadowing from without and by a quickening from within.

Reviewing the last meditation further, we observed that He who became flesh to lay it down in atoning sacrifice was in His resurrection raised to the glory of the divine nature, which he derives from the immortal and invisible God.

The Lord Jesus Christ is a kind of a for-runner. He exemplifies what shall be. We would change to be like Him; not Him changing again to become flesh and blood like we are.

God has marked out in His redemption schedule when our change will take place. In the closing part of the last meditation, we identified that this change is bound up with the Lord's Second Advent. The Second Advent was shown to have three distinct phases: Parousia, Epiphaneia and Basilea. We shall take up discussions on these three forth with.

Come with me to Mathew 24. We will first of all locate the words use to describe these three periods associated with the Second Advent. That done, we will commence discussions on them.

¹And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. ²And Jesus said unto them, see ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down. ³And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

The word translated "coming" is the Greek word Parousia. It is more appropriate to translate it "Presence". Taking a careful reading of the third verse (Mt.24:3) we are sure to notice that there was a three-fold question asked by the disciples, viz.; when shall these things be that you have just talked about? What shall be the sign of your presence (of your Parousia) and of the end of the age? The word "world" in verse 3 ought to be rendered "age", as newer translations do. So the third question relates to the sign of the end of the age.

That is the first occurrence of the word Parousia in relation to the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus. Another occurrence is in verse 37 of the same chapter. Here again, the Greek word "Parousia" is translated as "coming" rather than "presence", a more appropriate term.

We would reproduce verse 35. Jesus was answering the three-fold question asked Him by his disciples in verse 3 He says;

³⁵Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. ³⁶But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. ³⁷But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

So, if we are to read verse 37 putting the word Parousia instead of coming, it will read this way: "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the Parousia of the Son of Man be". Take notice that the days of Noah is a reference to the time period when Noah began to preach that a judgement was about to come. So, the days of Noah is not the day he entered into the ark but all the time of his ministry prior to the time the judgement set in. Jesus says His presence through His word and spirit during the first phase of the Second Advent will serve this generation in the manner in which Noah's ministry served the people of his

day. It was then a time of warning of a forth-coming judgement; of a working towards the saving of his household of faith and the related program of building an ark. It is prophetically so today.

Now, we shall move on to take references that relate to the second time period: the Epiphaneia, which simply means, "the bright shining". "The manifestation". "the unveiling of that which was previously hidden". So, come with me to Titus 2 where we find the phrase "the blessed hope". In that same context, is to be found the word Epiphaneia, used in relation to the Second Advent Titus 2:11-13

¹¹For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, ¹²Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; ¹³Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ

That word "appearing" is translated from the Greek word "Epiphaneia". If we turn to 2 Timothy 4 we find the same word Epiphaneia in the first and in the eighth verses 2 Timothy 4:1-8

¹I CHARGE thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and in his kingdom.

Incidentally, the third phase of the Second Advent of Christ is also found in the first verse of 2Timothy 4 the word "Basilea", translated kingdom). The word "appearing" here is Epiphaneia and it is assigned to the second phase of the Second Advent. Notice the close connection between what is said in the upper part of the verse and what we are now concentrating upon. The Lord Jesus Christ shall judge the quick and the dead. The word "the quick" means the living. He shall judge the quick and the dead during his "Epiphany" and in his "Basilea". Basilea, as we said, means, kingdom. The reference is to the millennial reign of Christ (Head and body) over the earth in the age to come, spanning a thousand years.

So, there is going to be a judgement of the living and of the dead, and we are told it is during his Epiphaneia and his Basilea. In this connection too, noting that the period called "Epiphaneia" will be the time when the church will enter into the fullness of her inheritance, Paul admonishes Timothy further. We will read verses 6-8 in order to get the flow of thought. Paul says

⁶For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. ⁷ I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: ⁸Hence forth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: (Which day? we may ask. We find the answer in the next statement he makes. He says): and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (that love His Epiphaneia)

So, the day in reference is the time period of the Epiphaneia, the day of the great unveiling of Christ in the earth. And like we showed in the last edition, it is the time when Christ comes in power and great glory to exalt the church, and to change their vile bodies to be conformed to his own glorious body. Let us recall that there is an aspect of the Lord's work which he does to fit us for that glory: the perfection of our character (a sort of moral resurrection) until we are completely delivered from sin and sin effects. And then, the Epiphaneia will set in.

The Basilea is the kingdom. We can see in Mathew 19:28 read and considered along with Luke 22:28, 29, the reference to the kingdom of heaven, the rule and reign of Christ with His exalted church over all the earth. Another reference is Mathew 25: 31.

We begin to round up. There is the Parousia, it is the first period of time in the Second Advent of Christ. It is characterised by the fact that that time period is measurably unknown to the church, completely unknown to the world, and begins to become clear only to those among God's people who are walking with him faithfully (Mathew 24:27 refers). And the Epiphaneia is when this presence hidden for a specific purpose (which we will be looking at in the next edition) shall be unveiled to the world. In the next edition we shall be seeing God's purpose in the Parousia and the Epiphaneia.

May the Lord bless you and cause his face to shine upon you and bring you to a closer walk with Him, in Jesus name. Amen

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10

THE PAROUSIA, OF CHRIST

In the last edition, we saw that there are three Greek words in the scriptures to show three distinct time periods in the Second Advent of Christ. These are Parousia, Epiphaneia and Basilea. In this edition, we will be looking closely at the Parousia in order to understand this first time period of the Second Advent.

We begin by saying again that the Bible is a prophetic book. It is given to reveal Christ (the Lord Jesus Christ in his redemptive work), to make known the body of Christ, the church, to reveal the kingdom of Christ (also called the kingdom of heaven), and to show all events that are to be associated with these.

The forty writers of scriptures employ in their writings so many symbols and figurative expressions or what we might call spiritual imageries. And these prophetic symbols and imageries must be understood in order for us to get at the message of God's word. Much of the ignorance we see in today's visible church systems is because time is not taken to sit at the feet of Jesus to learn from God's word the meaning of

certain prophetic symbols. And because quite often, these symbols are taken literally, God's message is lost upon His people.

The orthodox churches appear more concerned with details in certain matters. And so, whatever season there is of their spiritual calendar, certain services and ceremonies are performed in harmony with that season. So they have the lent period, the epiphany, they celebrate Pentecost and all of these things. And even though the light is blurred, but at least, an effort is made to see that there are different activities God has lined up for the church. If the early church gave time and attention to details in relation to things that pertain to their redemption, then we upon whom the end of the age has come cannot afford to be ignorant of great issues that belong to our time.

So, turn with me to Matthew 26:59-66, our emphasis will be on verse 64. We are seeking to see in the light of this scripture how a passage sprinkled with figurative expression open up to a proper understanding only when the meaning of the figure are known.

⁵⁹Now the chief priests and elders and all the council sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death ⁶⁰But found none: yea though many false witnesses came, Yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses. ⁶¹And said, this fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days. ⁶²And the high priest arose, and said unto him, answeredst thou nothing? What is it, which these witness against thee? ⁶³But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said to him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be Christ, the Son of God ⁶⁴Jesus saith unto him. Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you. Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. ⁶⁵Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying he hath Spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witness? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. ⁶⁶What think yet? They answered and said He is guilty of death.

Now, let us look again at words in the sixty-fourth verse. It reads, "Nevertheless, I say unto you, henceforth shall ye see the son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven". How may we understand these words: "sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven"? Where is power? What does it mean to come in the clouds of heaven?

We know that when there are troubles, tribulations, afflictions, confusion, anarchy, war, distress, disorder etc, among a people, it can be said that there are dark or ominous clouds that have engulfed the land. That, of course, does not mean that if you are to go out and look up into the sky, you will see certain dark clouds engulfing the sky, but that there is season of trouble that has come upon the land.

So, the word "ominous clouds" is a figurative expression and sums up the atmosphere of fear, feelings of apprehension and in security.

Now, Jesus in the passage we read was talking to his accusers and was saying unto them, as it were, "this day is as a day of great weakness. I am bound with chains, I will soon be killed. It is as it were your day of power and my day of weakness, but hereafter, you shall see me seated in glory...". The other synoptic gospels say, " ... You shall see me seated at the right hand of majesty, at the right hand of the throne of God". So here in Matthew 24-26 Jesus was talking about his exaltation to divine glory.

But the question may be asked, how were the listeners to see him seated in glory? The answer is that they were to see the evidence that the same Jesus who they killed is not destroyed forever, but is risen and exalted when they see the activities that reveal his glory and power in the ministry of his disciples. In

Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33) he drew attention to the fact, that Christ was seated in glory and the proof of it was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. When the early church went forth with signs and wonders after the outpouring of the Spirit of the exalted Christ upon them, the whole of the nation of Israel was moved. They knew straightaway that some thing glorious must have happened to Jesus, that they had not really gotten rid of him in his dying.

But then, the church went forth ministering for a period of about thirty-six years before the second part of the prophecy in Matthew 26:64 was fulfilled. The Lord Jesus Christ had said they shall not only see him seated on the right hand of power, but shall also see him coming in the clouds of heaven bringing divine judgement upon them: That event did not happen until AD 70.

In AD 70, the Roman soldiers came under the command of Titus, and sacked the whole nation, At first, true to the prophecies of the Lord in Luke 21:20, the Roman armies under Cestius Gallus came against Jerusalem in 66 AD, four years before the destruction of AD 70. A siege was on the City. But strange enough, Cestius Gallus did not press the siege to its completion; he suddenly retired from the city without any reason whatsoever. Thus, the Disciples of Christ having understood an earlier prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem (Mt 23) followed the divine counsel to flee the city.

Less than four years later, in AD 70, the Roman the under Titus returned and encircled Jerusalem. They cut down trees for miles around and built a city-encircling wall, a fortification with pointed stakes. All hope of escaping was now cut off from the Jews. After a siege of about five months, the city was destroyed. So thorough was the destruction that it was said that there was left nothing to make those who came to the place believe the city had ever been inhabited. According to secular history about 1,000,000 Jews died during the siege, and 97,000 were taken captive. For that nation, it was the terrible beginning of a tribulation, such as they had never witnessed before.

So the clouds of heaven the Lord was speaking about by means of which he was to come upon the generation of Jews that crucified him are nothing else but the event of the destruction of Jerusalem. They are said to be clouds of heaven because those events were sourced in the God of heaven. They were no chance events. The overthrow of the Jewish nation was actually an act of divine judgement. From the foregoing one cannot take this passage (Matthew 26:64) in a literal way. Neither is the coming referred to in the passage a reference to the coming of the Lord in His second advent. But the passage shows to us the same principle we began with in the last edition that that the Lord Jesus Christ has been coming (and keeps coming) to the world of mankind ever since the fall of Adam working salvation in all the earth. David said, The Lord is my king of old, working salvation in all the earth.

That brings us to Hebrews 10. We read this chapter to begin our meditation in the last edition, and we want to draw your attention again (for emphasis) to these two distinct aspects in scriptures concerning "the coming of the Lord". The first is that which has happened thousands upon thousands of times from the time of Adam and which will continue to happen until redemption is complete and human history is given a lift and the human race (the willing hearted among the human race) is fully reconciled to God. That aspect of the Lord's coming must be clearly seen and distinguished from His coming in the first and second advents.

So, we read Hebrews 10:37

³⁷For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come

and will not tarry

Reading the passage in a slightly expanded form, it says, for a little while and the coming one shall come. The "Coming One" is the redemptive title that the Lord Jesus Christ takes upon himself revealing the fact that he is the One that has been behind all the manifestations of God's power and glory in the earth, visiting humanity and manifesting such great judgements that have been used to call nations back to their senses.

So, we are told that the coming One shall come. But why is there any need to say that the coming One shall come since he keeps coming? The reference is to the Second Advent, a coming of the Lord just as distinct as was the first advent.

So, there are two great dispensations, in which the coming One reinforces his activities in a very special way. The first of these two great dispensations is the first advent, when the

Logos took on humanity and dwelt amongst men. There were certain things that he did in the days of his flesh that could not have been possible for him to do in those series of appearances in which he manifested His presence to men before the first advent. So, the first advent had its place in the plan and purposes of God.

But there is a Second Advent, which like the first covers a time period. And in relation to this, we are told in Hebrews 10 that the coming One shall come and shall not tarry. We have seen earlier that the Lord Jesus Christ can never take on humanity again. He took it to lay it down and in his resurrection, he was taken back to the divine glory. The fact of a Second Advent does not imply the Lord will again take on human flesh. It only means: that it has been divinely arranged that that same Jesus who was preached before unto us shall come again to bring us into fullness of redemption that we might be eternally associated with him (Acts 3:20). But when he comes in that Second Advent He comes as He now is not as he was in his first advent. We are going to see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

So, we want to look at the first time period in the Second Advent of Christ (the Parousia), distinguishing it from the second time period (the Epiphaneia), which in turn will be distinguished from the third time period (called the Basilea).

So, we turn to Matthew 24. Our purpose is to gather such scriptures as relate to the Parousia, separating them for study and differentiating them from other set of passages that show us the work of Christ in the Epiphaneia, and further differentiating these from those that reveal the activities of the Christ in the Basilea

In Matthew 24:3 and 37, we find the word Parousia used in relation to the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ.

³*And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying Tell us when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of the coming and of the end of the world.*

The word "coming" is the Greek word "Parousia" which is best translated as presence and not "coming" as rendered in the King James Version. Thus, reading verse 3 again, it says, tell us when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy presence and of the end of the age. Reading from verse 37 of the same chapter to verse 1 of the next chapter (i.e. Matthew 25), we will be able to see the characteristics of the time period called the Parousia and what Christ begins to do among his people and in the earth at that time.

³⁷But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

Again, the word coming here is Parousia, which means presence. Christ will be present among his people in a very special way carrying out certain activities which will prepare them for his unveiling in the Epiphaneia. When he comes with power and great glory, seen and associated with by the overcoming church, who being delivered from their sins and filled with the fullness of Christ relate to him as the bride. Verse 38

³⁸For as in the day that were before the flood...

So, the question may be asked, what were the days of Noah referred to in verse 37? The answer is that "the days of Noah" were the days before the flood. Noah ministered one hundred and twenty years before the flood came. And that whole time period, particularly the time he began to emphasise that judgement was coming upon the earth and he began to build the ark, those days, spanning several years (about three generations) in which Noah was preaching the gospel of divine judgement answers to the days of Noah, the days before the flood. So, we read verse 38 again, along with verse 39

³⁸For in the days that were before the flood, they were Eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark ³⁹And knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming (parousia) of the son of man be.

So, the Lord will be present among his people carrying out certain works in His church unknown by the world. And, in the passage of time, according to verse 27, His activities among his people will become evident in the church world.

It is with great rejoicing to say that we know hundreds of people in this nation who have delivered themselves from the unfaithfulness of the times and are preaching the word of the kingdom, living humble lives, fending for themselves, having a passion for God's glory, ministering to the church calling her to repentance, involving themselves also in repentance, seeking the Lord for the outpouring of more and more of his glory, studying the scriptures and rejoicing to see Christ reveal himself to them in a special way.

Hundreds of people in this nation, including persons who were formerly ministers of the gospels in the visible church systems, scattered all over the country in up to a hundred local congregations, are persons who are delivering themselves from the shame of what we see in the church world today. We read on from verse 40 straight to verse 1 of Matthew 25.

⁴⁰Then shall two be in the field the one shall be taken, and The other left. ⁴¹Two women shall be grinding in the mill, the one shall be taken, and the other left. ⁴²Watch therefore for you know not what hour your Lord doth come. ⁴³But know this that if the good man of the house had Know in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered hi house to be broken up. ⁴⁴Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. ⁴⁵Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over

his a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? ⁴⁶Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing. ⁴⁷Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods ⁴⁸but and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, my Lord delayeth his coming. ⁴⁹And he shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; ⁵⁰The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him; and in and in an hour that he is not aware of, ⁵¹And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ^{25:1}Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

So, you can see the series of activities the Lord will be carrying out among His own people. He judges among his servants, raises up the measurably faithful bringing them to a closer walk with him and making himself more known to them. And, with time, there is an emergence of a spiritual movement of the Lord's people in accordance with Matthew 25:1

Since we will be going into much details concerning this in other editions, we will pass on to take another reading that shows Christ activities among His people in the time of the Parousia. Malachi 3:1-3

¹Behold I will send my messenger; and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple...

There is a coming of the Lord to his temple. His temple is his church, the spiritual house made of lively stones. These lively stones are spirit-filled believers. So, He will come to His own, He will come to His church to carry out a work.

¹...and the Lord whom ye seek shall come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in, behold he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. ²But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap. ³And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

So, the Lord comes into His temple, to prepare His own for full redemption. He purges his servants; he purges the church, and leads the faithful and obedient to a greater knowledge of him. The closing part of verse 3 tells us one reason why he does that. It is that they may offer unto him an offering in righteousness. That means that they might serve him with greater faithfulness.

In verses 4 and 5 of the next chapter (Malachi 4), we are shown these same activities of the Lord among His people, with emphasis on the restoration of truth, of life, and of practices that agree with the truth of God's word as He originally gave it to the church through the apostles. And we are told that these

activities of the Lord among His own will take place in the time of the Parousia, before the Epiphanea, the great and dreadful day of the Lord. So, let us read Malachi 4:5,6.

⁵Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and dreadful day of the Lord...

The great and dreadful day of the Lord refers to the Epiphany. It is great because the faithful church will be brought to greatness at that time. It is dreadful because God will visit great judgements upon the unfaithful church systems and upon the civil states, preparatory to taking over the kingdoms of this world, as it is written, the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ (Revelation 11: 15)

So, the Lord says "behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and dreadful day of the Lord". Of course, we know that John the Baptist was an Elijah ministering during the time of the first advent of Christ, preparing the way before him (the Messiah). There was a great and dreadful day that was to come upon the nation of Israel, which was to completely wound up the Jewish age. That dreadful day of tribulation was consummated in AD 69/70 when the Roman armies utterly destroy the nation.

But before that time, the Lord came to the covenant people of Israel to prepare the faithful to escape that tribulation and to stand approved before the son of man. And heralding His presence, preparing the hearts of the people to receive and submit to the message of the Kingdom and the work of cleansing the Lord came to reveal was the ministry of John the Baptist. Thus the ministry of John was a fulfilment of this provision in relation to the first advent.

But from the words of the Lord in Matthew 17:11, we know that there is to be yet another fulfilment of this scripture in relation to the Second Advent. Just like the Lord send an Elijah ministry to prepare the way before him in his first advent; there is an Elijah ministry that the Lord raises up during the time of his Second Advent.

In a sense, we can say that at the time of the Second Advent, the Lord himself is the greater Elijah who comes to restore all things (Acts 3:21). He combines in himself the ministry of Elijah and the Ministry of the Messenger of the covenant revealing two aspects of the work he comes to fulfil in His church. But, he fulfils the Elijah ministry through a many membered body of servants whom he raises up unto himself at this auspicious time. They go forth with the sound of the trumpet to gather together his elect from the four winds of the heavens, preparing them to receive from the Lord that further work of perfection and glorification promised the church.

Thus, while during the first advent, the Elijah ministry was fulfilled in one man, John the Baptist, at the time of his Second Advent; the Elijah ministry is fulfilled in a many membered body. Not one man but many persons. Yes not one prophet coming as a great one whom all must hear and worship, but many anointed servants of God having the duty under Christ to prepare his people for the epiphany. In verse 6 of Malachi 4, it is said of this Elijah, and he shall turn the hearts of the father to the children and the hearts of the children to their father lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

In closing, we will read one scripture on the epiphany of Christ. 2 Thessalonians 1:3 – 10

³We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all towards each other aboundeth. ⁴So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions, and tribulations that ye endure, ⁵Which is a manifest token of the righteous

judgments of God that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer. ⁶Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you. ⁷And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. ⁸In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel our Lord Jesus Christ ⁹who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power, ¹⁰When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in the day.

Notice that verse 10 indicates that in the epiphany, Christ will be glorified in his saints and be admired in all them that believe (i.e. the overcoming church). That means there will be nothing in the saints that do not reflect his will and mind. There will be moral perfection, glory, honour and immortality. But we know that that is not the condition of the church today. The Parousia is given in order to make possible for the church to be cleansed, beautified and filled with glory at his appearing, his epiphany. May the good Lord cause us to have a portion among them that are being thus sanctified, in Jesus name. Amen.

11

CHARACTERISTICS

OF THE

PAROUSIA

We begin this meditation by saying that God's word is not of human creation. We are told in 2 Timothy 3:16 that all scriptures are inspired by God. There is just one author. And even though the instrumentality of men was employed and up to forty authors penned the sixty-six books of the Bible, the Holy Spirit

inspired every verse of scriptures. So, we can talk about the verbal inspiration of scriptures. That should convey to our minds that there would be consistency in the message of God's word.

The Bible is internally coherent. That means no part of the written word contradicts the other. And so, any confusion arising from the reading of God's word as may be inferred from the confused voices, the divergent views about the same subjects that we find in the visible church systems, may be traced to man and not to God. And we know that one of the assurance the Lord is giving to His people today is that He will clear the confusion of voices (the Babel of voices) and will restore to his church one pure language; His word. For, there is a close connection between the light of God's word, a true and full response to that light, and the faithful coming into the fullness of the inheritance.

We read in the scriptures, for example, that Jesus Christ is coming to his saints. Yet in the same scriptures, we are told that Jesus Christ is coming for the saints. Then again, we shown that Jesus is coming with the saints. We are told the saints will look for Him. We are also told that the saints will go for Him. We read that the saints will be gathered unto Him. Jesus is shown as coming in the clouds. Jesus is also shown as sitting upon a white cloud.

Again, He is shown as coming as the morning star, suggesting to carnal minds that, perhaps, He will come in the wee hours of the morning. But again, we are told that "in that night, two shall be lying down on the same bed, one shall be taken and the other left" thus conveying to the mind of the casual reader that Jesus Christ will come in the night. This will appear so, some say, since it is said that he will come as a thief in the night.

We are told He will appear to them that look for him. Yet, it is said that all eyes shall see him. Then we are told again that he comes as the sun of righteousness arising with healing in his wings. He comes as the refiner's fire, but he also comes as fuller's soap. He comes with vengeance, for so we are shown, but we are also told he comes to set up his kingdom over all the earth.

And whereas Christendom has fabricated various doctrinal positions, all of which are powerless to prepare the Lord's people for those things that belong to the Lords coming, nevertheless, like we began to say, we are to watch for a shining forth of the light of God's word in the midst of this maze of confusion. And so, much error will be swept out of the way as the pure light of God's word will assist the Lord's people to develop a proper character disposition that is required to effectively receive Him when He comes.

In this edition, we will be looking at the characteristics of the Parousia. We have previously established that there are three time periods in the coming of the Lord. These are the Parousia of Christ, His Epiphaneia and the Basilea, His kingdom rules. The Parousia stands for a great time of the Lord's presence among His people completely unknown to the world; majorly unknown to many in the church world but becomes increasingly known with time as the effect of his presence increases. The Epiphaneia is the time of the great unveiling, the manifestation of the sons of God, while the Basilea is the kingdom, the millennial reign of Christ.

And, all of those scriptures cited above showing the different aspects of his coming may be arranged into these three time periods. So, when we are talking about the second coming of the Lord, we should ask ourselves whether the reference is to the time of His Parousia, or to the time of His appearing, his Epiphaneia, or to the time of the Basilea. This is because there is a difference in the way and manner the Lord comes in each of these time periods and the things that are associated with a specific coming.

In this edition, we are concentrating on the first time period: the Parousia of Christ. We want to look at some of the things that are to characterise the Lord's activities among His people in the time of the Parousia. Later in the concluding editions on these series of meditation on the Blessed Hope, we will be focusing on the principal sign of His coming, the principal sign of the Parousia of Christ.

If we go to Acts 3:19-21, we read in the sermon of Peter to the people, the following words

¹⁹Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

The phrase the "presence of the Lord" means the "Face of the Lord". The word presence there is not Parousia. So, the reference here is not to the time of the Parousia, for that is mentioned in the next verse (verse 20). The church has always known times and seasons of refreshing from the face of the Lord at various times when there is genuine repentance, a turning to the Lord and seeking him. There has always been times of revival when men and women seek the face of the Lord. But all that is different from the activities of the Lord in the time of the Parousia, which is the focus in the twentieth and twenty-first verses. So, we read verses 20 and 21.

²⁰And He (that is the Father) shall send Jesus Christ, Which before was preached unto you:

²¹whom the heaven must receive until the times of the restitution of all things, which God has spoken by the mouths of all his holy prophets since the world began.

Verse 21 says, "whom the heaven must receive" (and retain, for that is the force of the word "receive" as used here). The reference is to the fact that when the Lord Jesus Christ was exalted into glory after his ascension, he was removed, as it were, from the earth's sphere. We can talk about the indwelling Christ, He indwells all believers, and we can talk about the personal Lord Jesus Christ. In the above passage, the reference is to the personal Lord Jesus Christ, the person of the Redeemer. We are shown in other scriptures that after his resurrection, he was exalted and seated at the right hand of majesty on high.

At the time Peter was speaking in Acts 3, the Lord had already ascended to heaven, he had been glorified, he was already seated at the right hand of power. And here in Acts 3, we are being shown that the personal Lord Jesus Christ, the resurrected and Glorified Lord must remain in the heavens of God until a particular time period sets in: the heaven must retain him until the times of the restitution of all things.

So, although, we may talk about the post resurrection ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ from the heavens, that ministry he has been fulfilling towards the church from the time he ascended to heaven. The word "until" in Acts 3:21 introduces another time period in His activities toward His people: the time of His descent from heaven, the time of His Parousia. And we are told that it shall be the time of the restitution of all things.

The word restitution, to the average English reader, hides the meaning of what is meant here and the intent of the inspired author. The right word is "restoration" and that is how it is rendered in many other translations. So, the reference is the "the restoration of all things. Heaven releases him or put in a proper

way, he is sent again of the Father unto His people. He comes from the heavenly glory, he comes among his own, He comes to his temple, at the time when the restoration of all things has become due.

Now, what are the things to be restored? Verse 21 of Acts 3 says these are the things that God has spoken by the mouths of all his holy prophets since the world began. The reference is to the restoration of the truth; all that God had spoken concerning man's redemption. But it is not only the restoration of truth that is implied here. There is in addition, the restoration of life, the fulfilment in the Lord's people of the great promises of redemption that God had spoken: the complete fulfilment, in actual experiences of the plan and purposes of God for his people.

Now, that suggests that up till the Parousia, there would much of yet to be fulfilled prophecy. But at the time of the Lord's Parousia there is to be the restoration of the church to the true and complete word of redemption. She will become what Jesus intended her to be. It will be a fulfilment of the prophetic utterances that detail the full redemption that the church is to enter unto.

The greater many believe that things will continue to be like this till the "rapture" takes place. While some await the manifestation of the sons of God, others talk about a great revival that shall wind up this church age. But some say we are already in the great revival, the sons of God are already manifesting and so just tomorrow could be "rapture" day. But is this really so? Are the sons of God already manifesting in the midst of the decay that we behold all over the church world? Is there any revealed who has come into the full stature of the Son of God in all things? Is there really a great revival taking place in the visible church system?

We believe that the prophetic scriptures point to the fact that before the time of the manifestation of the Sons of God sets in, God will first of all clean up the church and ultimately bring her to perfection. He will clean up the stable; he will restore to the church a pure language. There would be a manifestation of the Sons of God. It would be a glorious time. The persons to be revealed as the sons of God are men and women who are being built up into the fullness of Christ. The great work the Lord is carrying out among them is hidden from the world, and from the view of the carnal minded. These ones, as they grow into fullness, will be unveiled to the nations in the greatest manifestation of power, glory and honour the church has ever known.

This will culminate in a great revival. It will be ministry first to the church world, to wake her up from her stupor, to deliver the willing hearted from the error, darkness and shame of Babylon. There shall also be great conversions of persons from the world to the truth of the gospel. That revival will be so great that it will arrest the attention of all. All the nations of the earth, include the visible church world will be shaken by the power of the gospel of Christ.

But, we are saying that there is a work of restoration, of cleansing and deliverance that the Lord does among His people, in the time of the Parousia, which is to prepare them for that glory that is to be revealed. Let us read Malachi 3:1-3

¹Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in: ²Behold, he shall come saith the Lord...

If you look closely at this verse, you will notice that there are two messengers referred to – the messenger who prepares the way of the Lord, and then the messenger of the covenant who is the Lord himself. All serious Bible students are agreed as to the fact that the messenger, the first messenger in verse 1 of Malachi 3, refers in part to John the Baptist. You remember, he began to say “the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord”.

The Wilderness, in this connection, is used figuratively to speak of the condition of the nation of Israel at the time John appeared. The people were in a wilderness condition, as it were, far removed from the glorious estate of the city of God. John came to prepare them for a further work the Lord himself (the messenger of the covenant) would do amongst them. So, John preached in the whole of Judea. His baptism was at the outskirts of Jordan.

When we look at a given scripture detailing certain typical events we may, from a consideration of that scripture, see the same events in the antitype. The first coming of Jesus Christ is a type of His Second Advent. And although, one man heralded among the Jews the coming of the Lord in his first advent, we are shown in scripture that thousand of servants, men and women, shall be raised up to herald his Second Advent.

So, let us read verses 2 and 3 of Malachi 3, after which we go to the synoptic gospels to read how this was fulfilled in the type, during the first advent of Christ. Malachi 3:2,3

²But who may abide the day of his coming?

The reference is to the messenger of the covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He is the expression of the invisible God who comes to minister the full blessings of so great a redemption. So the prophet asks

²...Who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? (It is those that abide the day of his Parousia that shall stand in the time of his Epiphany). For He is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap. ³And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

Now, let us, go to Luke 3, and we will find in the ministry of John a reference to Malachi 3:2,3. We read verse 2 to 9

²The word of the Lord came unto John the son of Zachariah in the wilderness. ³And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; ⁴As it is written in the book of the words of Essais the prophet, saying, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; ⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God. ⁷Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptised of him O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance and begin not to say within yourselves we have Abraham to our father. For I say unto you, that God is able of

these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. ⁹And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.

You will notice that John's preaching was essentially a call to repentance. In symbolic language he declares that "every valley shall be filled, every mountain and hill shall be brought low, the crooked shall be made straight and the rough ways shall be made smooth." Of course, it is clear that John the Baptist did not run a construction company. So, we know that the way of the Lord was to be prepared in the hearts of men. And the figures of the valley, the mountain, the crooked and rough places refer to moral conditions in men.

Then we are told that the axe is laid at the foot of every tree. That does not mean that several axes dropped from heaven and each physical tree in Judea had an axe laid at its root. The ministry that John was fulfilling was as an axe, the trees are trees of witness, persons that have come to know the Lord according to the teachings of Moses. The covenant community, all of Israel, is symbolised by the word "every tree". And the tree that does not bring forth good fruits is hewed down and cast into the fire of affliction, the fire of tribulation. And, we are looking at the ministry of John and the ministry of the Lord in his first advent so that we may better understand the things shown us in Malachi 3.

If you go to Matthew 3:11,12, John was speaking and said,

¹¹I indeed baptise you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me (that is the messenger of the covenant) is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire: ¹²Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, but he will burn off the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Now, we notice that John was referring to Jesus when he said "I baptise you with water but he that is coming after me will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire". We are told his fan is in his hands and will thoroughly purge his floor. Now, what constitutes the fan in Jesus' hand? What specific event may be pointed to in the ministry of Jesus Christ in his first advent that answers to verse 12 of Matthew 3? It is said that he would thoroughly purge his floor. What is here symbolised as the Lord's floor?

The Lord's floor is His people. The Lord's floor also will represent in the same imagery that we read of here, the truth of God's word. The Lord is referring both to the wheat of his word and the wheat of His people. His choice people, the faithful among his people are his wheat (John 12:24). The truth of his word may also be symbolised by wheat.

So, He comes to purge his floor. And we are told He will gather the wheat into his garner and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire. Whatever there was in the teaching of the Pharisees and scribes that were not in harmony with truth, he burnt, and that which is in full harmony with God's word, he preserved. He also gathered unto Himself the faithful among the Jews while the unfaithful were reserved unto judgement.

Of course, there was practically no teaching of the Jews that did not have some measure of misconception. This chaff of doctrinal errors was burnt off with unquenchable fire.

So, there was no event in Jesus ministry in the days of his flesh in which He gathered literal chaff for burning. No, these things are set forth in figurative language. He cleaned up the ministry of the word in his time. He said, for example, "Ye have heard when it was said in the time of old, thou must not do this, but I say unto you, this is what is indicated"... "It is said you must not commit adultery, but I say unto you, whosoever looks at a woman with an intention to lust after her has committed adultery already in his heart".

And so, He began to refine the word, bringing it forth with greater brilliance, to assist the people to understand God's original intention in giving those words. Then He also by the refined word, cleansed those of the Jews that were gathered to Him. He said unto them "ye are clean by the words which I have spoken to you" (John 15:3).

We are now better able to understand Malachi 3:2,3. When in his advent the Messenger of the covenant comes, he is like a refiner's fire. He will purify the ministry of the word. Then, he is like a fuller's soap. He will cleanse the church; He will destroy from those who hear him, things in their lives that are contrary to righteousness. The word "fuller's soap" has to do with bleaching, a bleaching agent. Many symbolic garments (garment symbolises character and characteristics) will require a lot of beaching. In fact, because of fixed habits, and the necessity for frequent washing, some clothes will get torn. We all need changes of raiment (Zechariah 3:4,5).

Beloved! He (the Lord) is coming in the power of His word and spirit, to put all things straight. To purify our understanding and the ministry of the word. He comes to change us, burning off elements in our doctrines, and character contrary to Him. And, we will have to shape up or be put aside.

Now since the figure of the temple is already used in Malachi 3:1 (and remember, we are the temple of God, a spiritual house made up of living stones: 1 Peter 2:9) the prophet says in verse 3 of Malachi 3 *He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver.* Levi did minister under the Old Testament. And so, in relation to the Second Advent and the New Testament temple, Levi types his servants; all who having believed on the Lord Jesus Christ unto life and are filled with the spirit are able to witness for him in one capacity or the other.

He will purify the Sons of Levi (and remember that the phrase includes you) and purge them as gold and silver that they might offer unto the Lord, an offering in righteousness. So he purges His people to enable them to serve Him better. He purifies the ministry of the word, He restores truth, and He purifies his people that they may take on His moral beauty in all respects. But while He is doing this with the faithful the unfaithful are confined to the outer darkness; cut off from the light of the Lord's day. Daniel 12:10 say *many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly.*

In the last chapter of Malachi (Malachi 4), mention is made of this same work of restoration, cleansing, purification and perfection that the Lord carries out among His people at time of the Parousia, before the Epiphany (the great dreadful day of the Lord). In verses 1-6, we read

¹For, BEHOLD, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven (the reference principally is to the Epiphaneia, even though, some measure of the things revealed here are witnessed also in the time of the Parousia); and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root

nor branch. ²But unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings, and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. ³And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, said the LORD of hosts. (Now take particular note of verse 4-6). ⁴Remember ye the Law of Moses my servants, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. ⁵Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: ⁶And he shall turn the heart of the father to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

We have said before that the Elijah that shall come to restore all things at the close of the church age is the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember Acts 3:20. The Father shall send again Jesus Christ at the time of the restoration of all things. So, the Lord is both the greater Elijah as well as the Messenger of the covenant. These two ministries reveal two great aspects of the work of restoration He comes to accomplish in the midst of His people.

But, just like we earlier observed, the Lord fulfils the Elijah ministry through a many membered body of servants that He raises up at the end of the age. Thus, the Elijah that shall come can be said to be persons who upon receiving the Parousia of Christ, are anointed to carry the word of the Lord to His people in every place. They will be simple men and women with lamb-like graces, coming forth with a trumpet that will wake the sleeping church.

Notice in verse 6, we are told that this Elijah shall turn the heart of the father to the children and the heart of the children to their father. That speaks of restoration. It speaks of a church standing in the path God has ordained. It speaks of the raising up of the body of Christ, standing in the unity of the faith and of the spirit, having her ministry and practices guided by the truth of God's word; submitting to the headship of Christ, seeking for the fullness of Christ to be revealed in her, and being gradually built up unto that fullness. This will be fully realised before the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

In closing, we will read from Matthew 24. We will only mention but not elaborate, on some other characteristics of the Parousia of Christ, hoping to pick up this same meditation in the next edition Matthew 24:37-38

³⁷But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the Parousia of the Son of man be. ³⁸For as in the days that were before the flood: they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark

So, there will be gross ignorance of his presence. Since, the scriptures reveal that the Lord Jesus Christ will never again take on the human nature, we know that it will be the glorified Lord in the midst of His people carrying out a work, "building" His ark. However, there will be gross disbelief among the churches of the Lord's activities just as we find in the days of Noah.

That is why I Thessalonian 5 refer to some as being the children of the night because the activities of the Lord in his Parousia pass them unawares. They are only awakened to the reality of the second phase of the Lord's presence (the Epiphaneia) through the great judgement that accompanies it. So verse 39 of Matthew 24 says *And (they) know not until the flood came, and took them all away; (in judgement), so shall also the Parousia of the son of man be.* We read on

⁴⁰Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. ⁴¹Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken one and other left. ⁴²Watch therefore: for you know not what hour your Lord doth come. ⁴³But know this, that if the good man of the house (and you are the good man of your own spiritual house) had known in what watch the thief would come; he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. ⁴⁴Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. ⁴⁵Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom the Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? ⁴⁶Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing ⁴⁷verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods. ⁴⁸But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, my Lord delayeth his coming, ⁴⁹And shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; ⁵⁰The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, ⁵¹And shall cut asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

So, the Lord in his Parousia judges among his servants with a view to lifting the measurably faithful up and bringing down in judgement those who are decisively unfaithful. Malachi 3:5 says he will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right and have cast away the sense of the fear of the Lord. To the same degree of unfaithfulness shall the judgement be. He will treat those worthy of much stripes with much stripes and those worthy of few stripes with few stripes (Luke 12:42-48). But again, it will be with a view to raising up a new spiritual leadership completely cleansed from the old ways of greed, pride and human worship.

May the Lord cause you to be found faithful and to hearken to his voice at time of the end, in Jesus name. Amen

12

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PAROUSIA

We are continuing in our series of meditation on the Parousia. We will be addressing forth some basic things that will enable us to understand clearly the purpose of the Lord in this time period.

We saw in our previous meditation that there two dispensations that are of great importance to man and to the outworking of God's plans and purposes in redemption: Christ's first advent of Christ and the time of his second advents. The first was to secure through death our redemption. Before then the Lord Jesus Christ, the pre-existent Logos had been involved in ministry to humanity and had appeared on several occasions to His servants. But a time came when a particular phase of the redemptive plan must be fulfilled. That phase required a perfect sacrifice to be made for the redemption of the human race.

Galatians 4 says when that fullness of time was come, God sent his son, born of a woman, made under the law. John 1:14 says "And the word (the Eternal Logos) was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, as of the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth". For thirty-three and a half years, the Eternal Word, having taken on full human nature, had a dwelling amongst men.

Now, after the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for sin, he was raised from the dead. And we are shown that in his resurrection, he took on the spirit nature again, returning to the divine estate. Hebrews 4:14 say he passed into the heavens.

But, we are shown in scriptures, there is also to be a Second Advent. Act 3:21 says the heavens must receive and retain Jesus until another particular time period sets in the Father's redemption plans. At that time, the same Jesus who was before preached unto us, is to be sent again to bring to grand conclusion the work of redemption.

So, two great time periods in he human history that are unique and of great importance in the fulfilment of the plan of redemption: the period of the first advent and the period of the Second Advent of Christ. Just as it was necessary for Jesus Christ to be personally here in the first advent to fulfil those things that belong to that time period (proclaiming the word of God, showing example in himself as to what serving God entails, and finally. Laying down his life a ransom for the salvation of humanity) so, it is necessary in the second time advent for Christ to be among His people carrying out a work. Howbeit, He is present in the glory of His Spirit nature.

Since the Lord, having returned to the divine nature, will never again take on the human nature, it becomes necessary for us to understand, through the word, the various events that belong to his Second Advent.

When the Epiphaneia sets in or when the kingdom sets in no man will be left in doubt that Christ has taken on his great power and has began to reign over all the earth (Revelation 11:17). The time period that most persons are likely to miss out on is the Parousia, the first of the three time periods that describe the Second Advent. When it is said that Jesus comes as a thief in the night, the reference is to the Parousia. There is so much ignorance even in the church world concerning this time period.

And in this edition, we will be looking briefly at nine characteristics of this time period that will assist us to understand what time we are in. Later, we shall be taking a consideration of the principal sign of the Parousia. May the Lord quicken us as we do this, in Jesus name. Amen.

We will quickly go through these nine elements. There are more, but all of these can be resolved into these nine very distinct characteristics. Many of these elements will be found happening in the church world at the same time. And they show to us that we are in the time of the Lord's Parousia.

We have in previous meditation drawn attention to the fact that in this last hour, God is bringing to an end the rule of man in the church, and the prevalence of the mind of man in the operations of the church. God will bring an end to all of that. That is, in some sense, we are in a transition, and much of what we see in the church world will no longer be there in the years to come. So, you and I must prepare for the tremendous changes that God shall bring about.

The first characteristic is that the Parousia will witness a great restoration of truth to the church. Much of what is taught and preached in the visible church systems may be said to be just carnal projections of men, the teaching of man, out of tune with the word of Lord. From Acts 3:21 we saw that the Second Advent of Christ will set in just when God is about to restore all things. So, the first characteristic is the restoration of truth. Another way of saying it is that the ministry of the word as fulfilled by the servants of God all over the earth, will be purified. And that includes you, for whoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ and is filled with the spirit of God, having the capacity to witness for Christ is, in that sense, a servant of Christ.

God will open the understanding of His people. So much will be swept away that has been held out as truth to the Lord's people. So, there will be the restoration of truth, the purification of the ministry of the word.

The second characteristic is that the Lord will manifest unfaithfulness in the church systems. And, of course, that derives from the restoration of truth. As He open the understanding of His own to the truth of His word, then character failures, ministerial failures within the church will become evident. Erroneous practices, heretical teachings will be revealed for what they are. So, the second characteristic of the time period called Parousia is that the Lord will manifest distinctly unfaithfulness in the church systems. We make bold to say by the Spirit of the Lord that the next few years will witness such tremendous changes that certain places that go by the name of the Lord shall be no more, while there will be a springing forth of something entirely new.

That takes us to the third characteristic. The scriptures show that when He comes, He will test and judge among His servants. The reference in this connection is to those of His servants that have come to the estate of the five-fold ministry. He will test and judge among them Recall that part of the description of glory of the Lord is that He is seen holding His ministers (the seven stars) in His right hand (Revelation 1:16).

God fulfils His redemptive promises to the church through the ministry of the principal witness (the Holy Spirit), and the co-witnesses (His servants). So, it is something great in the sight of God for somebody to be raised up into the estate of ministry and be given to the church as a servant. These ones are under clear divine responsibility, and God will judge among them.

So, those among God's people that have come to the estate of ministry are to be tested, judged and manifested for what they are. In Matthew 24 from verse 42 to the end, this is shown to be the case. Those who are measurably faithful... (Now when we use the phrase "measurably faithful" we are admitting in part that when God judges among His servants, there is no one that will be found hundred percent in full harmony with the Lord's mind. But there are some who dispositionally, in their heart's attitude, in the fact that they tremble at God's word and allow the word of God to do their thinking for them that can be said to be faithful to a large extent).

These measurably faithful ones will be cleansed of their faults and admitted to a closer walk with the Lord, while the unfaithful ones will be set aside. In the words of the scriptures, for the unfaithful, there will be the binding of the hands, meaning that their services will become increasingly irrelevant to God. Men may hail them, but in relation to the outworking of God's plans and purposes, and the raising up of a bride for

Christ, their ministries will not be relevant. Ezekiel 44:9-end show that there are two kinds of ministry; that which serve God's purpose and that, which serves man's purpose.

We are talking about God lifting up the measurably faithful ones to a closer walk with Him while setting aside the unfaithful as far as His great purposes are concerned. Matthew 24:47 says concerning the faithful He (the Lord) shall make them ruler over all His goods. This shows that the Lord will make known to them all that needs to be known in relation to the truth of God's word which is the principal element in the ministry of the servants of God. God's church moves forward on the wings of the revealed word, which reveals Christ, His saving purpose, his program and His kingdom. The Lord Jesus will commit the great riches of his word, his plans and purposes unto the faithful.

But for the unfaithful there will be the binding of hands and the binding of feet. So, ministerially, they will be irrelevant. You will not need to look too closely to detect the inconsistencies in the moral lives of these ones. Verse 51 of Matthew 24 says they will be appointed their portion with the hypocrite where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 25:30 say they will be cast into outer darkness. That is no reference to the lake of fire. It shows that they will be shut away from the light of what the Lord is doing at this time of the end. They will not be able to understand or to intelligently respond to truth. They may even find themselves fighting against truth in order that their folly might show forth. They will be consigned to outer darkness in relation to the Father's plans and purpose. Daniel 12:10 say none of the wicked shall understand.

So, the third principal characteristic is that God tests and judges among his servants. An immediate consequence of this is that the Lord Jesus Christ will be raising up unto himself a new spiritual leadership, as He brings down the old order. The word "leadership" is used to stress the fact that the character of those who in ministry serve the interest of God will be altogether different from what we have seen up till now.

There will be persons involved in the old spiritual leadership, who through change, will be brought into the new spiritual leadership. But those who insist on their ways, who will not tremble at God's word, who will not have their lives cleansed and their eyes washed and their garments changed, will keep doing the same thing, building unto themselves kingdoms, more interested in what they can get out of the gospel rather than what God desires to establish.

So, that is the third characteristic. And we have used Matthew 24:42-51 to illustrate that. You can also look at Zechariah 10:1-4. it shows that there will be a new spiritual leadership symbolised in the phrase "bright clouds". And there will be the judgement of the old spiritual leadership symbolised in the word "goats" and the phrase "idol shepherds" (Zechariah 10:1-3; 11:17). These are ministries that make themselves gods unto the people.

Idolatry is man making another man god and bowing down to worship him. We know the abuse of the image and likeness of God that man stands in when men worship the gods of wood and iron. But, the most terrible assault against God's plans and purposes is when man is set up in God's house as a god and is worshipped by the people. Zechariah 11:17 says woe! To the shepherd. God says He will punish the goats (Zechariah 10:3); person's stubbornly resisting the rebukes of the Lord.

That was the passage the Lord Jesus Christ was referring to in Matthew 9:36 when He said the Lord's people are as sheep without shepherds. Many in those days were found to be servants attending, as it were, to the things of God. But the Lord said God's people were as sheep without shepherd. We trust and

rejoice in the fact that the Lord's people will see the emergence of a brand new spiritual leadership, who in the spirit of Christ, will serve and serve and serve. These will hold unto God to minister more effectively unto the Lord's people, not seeking for salaries like hirelings. Not hoping to make merchandise of the Lord's people and of the anointing upon their lives but rather spending their lives and their all for the kingdom.

That brings us to the fourth characteristic of the Parousia. There will be a calling out of the Lord's people from the spiritual environment of the denominational churches neck deep in unfaithfulness. That reminds us of Revelation 18:4, "Come out of her my people and be not partakers of her plagues". The "her" is a reference to church systems, which in their unfaithfulness increasingly approximate to Babylon. Denominationalism in its unfaithfulness is called by the terminal name of Babylon. But there will be ministries raised up by God unto His people across the face of the earth, calling them out of the denominational church systems neck deep in the rule of man. Typical denominational churches are merely religious empires devoid of the characteristics shown in God's word to belong to the church of Jesus Christ.

Closely associated with that is the fifth characteristic: of there being a gathering together of such persons that have been called out of the denominational church systems unto the Lord. In small pockets, scattered all over the world, are to be found groups of persons who have delivered their souls from the shame in the visible church systems, being taught of the Lord to His plans and purpose for this hour. This fifth characteristic is very important. In Psalm 50:5, the Lord says, *gather together my saints unto me those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice*. Again, we are told in 2 Thessalonians 2 that when the time of the Parousia of Christ sets in, there is to be a gathering together unto Him of all who love the Lord.

The formation of the body of Christ is the most powerful spiritual reality in the world. When God has a local ecclesia, a local congregation of His people moving according to His mind and will, then we might be able to witness the raising up of God's army. Central to understanding the New Testament revelation is the raising up of the body of Christ.

So, there will be a gathering together unto the Lord of like-minded people. Malachi 3:16 simply puts it this way. *And they that fear the Lord* (those who are delivering themselves from the unfaithfulness of the times... *they that fear the Lord spake often one to another. And a book of remembrance was open for them...* And so much is said in the verses that follow until we get to the climax in verse 2 of Malachi 4 *"And unto you that fear my name, shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.*

So, that is the fifth characteristic: that there will be a gathering together unto the Lord. Where the "soma of truth" is, there the eagle saints will gather (Luke 17:37). Truth will be a singular factor at this time of the end. The necessity for meat in due season will force those who have a heart towards God to seek where they will be fed with God's word. (We shall take more details when we examine the principal sign of his coming).

That brings us to the sixth characteristic: the moral cleansing of the obedient at heart. As the Lord draws his people from the spiritual environments of the visible church systems neck deep in unfaithfulness, they will come just the way they are: lame, blind, deaf, unclean (all of these terms represent failures and weaknesses in the lives of God's people). So, there will be a whole lot of cleansing. Repentance, consecration and yieldedness will be words that will describe the character of the meetings.

When the people gather unto the Lord, they will be crying out unto the Lord for a change in their being because the light of God's word shine brilliantly on them exposing their weaknesses. Make no mistake about it. Whatever a believer has acquired of evil, he must be purged of it right before the Epiphaneia sets in, or he will have no place in the heavenly kingdom that is to be revealed.

So, the sixth characteristic is that there will be the moral cleansing of the willing ones among His people. It is for this reason that the Lord is shown coming as a fuller's soap and as a refiner's fire (Malachi 3:2).

That leads us to the seventh characteristic. God will build up a prophetic spirit among this body of persons scattered all over the world. The prophetic element is so much missing in the church today, that so many believers do not know what the true character of the church is. But God will build into these people gathered unto Him (cleansed, feasting upon Christ, the meat in due season, having the prophetic word opening their understanding) the prophetic spirit. And one expression of that life is that God will empower local congregations of his people with so much of the anointing of the spirit that they will begin to develop such qualities as are to be found in the Lord's army. So, we can talk about the raising up of the Lord's army (Joel 2:1-11, Ezekiel 37:1-10).

That moves us to the eight characteristics: the revelation of Sonship and the redemption of the body. Roman 8:23, read in the light of verse 14-23 tell us of the redemption of the body. The believer who faithfully makes use of the Lord's Parousia is to break loose from corruptibility and mortality. There will be redemption of the body. Death is never a gateway to glory. Resurrection is the gateway. Death is not a friend. There will be a revelation that God intends that the last members of the church class should break free from all limitations and enter into life. There will be redemption of the body.

But there will also be the revelation of full sonship. Galatians 4 teaches on the difference between spiritual childhood and spiritual maturity. Some of those that have gone all over the world, preaching the gospel, are in some sense, still spiritual babies. But God will raise up among His own, men women fully built up. He will raise us up out of childhood as he makes Christ more and more known to us. Galatians 4:1 says, "the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be Lord of all. He is placed under tutors and governors until the time appointed".

So, sonship is not something we come into at the new birth when we give our lives to Christ. But the placement of full-grown sons is something yet future. And the Lord will cause us to grow up unto Christ in all things. So the revelation of the redemption of the body, and of full sonship, is a feature of the Parousia.

The last of the nine characteristics of the Parousia, is that, for the habitually faithful, the experience of full experiential deliverance from sin is promised. The feast of atonement practised under Old Testament will be antitypically fulfilled in the church. We call it moral resurrection, moral perfection. This will be granted unto the habitually faithful in the time of the Parousia. And that will qualify them to enter into the bliss and glory of the Epiphaneia.

13

RAPTURE DOCTRINE EXAMINED

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We have been taking an introductory consideration of the Blessed Hope. This has consisted in looking at the Second Advent of Christ, what it is all about, and the various time periods associated with it. We have seen from the witness of the prophetic scriptures that we are already in the first phase of the Second Advent of Christ and that Christ is among His people in a very special way carrying out a work.

In this edition and others to come, we will be focusing attention on the key feature of the blessed hope, erroneously called "The Rapture" In "God's Pattern Church", we drew attention to some erroneous practices in the church world today. Now we are tackling doctrinal errors crippling the growth and mission of the church whilst creating false hopes.

Our burden in these new series of teachings has been exposing refuge of lies. Refuge always has to do with hopes. If there are false hopes, then there must be true hopes. It is essential that the Lord's people have a clear understanding of the Living hope; the sure hope that is held out by God unto the church.

In looking at the Second Advent, we observed that there are as many divergent views on the subject as there are denominations. What is more perplexing is that if you take any doctrinal position held by one denomination, you will meet with absurdities; line of thoughts at variance with others on the same subject. We intend to take up these absurdities; in their place we hope to minister the living hope; something that we can hold unto.

For a start, let us take two passages in the New Testament, commonly used by preachers to teach the Rapture doctrine.

The first passage is Titus 2:11 – 14.

¹¹For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men. ¹²Teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; ¹³Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. ¹⁴Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

The verse of interest is verse 13: looking for that blessed hope which is realised at the glorious appearing of the great God and our Lord Jesus Christ. The second passage is Hebrews 9:24-28

²⁴For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God for us; ²⁵Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others. ²⁶For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement, ²⁸So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and unto them that look for Him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

The doctrine of the Rapture thought to be what the blessed hope consists of, teaches that when the Lord Jesus Christ comes, he descends from heaven into the atmospheric heavens, that is, the sky. And then the dead in Christ will rise from their grave. And we, the alive and remaining of the children of God, will be caught up together with these ones that are risen from their graves, to meet the Lord in the air.

In the doctrine of Rapture, it is believed that the "alive and remaining ones" will be caught up; they will not die. But then, strong adherents of this doctrine have this view that all must die. This is because Hebrew 9:27 reads: "*it is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgement*".

Some go on to say that in the scriptures, there are two men that escaped death. The first is Enoch in Genesis 5:19-24, and the second is Elijah in 2 Kings 19. And they say, because it is appointed unto men once to die, Enoch and Elijah will come back to the earth and will be killed according to Revelation (11:3-11). Many preachers believe that this passage speaks of Enoch and Elijah coming to the earth to pass the way all mortals must go; going to glory through the gateway of death.

So, we are told by men, even great Bible scholars that the two witnesses are Enoch and Elijah. Others say "Well, they must be Moses and Elijah since these two witnesses are said to have power to turn water into blood, and in the book of Exodus, we read that Moses turned water into blood". So, the thought is that if Moses and Elijah or Enoch and Elijah who had gone to heaven must come back to the earth to die, then who will escape death.

One thing we might note from this is that although the people believe in the Rapture, their belief in Hebrew 9:27 as it is generally taught in the denominational churches seriously contradicts this doctrine! Whenever there has been any strongly held doctrinal error it has always had a crushing negative effect on her. Her testimony and service are always adversely affected under such circumstance.

Some argue that it does not really matter what the future hopes of the church are. When the time comes, by and by, the church will enter into whatever hopes are prepared for her of God. But is that really true that it does not matter what you believe? Do men enter into the things of redemption without walking in the light of these being positively exercised by their gracious power?

When we look at the scriptures, on the average, one verse out of every seven has to do with the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, in the Old Testament, there are far more prophecies on the Second Advent than on the first. It was so much so that the Jews thought that it would be just one advent, that glorious coming in which the Lord Jesus Christ comes to set up his kingdom over all the earth. It is for that reason they were not able to understand the appearing of the lowly and meek Saviour preaching the

gospel of the kingdom. And if there is so much witness as to the Second Advent, we know that of necessity, there must be God's purpose in it.

We need not hurry over this matter. We simply say at this point that the doctrine of the Rapture is most unfortunate. No single doctrine in all of the New Testament scriptures that has been so perverted as that which relates to the exaltation of the church to the place of honour and glory with the Lord Jesus Christ. There is so much gravitation towards earthly things among the Lord's people because what shall be is not clearly spelt out. We shall take out time and space to show the fallacy and inconsistency in the doctrine of the Rapture

Our next object is to look closely at Hebrews 9:27, If death is an appointment, then the Lord Jesus Christ died by the death sentence passed on all humanity. Did Jesus Christ really die in Adam? The death sentence that God passed on Adam and Eve and transferred to all of his posterity, was it really applicable to the Lord Jesus Christ? Is death really the gateway to glory? Is death a friend?

You know, in most traditions and cultures, death is revered. In most cultures of the world, there is a great belief in death. They may say that death is a transition; a transition into a higher life. But is physical death really a transition? Is death a gateway to glory?

In our meditation on the blessed hope, we are going to show very clearly that it is God's purpose that the last members of the church class (the overcoming saints at the time of the end who hold on to the Parousia ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ) break loose from the bondage of death.

We know that there is going to be a time of great tribulation. It will make nonsense of all the time of trouble that humanity has known in the six thousand years of recorded human history; but God's Word teaches that the faith structure of the Lord's people will be so much strengthened by Christ that men will have power over all opposition and will break free from all evil.

Let all who love the name of the Lord begin to take up strong intercessory prayers at this time for God's gracious intervention in the church. All refuge of lies must be burnt away. The true hopes must be held forth unto the Lord's people. Faith springs from true spiritual knowledge.

There must be a return to seeking the Lord on the pages of the written word, trusting in the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. There must be an intense desire to know the Lord. The prophetic subjects must come alive again. Men must begin to burn the midnight oil to know what the scriptures say about the things that pertain to their full redemption.

One characteristic that will be found among the Lord's people, among those that are measurably faithful, is that they will take pains to prove the truth or otherwise of every doctrine. Whatever a man believes affects his lifestyle. There is going to be a passionate hunger for Him, an eager and patient waiting for the Epiphaneia of Christ; the unveiling of Christ and the promise of the subsequent lifting up of the church to incorruptibility; and then to immortality. It is the ministry of the Word (the prophetic Word) that will cause this hunger in the hearts of the Lord's people. *Hebrews 9:28 says "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and unto them that look for Him..."* The Amplified Bible says *unto them that eagerly and patiently wait for Him."*

So, there must be that spiritual hunger within a soul who seeks to have a throne-placement in the kingdom that is to be revealed. We cannot continue the way we are and hope to share in the full salvation that is in Christ Jesus. There is a great hunger for perfection, a burning hunger for the fullness of his life, an earnest desire for Him that must be created in us. If the Lord will be the desire of all nations according to Haggai 2:7 then He must first of all be the sole and burning desire of His own people.

It is the truth of God's Word that will open our eyes to the reality that is in Christ Jesus and cause our hearts to hunger for Him. And if that truth is not known and taught to the Lord's people in the power of the

Spirit; if it is not kept in a living way before the view of the people, then there is no way the Lord's people can enter into the chief inheritance. What you do not see, you cannot become. As in Hebrews 9:28 so also we find in Titus 2:23; "*looking for*", having an eager desire, deep longings and patiently waiting for the Epiphaneia of the Lord is the outcome of a healthy spiritual life.

Do you possess this hunger in your heart? "Looking for that blessed hope..." It is something to look for. Matthew 25:1 says, "*Then shall the kingdom of heaven become like ten virgins who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom*". There is a spiritual journey, a spiritual course that must be entered into. Our devotional lives must be cured. There must be a hunger for the Lord, a crying out from our hearts that He might make himself known unto us. I John 3:1-3

¹BEHOLD, what manner of Love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God. therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. ²Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as he is. ³And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

Earnestly seek the Lord to create in you and interest in the matter at hand. For the next several editions, we will be looking at *the Rapture* and showing that it is dangerous for the church to continue blindly in it. We must be awakened to what the true hopes are that the Lord has reserved for her, so that she might intelligently follow the Lord faithfully. May the Lord bless you in Jesus Name Amen.

14

RAPTURE

DOCTRINE

EXAMINED

In the last edition, we briefly highlighted two doctrines that have done and continue to do so much damage to the church. The first is the doctrine of Rapture and the second is the doctrine that all must die. It is said, "*It is appointed unto men once to die...*" We also said the death is not an appointment, it is a judgmental process that came upon man in Adam; and in Christ that sentence is lifted from the believer. Death is not the gateway to Life, rather, resurrection is the gateway to life and the first resurrection is the true hope that Christ has established for the church.

In this edition, we begin an examination of the Rapture Doctrine. Our first reading will be taken from Matthew 11:25-27

²⁵At that time, Jesus answered and said, I thank thee O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because thou has hid these things from the wise and prudent and has revealed them unto babes. ²⁶Even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. ²⁷All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son and He to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.

Straightaway, we want to establish the fact that the revelation of God's Word is not based on Scholarship; it is not dependent of you being a titled priest. As it is revealed here, no man knoweth the Son, but the Father. The knowledge of the Son is the exclusive property of the Father. And again, no man knoweth the Father save the son and to whom the son shall choose to reveal him.

There are several passages in scriptures teaching us that meekness, humility, teachableness are the essential qualities of life that are to be found in those that are to receive the revelation of Christ in his Word. Psalm 25:9 is straight to the point, God will teach the meek his ways. In the fourteenth verse, we are told that the secrets of the Lord are with them that fear him.

So, not only must we be humble in our disposition, but also there must be in us that growing urge, the continuous cry for more of Christ.. In this last hour, many good and great people will make costly mistakes acting from self-sufficiency; but blessed are those who are made to know that until they stand in the perfection that is in Christ, until they break free from all the limitations of the present mortal life, they have not yet come into all that the Lord has prepared for them. We must continue to seek the Lord in all humility.

So we come to the matter of the Rapture. We can show (and you may want to check any encyclopaedia on church history) that the doctrine of the Rapture is less than two hundred years old. A young lady had a dream in which she saw several persons in an upward flight; looking up, she saw Jesus in the sky. The dream was so real to her that she told it to the "pastor" in her church, and of course the man shouted: Ah that must be the meaning of 1 Thessalonians 4. Some few Sundays later, he started to teach the Rapture drawing inspiration from the young lady's dream.

John Darby the great Bible Scholar who edited a version of the Bible was of the same denominational system and he soon got influenced by the teaching of his co-minister and elaborated upon it, using scriptures he feels to be in harmony with the doctrine. All these elaborations were later brought into his version of the Bible as footnotes to the relevant to the Bible passage. Some years later, Doctor Scofield (Of course you might know the Scofield reference Bible) also included all these comments in his edition of the Bible.

The apostles never taught the Rapture doctrine; nor was it ever preached in the church till about two hundred years ago. It is founded on a dream.

Turn to Jeremiah 23, you will find that this tendency of ministering from dreams and visions that is supposed to have been received of the Lord has been there of old. God has warned His people in ancient times, and He is still warning His people today, to separate dreams, visions and revelations from God's Word. Dreams, visions and revelations are vehicles through which God can make known to us His will. Relative to the Word of God, (the written word) they are of secondary importance; and only as a revelation, a dream, a trance, a vision, a prophetic utterance is in harmony with the teachings of God's Word should it be received.

So, in Jeremiah 23:25-26 we read the following words

²⁵I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. ²⁶How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? Yea they are prophets of the deceit of their own hearts...

We will stop the reading here for a while. Here is revealed one source of erroneous doctrine. In our walk with God, we are to keep our hearts in a steady state of fellowship with Him. We are to walk in the Spirit of the fear of God. The longings for God must not be relegated to the background. Sometimes, the work of the ministry can just be a mere routine, but we should know that the Lord is more interested in who we are and of our becoming like him than merely doing his works. When we are what God wants us to be, then we are better able to do the works that God wants us to do.

So, deceit is at the root of the dreams of the prophets described in the above passage. The Bible says some dreams come as carryovers of the day's activities. Returning to the reading, we come to verse 27-28

²⁷(These prophets) which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams, which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their Fathers have forgotten my name for Baal. ²⁸The prophet that hath a dream let him tell a dream and he that hath my word let him tell my word faithfully. (We shall talk about what amounts to speaking the word of God faithfully) What is the chaff to the wheat saith the LORD

What is the chaff of dreams and visions to the wheat of God's Word? When you remove the husk from grains, what is left is called chaff. The main meal is in the grain. So the Lord asks, "what is the chaff" (symbolic of a dream, a vision, a trance, revelation etc) to the wheat (symbolic of the written word of God). And he says, "*he that hath my words let him speak it faithfully*". Verse 29

²⁹Is not my Word like as a fire? saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?

The rock of false doctrine will be broken in pieces as the truth of God's Word is empowered by God in the ministry of such that humbly seek Him.

This brings us to a very important observation. The Bible says the witnesses of at least two or three writers are required for every doctrinal position. In 2 Corinthians 13:1 we are told that at the mouth of two

or three witnesses shall every word be established. This is a key principle given us that is to be held by everyone that labour in the ministry of the Word. Who is a witness? A writer of the scriptures is a witness.

So, the reference is not just to two or three passages. For example, if a writer, say Paul who wrote over half of the New Testament writings, witnesses to a subject, all the things he has written concerning that matter constitute just one witness. Because we are told in Isaiah 28, that the character of God's unveiling of himself to His prophets, is to one a little and to another a little. So, all prophets who may have a witness on any given matter in the mind of God must be consulted. Not until the witnesses of all writers concerning that subject matter are considered, we cannot say that we have come to full and clear understanding of the matter yet.

So a doctrine can only be established when it is harmonious with all witnesses of scripture on the same subject, and again, it is to be harmonious with every other truth of God's Word, because the truth is a Person and every one truth must agree with other truths.

We find the same principle in *Hebrews 1:1: GOD, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in time past unto the Fathers by the prophets*. The phrase "at sundry times" mean at different occasions those servants of God have received several parts of the subject matter of redemption, and each had faithfully ministered that part. So, not until all scriptures concerning a doctrinal position are examined, a wrong position can only be the result.

That brings us to our subject. We will be looking at all passages that are often used to teach the Rapture. We will begin with the synoptic gospels.

In the teachings of Jesus concerning the Second Advent, as recorded in the synoptic gospels, He mentions two person in the Old Testament. The first is Noah and the second is Lot. Noah is used to show a type of the Parousia of Christ (we will be looking at that more closely) while Lot is used to show a type of the Epiphaneia. When the witnesses given of Christ concerning these two persons and their histories are confused, the result will be a wrong interpretation. Come to Matthew 24:36-43.

³⁶But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

³⁷But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the Parousia of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood...

In the days of Noah, referred to above as the days before the flood, Noah ministered for one hundred and twenty years, though he lived for about six hundred years. The apostle Peter says Noah was a teacher of Righteousness, warning concerning judgements of the world that then was. The pre-flood ministry of Noah parallels the ministry of Christ during the Parousia.

We read verse 38 again down to verse 41

³⁸For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, ³⁹And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away (taking them all away in judgement) so shall also the Parousia of the Son of man be ⁴⁰Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left.

⁴¹Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left.

These two verses (40 and 41) are quite important, because they are often referred to when the doctrine of the Rapture is preached. Many read into the two verses, the following thought: "*Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and the other left*". That is the understanding they will have us receive from this passage.

Now, you will notice the gospel according to Matthew, the one according to Mark and the one according to Luke are all said to be synoptic. Since all three writers cover this very teaching, it will be profitable to see what the other two writers have to say. So turn with me to Mark 13:24-37;

²⁴But in those days after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, ²⁵And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. ²⁶And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. ²⁶And then shall He send His angels and shall gather together His Elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven... (We move straight to verse 32) ...³²But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father.

³³Take ye heed, watch and pray for you know not when the time is. ³⁴For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work and commanded the porter to watch. ³⁵Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh...

There is a difference between the coming of the master of the house when he takes account with His own and when the Lord of all the earth, the judge of all the earth comes in judgement, preparatory to taking over the kingdoms of this world. So, he says here,

³⁵...for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning. ³⁶Lest coming suddenly, he finds you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all. Watch

Four time periods are given in the Parousia. Here, they are symbolically given to us as the evening (the beginning period of the Parousia), the midnight, the cock crowing and the morning (the morning being the period that leads to the Epiphaneia). And the commandment is for us to watch so that we will not be found sleeping. So waiting for the Lord in his Second Advent is not a passive activity; it is an intense spiritual activity in the realm of the heart, in vital communion with the Lord and in our daily living.

That is the witness of Mark. Mark emphasises in His teaching the Parousia of Christ and does not say anything about what we find in verses 40 and 41 of Matthew 24 that "*one shall be taken and the other left*". But Luke does in Luke 17, to which we now turn. Here, the two names, the man Noah and the man Lot are mentioned, using the events of their times to describe the events of the first two phases in the Second Advent of Christ (The Parousia and the Epiphaneia)

We said earlier that the events associated with Noah relate to the Parousia while the vents associated with Lot relate to the Epiphaneia, the time when the Lord comes in His full glory, bringing good to the redeemed ones and bringing judgements to them that have refused to obey the gospel of Christ. So, the

Epiphaneia is a time of the unveiling of Christ, and the unveiling of the faithful who have come into full union and glory with him. But it is also the time of the unveiling of the wicked. In the Epiphaneia, all things shall be shown in their full light. For in the blazing light of the Lord's appearing, all things shall be revealed in their true pictures. Righteousness and faithfulness shall be rewarded, while wickedness shall be punished.

So let us read Luke 17:26-36

²⁶And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it also be in the days of the Son of Man...

The word "Day" is in the plural form, implying that the day of the Parousia is actually a time period covering several years. We may not know when it begins, but can tell when it has set in by the activities of Christ in the midst of His people. He comes to His people as the Latter rain awakening and quickening them to the truth of His Word. The discerning at heart, the humble are then able to walk in the things revealed of Christ. We continue to read from verse 27, it says

²⁷They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

²⁸Likewise also, (the judgement of the flood is as the events surrounding Lot, So we are told) as it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; ²⁹But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all

We take verse 29 again. It says "*But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all*". It was not the day that Noah entered into the ark that the rain started or the flood came. The rain started seven days after Noah had entered into the ark (Genesis 7:10). But here, an event in the life of Lot is mentioned and used to show us something that belongs to the Epiphaneia, the day in which the Son of Man is revealed, the day of His unveiling.

When he comes in the Parousia, it is as a thief in the night. He is present among His people through His Word and His Spirit, but is not seen of the Church or of the World; but when he comes in the Epiphaneia, the redeemed of the Church class, those counted worthy of the first resurrection, shall see Him as He is for they shall be like Him. They shall become full grown spirit beings and then in the clouds of trouble that shall visit the world, the unsaved and the careless professors of religion, will begin to become aware that the Lord hath taken unto Himself His great power and hath began to reign.

Now, Lot does not represent the best among the Lord's People. He is an overcomer, but he is only so in the secondary sense. Of course we know the story about Abraham and Lot; two persons who came from the same root, who responded to the call of God but did not have the same type of heart disposition towards God in the matter of consecration.

Prophetically, Lot represents those of the Lord's People, who remain in the Spiritual environment of the denominational churches up till the time of the Epiphaneia and were delivered from that order of things just before the outbreak of divine judgement upon Babylon. Lot was delivered out of Sodom (a type of Babylon) just before the city was destroyed. He was a true seed and loved righteousness, but he never could come to a point of taking a decision to leave Sodom even when the things he saw and heard

continually grieved his heart. (2 Peter 2:8). His treasures were right inside the city and he just could not contemplate the loss of fortune that he thinks will follow his exit from the city.

However, at a time in God's economy, when it became very clear that the city was under divine judgement and the wrath of the Almighty God was about to be revealed, Lot knew he had to leave Sodom, even against His will.

Lot came out of Sodom wounded and terribly bruised. His sojourning in the city, his lack of wisdom in not knowing to depart from the city at an auspicious time, caused him a great loss. Not only did he lose his investments in Sodom, (the very things he sought to keep verse 33 of Luke 17), he suffered also the loss of his wife a prophetic figure of that which his soul lusted after.

We are told in I Corinthians 3:13-15 *"that every man's work shall be made manifest. For the day, (the Epiphaneia) shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abides which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward; if any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by Fire"*.

So Lot, a seed of righteousness, was a man of divided loyalty. He had a craving for worldly riches and honour. He sought the chiefest places in "Babylon", and the craving of His heart did not make him to respond to the voice of the Word of the Lord. The Lord Counsels in Matthew 24:15-21, *"when you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet stand in the holy place (who so readeth, let him understand), then let them which be in Judea flee to the mountains"*. And we are to watch and pray ensuring that our flight be not in the winter period of the Epiphaneia, for then shall there be great tribulations. Rather, we are to note the sign of the abomination in the holy place long before, and come out of Babylon at the time of His Parousia when the Lord can still prepare us for the glory that is to be revealed at his appearing.

So, let us read verse 29 of Luke 7 again and continue down to the 34th verse.

²⁹But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. ³⁰Even thus shall it be in the day when the son of man is revealed. ³¹In that day, he, which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: he that is in the field let him likewise not return back. ³²Remember Lot's wife. ³³Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. ³⁴I tell you, in that night...

Remember, Jesus is the one speaking and this is emphatic *"in that night"*. So, it must be a night period, a night season; But Mark 13:35 tells us of four seasons: the evening, at midnight, at the cock crowing and in the morning. In all of those four time periods, the reference is to the different seasons within the Parousia; but here in Luke 17:34, the reference is to the Epiphaneia, and the word night is used to represent the judgement aspect of the Epiphaneia. When it is light to the faithful, it will be darkness to the wicked.

The symbol of the night is sometimes used to typify a time of trouble, a time of tribulation, a winter period, not conducive for normal activities. The Lord said in John 9:4 *"the night cometh when no man can work"*. So he says *"in that night, (in that night of great trouble), two shall be together, one shall be taken and the other left behind"*. So the one taken is taken in judgement. *"the flood came and took them all away"* Matthew 24:39 says. The one left behind is the one approved.

Of course, from the words of the Lord in verse 37, we know that verses 34 to 36 of that passage point to a gathering together of the eagle saints unto the Lord and His Word at the time of His Parousia; but we will consider that in another meditation.

In closing, take note that there are two time periods in the Second Advent of Christ that are much confused in the church world. The first time period is called the Parousia and it covers many years. The second is the Epiphaneia. For the faithful among the believers, the time of the Epiphaneia is a day of Glory, for she is caught up in the glory of her gracious Lord; but for the world and the careless in the church systems, the Bible says it is going to be a day of woe. Amos 5:18 says, "*Don't look forward to the day of the Lord, for the day of the Lord is darkness and not light*". That is, to those who are not obedient to the ministry of the Lord in His Parousia.

May the Lord bless you. May he keep you alive and awake to His plans and purposes in this last hour. Amen.

15

RAPTURE DOCTRINE EXAMINED

We are bound to give thanks to the Lord for the great work He is doing among his people at this time of the end and we are quite privileged to be alive today. It is required of us to keep seeking God to have a share in this great work. Please turn to Isaiah 28, we will be looking at the ninth and tenth verses using them as entry points into the message of this edition which is a continuation of our examination of the Rapture doctrine. In these two verses, the prophet was asking:

⁹Whom shall He teach knowledge?

The reference is to the Father making the Son of God known, no one knoweth the Son save the Father only. Of course, He will admit men and women into the knowledge of the Son, but here we are about being shown what qualifies one to receive divine teachings.

The message is to those who are already in covenant relationship with God. For the prophecies quite clearly (when you read from verse 1) show God addressing His people at a time of great spiritual declination, when things are not as they were at the beginning. When the standards are falling and there is a lowering of spirituality on all sides.

God will always react to that situation. He will speak to His people, he will turn their hearts back to him; and in doing so, He lays hold upon some and turns them to right living. He makes great demands upon these ones and constitutes them His instruments for reaching others. So this passage speaks of the nature of the divine reaction to things among us, when God desires to bring about change to the situation in the body. If you are quite honest with yourself and with the situation about you, you will notice that although we are moving closer to the end, there is something seriously sick about the visible church systems. God is reacting to correct that; but who will be persons that God will lay hands upon at a time such as this? So the prophet asks:

⁹Whom shall He teach knowledge, and whom shall he make to understand doctrine: and the answers are given; them that are weaned from milk...

The milk is symbolic of the beginning of the doctrines of Christ, those elementary teachings that set forth repentance from dead works and faith towards God; how to walk in victory from such distributed effects of the fall as sickness, poverty, danger. These are the elementary principles of God's Word. And the prophet adds

⁹... them that are drawn from the breasts

Although some may have been saved for twenty, thirty years, the greater many in the visible church systems are customarily hooked to the milk. Paul in Hebrews 5 says that such who use milk are unskillful in the Word of righteousness. But, the one whom the Lord will teach must look beyond worldly lusts and appetites. Victory over sickness, disease, poverty, and related issues is promised to the believer. All of that are included in redemption, but it would be tragic to think that Christianity amounts to just solving man's needs. Christianity first and foremost is to solve God's needs, and when God's needs are met, man's needs are supremely met.

So, them that are weaned from the milk... When the discussion gets a little deeper, when the teaching of God's Word begins to get into the deeper matters of the kingdom, many in the church fall asleep. "Oh your business will prosper; your mother-in-law that is looking for your trouble shall not be able to kill your children". These are the kind of things that many in the church today want to hear. Bu the prophet asks "whom shall He teach knowledge, those that are weaned for the milk..."

Then the question is asked – whom shall he make to understand doctrine? And he answers: them that are drawn from the breasts.

There is something odd that has become common place in the church, and that is that men look at their walk with God as though it is to be influenced only by what they learn from their Sunday school materials. The "breasts" here in Isaiah 28:9 talks about the breasts of the denominational mothers. Whereas human

instruments are used to teach us by God, we being suitably fitted through the baptism of the Holy Spirit to receive help from the Lord directly, we are not by God required just to take hook, line and sinker whatever anyone says even if the person is spitting fire from heaven. It is a better service done to any servant of God if the people prove what he is saying from the scriptures.

So the Lord will reveal His thoughts to them that are weaned from milk them that are drawn from the breasts.

Anyhow, the main purpose of coming to this passage is to take the tenth verse. For God's Word comes in this way, it must be precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little. Of course, that requires that one should be properly focused because it is not like our regular books where the chapter deals with a particular subject and moves on to yet another subject in the second chapter. No.

Paul drawing inspiration from this passage and other passages in the Old Testament says in Hebrews 1:1 in many parts and in diverse manner, God communicated His mind to us all by His prophets in times of old. And there is a reference to how the scriptures came. So, one writer of scriptures may have an insight by divine help into an aspect of a given subject, while another writer of scriptures maybe given entrance into the same subject, but from another standpoint; and because truth is constant and not patented, the many sides of truth become harmonious when they come before full view. For a particular subject matter to be adequately understood therefore, all writers in the scriptures that discuss that same subject matter must be consulted.

So the one the Lord would teach knowledge and make to understand doctrine must be focused, must be patient, he must be humble. He must cast away all the traditions of men that he has been taught and be ready to study God's Word and to learn from him; and we are looking at this in the light of the Rapture doctrine.

We observed in the last edition that this doctrine was never preached by any of the apostles of the early church and was not known in the church until about 200 years ago. The man who first preached it (a man that was eminently spiritual) was Edwin Irvin of the Plymouth Brothers and it was based upon listening to a dream that a girl in his congregation had. But Jeremiah tells us that "he who has a dream, let him tell his dream, and he who has God's Word, let him preach God's Word; what is chaff compared to the wheat".

Of course if this man had simply followed this principle here enunciated (Isaiah 28 and Hebrews 1) he would have known that there was something wrong with reading and understanding I Thessalonians 4 that way.

Anyhow, when he preached it, a fellow minister who was in the assembly, John Darby, was greatly impressed since it suited the fancy of the Lord's people to think that before the great judgements that would crush all the earth, the church would be taken up to safety in the heavens; and when all things have been destroyed, they will come back to be rulers of a world that contains no people but themselves; ruling themselves, kings having no subjects.

So John Darby who edited the King James Version of the Bible placed the teaching of the Rapture in his footnotes. Dr. C. L. Scofield, another great man of God, was so impressed by the doctrine that he also in his edition of the King James Version of the Bible placed the teaching of the Rapture in his footnotes. Whoever buys the Bible, in reading the commentary upon certain verses is likely to buy that idea. D. W. Moody, also a great man of God that worked with a foremost Pentecostal church, included the doctrine in the Sunday school manual of the church. That is how the Pentecostal church came to accept this doctrine of the Rapture.

Now, nothing is said against these eminent servants of God, and we are not about to say that we have ascended to the great heights they attained, but it underscores one point that when it comes to spiritual

things, we must develop the attitude of the Bereans (Acts 17:11). A great man can make a mistake and a mistake rehearsed several times over become unquestionably accepted. The Berean Christians proved what the early church apostles preached and they only received those things because they conformed to the scriptures. The servants of God were very happy with that attitude and said that ...The Berean Christians were more noble than the Christians in Thessalonica who just received the word, were so excited about it, but did not prove it. Every witness concerning a given subject by a writer of scriptures must be consulted before we can see that topic in full view, as the Lord will have us receive it.

We have been able to establish clearly that there are three distinct time periods in what is called, the Second Advent of Christ. The Parousia, which covers so many years, the Epiphaneia which has two contrasting aspects – Christ making Himself known in the fullness of His glory as he reveals the many sons that have come to full union with Him in what is called the Manifestation of the Sons of God, and the judgement aspect in which the Lord judges things that are contrary to His Word and Will; first in His church and then in the nations. The third time period is the Basilea.

Of course we are excited when we find in Finis Dake's Bible, that he sees these three time periods except that he sees the Parousia as talking about the Rapture. So, for Finis Dake, the Rapture is the Parousia. In page 227 of his Bible, He sets this out. So, he talks about the Parousia, then the Second Advent proper that consists of the Epiphaneia and the Basilea.

However, these time periods are marked with several distinguishable characteristics, and by looking at all the things that happen each of the time periods, we know that the Parousia cannot just answer to one single event of catching up people into the air as contained in the Dake's reference Bible. The Parousia is over a period of time not an instance and is included in the Second Advent not out of it.

Now, if you come to Mark 13:34-37

³⁴For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work and commanded the porter to watch. ³⁵Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh - at even or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning. ³⁶Lest coming suddenly, he finds you sleeping. ³⁷And what I say unto you, I say unto all. Watch

The passage discusses the Parousia of Christ. It says it could be in the evening, it could be in the morning, it could be in the midnight or it could be in the cock crowing. These are not time elements in our physical day of 24 hours, but that the Parousia will be divided into four distinct brackets in the which the great presence of the Lord will be increasingly felt among his people through the ministry of the Word and of the Spirit.

So, the Parousia covers many years. There are different phases of the Lord's activities among His people in the time of the Parousia.

There are two other things we want to take note of in verse 34. It says for the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work and commanded the porter to watch. Two kinds of servants are revealed here. The first has to do with every man as a servant being busy about the work of the Lord, while the second relates to every man as a porter living a life of watching. All are commanded to work as revealed in verse 34 and at the same time, all are commanded to watch, as shown clearly in verse 35. We are all servants and porters at the same time.

Thus, there are two divisions of the services of the Lord's people. There is the field ministry where, by the grace of God, we serve men in the interest of the Lord. Then there is the Sanctuary ministry where by the Spirit of the Lord, we minister directly to the Lord and are taught of Him concerning the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

The first covers ministry as fulfilled publicly; and we can borrow a phrase from Luke 19:13. It says, "...Occupy till I come..." That has to do with our labour among men, to the unsaved, calling them to the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, to the saved, exhorting them according to the measure of Christ we have; That is the field ministry.

One of the problems of the visible church system is that many are overtly involved in public service that they are virtually lost in it. God is not so much interested in what we do among men (even though we all must serve him) but in making us become His sons in all respects. So, the prophetic element in our walk with God; that finger that point to the coming of the Lord is the porter ministry. Remember, the porter is to watch so that he can open when the Son of Man comes. The porter ministry emphasises a true and proper focus upon Christ. There is also a knowing by the Spirit and by the Word when the time approaches. Such knowledge and focus comes only in the place of a sustained and consistent devotion to the Lord

Much of the problem in the church is that so many persons are busy trying to work and are forgetting this principal element of watching, of growing in Christ, of learning to be sensitive in His presence, of understanding and approaching whatever the Lord is doing at any time; and seeking to be partners together with God in what He is doing. So we are commanded to watch lest when He comes, He finds us sleeping. Many that may be found sleeping at this early period of the Parousia are those who are to some extent faithfully serving God. Brethren, let us not be caught up in the work, let us be caught up with the Lord. When we see Him as He is, we are better able to do acceptably, what He asked us to do,

That takes us to Matthew 25 where these two great aspects of our ministry is clearly set forth. This is a passage that tells of the coming of the Son of God and our going to meet Him. The language is quite clear and does not suggest a sudden flight, but a very deliberate action of moving on to meet with the Lord who keeps revealing Himself through His Word and His Spirit.

There are two parables given us in Matthew 25. In the first 13 verses, you have the parable that brings to light the porter's aspect of our ministry, that prophetic dimension of our ministry in which we are to spend so much time with God. It involves ministering in praise and worship, seeking His glory in the midst of the earth; yes ministering in His pleasure and satisfaction. And in waiting upon Him, receiving divine communications that teach us the things that belong to the fullness of redemption. So, the first thirteen verses cover that aspect. But the aspect that covers occupy till I come is treated from verse 14 and goes on till verse 30.

Now we take the reading of Mathew 25, the very first verse, it says

¹Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

The Word "Then" can be taken as an adverb of time and relates what follows to what has been said in the previous chapter. There in the previous chapter (Matthew 24), we find that at some point, the Lord comes in His Parousia and begins to judge His house (I Peter 4:17), judging first among His servants. The faithful are set aside to a greater walk with God while the irredeemably unfaithful are appointed their portion with the hypocrites.

So, when He thus call some to a Higher walk with Him, He empowers them to go forth with the sound of the trumpet, calling men out of the failures and unfaithfulness of the visible church systems. Calling them to a closer walk with the Lord. Those who respond... so many will not respond because they would continue to do their own thing, going round and round and just concerning themselves with the milk, which milk doctrines are being taught in a perverted manner. While so many, a greater number will be doing their own thing; some will hear the sound of the trumpet and begin to turn to the Lord.

Of those who turn to the Lord, there will be two classes; and so verse 1 of Matthew 25 says Then (at that time) shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

Thus, the matter of the bridegroom's coming should be understood in the light of there being required from us, a deliberate going out to meet Him. He is coming and we must go to meet him. It is something that is supposed to be taking place on a daily basis. Even when the Rapture theory was preached two hundred years ago, the thought is that only Christians who are living overcoming lives will be caught up. Now, it has been watered down further to say anyone who just "accepts" Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour, who raises up his hand after listening to an evangelical delivery of the word, has immediately qualified to be caught up in the Rapture. May the Lord deliver us from mere fallacies.

So, we find that going to meet the bridegroom has a daily consequence as far as the believer is concerned. He is coming and we are going to meet him. We read verses 3 and 4 of Matthew 25

³They that were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them: ⁴But the wise took oil in their vessels (with their lamp). While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

Remember, He says; watch therefore lest when he comes, he will find you sleeping. And yet the two classes of persons revealed here – the wise and the foolish, were found sleeping. The next verse says

⁶And at midnight, there was a cry made; Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.

That is where we will be stopping for now. But notice that this passage suggests a busy spiritual activity employed by those who intelligently understand the character of the work that the Lord is doing at the time of the end; fitting those who turn to him for the fullness of redemption. Remember Hebrews 9:28 says and unto them that look for him shall he appear a second time unto fullness of salvation. The Lord bless you, the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and do you good in Jesus name. Amen.

RAPTURE

DOCTRINE

EXAMINED

Glory, honour, power and majesty be continually ascribed unto the name of the living God. We know, by the Lord's promise and by His Spirit, that He is doing a great work in the midst of the church at this time of the end. And we trust that we all with an open face, beholding the glory of the Lord may be drawn more and more unto the same glory until we become like him in all things.

We will be continuing in our examination of the Rapture doctrine. In this edition, we will be drawing our meditation essentially from Matthew 25, the passage with which we ended the last one. We begin this way. The terms or phrases: "The Kingdom of heaven" and the "The kingdom of God" can be used interchangeably when the context so admits it. But, strictly speaking, the "Kingdom of God" is one thing, and the "Kingdom of heaven" is another; another of the same kind.

The kingdom of God has always been, even before the creation of man and it will always be even after the work of redemption has been completed. But the kingdom of heaven is something introduced into the kingdom of God for a specific purpose. Thus, the kingdom of heaven had a definite beginning. It was introduced with the appearing of the king, the Lord Jesus Christ in the days of his flesh.

The church in her time of preparation, which fits her for rulership with Christ in the age to come, is the kingdom of heaven. We can talk about the kingdom of heaven in its time of preparation and we can talk about the kingdom of heaven when it is inaugurated or installed.

Thus, the main distinction in the kingdom of heaven is that it is the ruling class of the kingdom of God in the coming age. One of the purposes for the church in this age is to build her up to exercise ruling function in that age. So, heaven is a people. A people thoroughly trained, tested and perfected for the age that is just about breaking upon us.

The first thirty verses of Matthew 25 covers two parables, both having a common introduction: the kingdom of heaven is as..." And, although that phrase is repeated in the fourteenth verse, you find that it is in italics, showing that it is seen and understood as relating to the first verse of Matthew 25

The two parables cover the two great aspects of the ministry of the church, and the ministry of individuals within the church. Of course, we pointed this out in the last meditation. One aspect of our ministry has to do with ministering to people, proclaiming Christ to the saved class with a view to making them desire to be more and more like him. And at the same time we receive ministries from others in the church. It also has to do with ministering to the unsaved class to bring them to the knowledge of Christ in salvation. All of these can be grouped together as the field ministry,

But what we do in service towards men is not however, what saves us. Paul says he takes diligence to watch over his own soul and to be a supplicant at the altar of grace, fellowshiping with the Lord, taking time to know him, lest having preached to others he himself should become a castaway, a reject (1 Corinthians 9:27).

So, there is this other aspect of our ministry that has to do with the one-to-God fellowship. We can call this the sanctuary ministry. Here, we minister to the Lord in His praise worship and adoration and are led by His Spirit into the study of his word. He keeps unveiling himself, manifesting His power, bringing us to full redemption. It will also involve the Lord opening our understanding in the medium of the written word to His person, His purpose, and His power.

Then, it contains this other aspect of being assisted by God, anointed by God to go into prayers, intercessions, supplication, first for self, and then for others of the Lord's people: reaching out unto God to enable us experience the things that He is showing to us in the secret. All these relate to the sanctuary ministry. And, in this connection, there is an all-important instruction: watch. It is in Mark 13 set forth as the porter's ministry.

Also, there is a ministry to others, something outward, something public. It is the field ministry. And there is the ministry to the Lord, the sanctuary ministry. And we said one of the great problems in Christendom is that even men and women called to His service burn themselves out in the field ministry to the utter exclusion of ministering to the Lord. And even when men come to the Lord in fellowship, it is that they might garner information, receive grace and ability to minister to men. But there must be a concentration upon the Lord. We must not be lost in the work of the Lord through losing the Lord of the work. May the Lord help our understanding in Jesus name.

So, the aspect that covers our field ministry is revealed in the second parable from verse 14 of Matthew 25 to 30th verse, while that aspect that relates to the prophetic watch, coming into the blessed hope, coming to full union with Christ, being caught up to God and to His throne (Revelation 12:5) is discussed in the first thirteen verses.

With that background, let us now come to the meditation proper. We read from verse 1 of Matthew 25.

¹THEN shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

The first question is who are these ten virgins. And we answer; the ten virgins must be the prospective many-membered bride of Christ. We are told they go to meet the Bridegroom. And a little later, we are shown that the ready ones enter into the inner chamber for the marriage proper. So, at least, all should be agreed that these ten virgins speak of the prospective bridal class.

Then, the next question to be asked is when shall the kingdom of heaven become like or be made like unto ten virgins? Notice the very phrasing of the first part of verse 1, it begins with the word "THEN". And we are to understand that it is at a time when there is a spiritual movement, a movement of God's people out of the visible denominational church system seeking a greater walk with the Lord, yearning for full union with Christ.

In Matthew 22:2, we read that *the kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son*. Notice that the kingdom of heaven already had this characteristic at the time of the first advent of Christ. The Lord came to raise up a bride, a body of people that would be united with him in his divine glory and in the service of the Father's will. And in this parable in Matthew 22, we are shown that men and women from the unbelieving world are called to share in this heavenly glory. So, what we find in

Matthew 22:2 is a characteristic of the kingdom of heaven that has always been there since the time of the first advent of Christ.

But, the situation in Matthew 25:1 is different. We are told, "Then (at that time) shall the kingdom of heaven become like unto ten virgins. Thus, we are shown that this characteristic of the kingdom of heaven is futuristic relative to the time the Lord was speaking the words. It was something that was to be at a future time.

So, although this parable had always been a blessing and a source of inspiration to the Lord's people all through the church age, it has a special message to the Lord's people living at the time of the end, more so, at the time of the Parousia. This is important. By the time we take the series of mediation on the Principal sign of His coming, we will be looking at that more closely.

We go to another question: what are the characteristics of these ten virgins? First of all, we have already noted that they must be saved persons, persons who are already saved and spirit-filled, who in their hearts yearn for more of God than what is available in the immediate environment of the denominational church systems.

There is a movement out of the visible church systems and a seeking after God for such fuller experiences that belong to redemption. So, the persons described already have this characteristic.

And remember, they are said to be virgins. They have virgin heart purity towards Christ. Compare that to spiritual harlotry, where the heart has gone a-whoring after the world, lusting after worldliness and materialism. So, these persons have virgin purity. And in Revelation 14 we are told that virgins are they who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. So, there is a yearning for more of Christ.

The next question is: Of what consist this journey of the ten virgins to meet the Bridegroom. We answer that it must be a spiritual journey. It would involve moving from one estate in Him to a higher estate in Him. Remember here, it is said that they are going to meet the Bridegroom. Later in verse 6 we are told that the Lord is coming to meet them. This is quite important.

The Lord who is present with His people according to the promise of Matthew 28:20, is said to be coming. And that leads us to ask, what is the manner of the Lord's coming referred to here? Remember, this is the first time period of the Second Advent; the Parousia. During the Parousia, it is the intensification of his presence among His people that is the special characteristic. Through the ministry of the word and through the ministry of the Spirit, He comes more and more among His people. His presence becomes more and more felt by the discerning among His people.

In the early rain the things of our redemption were declared to us, and we saw Christ, as it were, from afar. But, in the latter rain, Christ is now ministering to us from a near presence. And some are already taking advantage of a greater knowledge of him to live in the abiding presence of Christ.

In verse 2, we are told concerning these ten virgins that *five of them were wise and five were foolish*. Now, many servants of God when they teach on this passage regard the fools, as those that are unsaved. But, from the first verse, it is clear that these are not just individuals who are not saved, but persons with great spiritual heart desire after God.

What then consist in their being foolish? We are told five were wise and five were foolish. What does the foolishness of these five virgins consist of? The next verse (Matthew 25:3) answers the question. It says, *those who are foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them*.

Oil in this passage is used to typify the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the accurate knowledge of Christ (Ephesians 1:17). There are three separate Greek words translated as wisdom in scriptures. In other

words, there are three spheres in which God makes His wisdom known to His people. The first is described by the Greek word *Sophia*. It speaks of the critical faculty by means of which we are made to know the things of God. It is something revelational, God making Himself known to us in Christ. The knowledge so gained is wisdom, and is represented by the Greek word *Sophia*.

The next is '*sunesis*'. It speaks of understanding what is revealed. Here the mind is in view. There is a mental appreciation of the message of Christ revealing His saving purpose. The third one is *phronesis*. It talks about wisdom in practical matters, in daily affairs. It is about prudential dealings, a right application of what is understood and what is known of the Lord's mind to determine how life is to be lived on daily basis. In the closing verses of Isaiah 52, we are told that the Lord Jesus Christ will deal prudently. The reference is to the fact that He will employ great wisdom in the exercise of judgement (John 5:22). He will make Himself known to those whose hearts are perfect towards him. He will be able to know who to admit into favour, into certain privileges of the kingdom and who to shut away from these favours. He will deal prudently.

It is this third dimension of wisdom (prudence) that is the issue here in Matthew 25. In this connection we are told that five of these ten virgins were wise and five were foolish. So, the five who were wise were actually discrete. They conducted their daily affairs in the light of what they now know and understand of the Lord's will. The other five virgins were foolish. They were not fools, but they were foolish, stressing lack of application of self to what is already revealed and known of the Lord's will.

Thus, what is lacking is that the foolish picked and dropped the Spirit of consecration. There was no constancy of spirit. And what would have resulted from a constancy of spirit is the presence of oil in their vessels, the supply of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the accurate knowledge of Christ. Remember in Ephesians 1:17, Paul was praying that the Ephesians' church should have such a grace. They were already saved, spirit-filled and walking to the best of their ability in the way of Christ, but Paul, seeing them and knowing how they are full of love for the Lord's people was asking this additional grace for them. We constantly need to pray this prayer for ourselves.

So, it is the Spirit of Wisdom and revelation in the accurate knowledge of Christ that is typified by oil here. Thus, the difference between the wise and foolish was not in their mental capacities but in the attitude to an understanding of what the Lord's will is. The five that were foolish did not apply themselves consistently and so were not possessed of the oil.

The words of the Lord Jesus in Luke 16:8 help to reinforce this observation. He said that *the children of this world were in their own generations wiser than the children of the kingdom*. From the context, we know that the wisdom in this connection refers to being shrewd, dealing prudently, knowing how to apply one's self and to plan out one's interest in a way that will ensure great gain.

For the children of this world, when they set their hearts upon a thing, they go all out to get it. They make plans and exercise themselves strenuously to execute their plans. They wake up early and go to bed late. They burn the midnight oil. They employ all soulical and physical powers they can muster, exploiting all opportunities sometimes even doing the seemingly impossible, to ensure they achieve desired results. The Lord says this is wisdom even though it is worldly.

However, in relation to pursuing the place of honour and glory in the kingdom, we do not always find the same wisdom revealed in the children of the kingdom. Here in Matthew 25, we are shown that this wisdom was lacking in five of these ten virgins who were on a spiritual journey to meet the bridegroom. May the Lord cause us to be wise indeed unto Salvation.

³They that were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels (with their lamp). .

The "vessel" here symbolises the believer's soul. Paul says "*but in a great house, there are many vessels, and some to honour and some to dishonour*" (2 Tim 2:20). We know that the great house in reference is the church.

So "vessel" symbolises the soul. For the foolish, there was no practical knowledge of consecration. While the light burns brilliantly, there was no difference between the foolish and the wise. It was when the light of God's Word was dim relative to the people that a difference emerged at the time of coming out of their sleep.

With that, we will take a straight reading again from verse one to verse six and we will make some other observations. Matthew 25:1-5

¹THEN shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. ²And five of them were wise and five were foolish. ³They that were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them: ⁴But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. ⁵While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept

In the margin, it says, "While the bridegroom was taking his time". That of course is a characteristic of the activities of the Lord. There are seasons of refreshing granted unto the Lord's people and there are intervals between these seasons of refreshing allowing the church to live in the good of that which has already been given. Remember the wilderness journey, when the Ark of the Covenant moved forward because the cloudy pillar between the Cherubim lifts up; then the whole of the children of Israel moved forward. But at what time the pillar of cloud descends upon the mercy seat, it was indicative that they are to stop, put their tents in order and stay for a while. And we are told that they kept the charge of the Lord when the pillar of cloud tarried in the holiest of all.

The tarrying of the Bridegroom is characteristic of the Lord's dealing with us. He teaches us; He makes known to us His will. He allows time for us to internalise what He has revealed to us, and to cry out unto Him for the fulfilment in our lives the promised blessings.

But then we are told that while there was this tarrying, all the virgins slumbered and slept, both the wise and the foolish. And that is a critical point in the narration. As the light of the word burns brilliantly, there is freshness in the ministry of the word. Then the Lord opens to us more and more of the redemptive blessings in Him, and this keeps us awake. 1 Thessalonians 5 says, "They that sleep, sleep in the night (that is night relative to the things of God). But we are not in darkness as to allow that day come upon us unawares.

So, verse 5 of Matthew 25 says *and while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept*, and in verse 6 we are told, *and at midnight there was a cry made behold the Bridegroom*. And we ask who made this cry? It is the faithful among the Lord's people.

The first parable in Matthew 25 emphasises a general characteristic of this specific class of God's people, that spiritual movement that seeks more of Christ. We are shown that there is a widespread tendency for slumber and sleep. However, here in the sixth verse we are told of some who do not go the way of others but keep watching. It is because they knew the divine schedule. And so, they were able to receive that fresh release, that fresh outpouring of the Lord's word and of His spirit and are able to announce a new day is come upon the church. And see how the announcement is given in verse 6, "*behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him*".

So, we have three classes here: the faithful class, the measurably wise class and the measurably foolish class. May the Lord assist us ever to keep on our devotions, holding on to the Lord, keeping track with all the promptings of the Spirit, responding to him, having an anointing of praise and worship upon our spirit. And as we share thus with Him in our closet, He keeps us in tune with whatever He is doing. Amos 3:7 say the Lord will do nothing but He revealeth His secrets unto His servants the prophets. The prophetic spirit is to come increasingly upon the Lord's people who walk faithfully with Him.

Then next the reaction: *Verse 7 says then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.* Notice the relatedness between the burning of the lamps and the movement of the virgins. It is not just a passive thing to wait for the Bridegroom. It is something that requires us to seek the Lord diligently in the light of what is being declared to us in the ministry of the word. Those who seek the Lord have further understanding and know how these things relate to everyday life. So, they arose from their sleep, took their lamps and trimmed it.

Verse 8 says; and the foolish said to the wise, give us of your oil, for our lamps are going out. Note they did not say "give us oil" but "give us out of your oil". That is, exercise yourself in the things that you know, assist us, sit with us, teach us, enable us to have a practical entrance into the meaning of that sound, "behold the bridegroom". And of course the wise answered *Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you...*

The phrase "not so" is in italics showing that the translators, supposing to bring in clarity, added it. But it is not really needed. The wise were sympathetic. But they knew that they have lost out time when they slumbered and slept. In recovering themselves, they began to take out time to really seek the Lord, to wait upon the Lord. Thus, they told the foolish virgins, "if we tend to be unmindful of our present state and give you attention, there may not be enough oil for you and for us. But go ye rather to the sellers and buy for yourselves".

There will come a time just when the glory is near to be revealed and the tokens are already being released, when the things the Lord will be unveiling are so great that men would be under pressure as though there is "time no longer." At that time every man will be more concerned for his own soul, wanting to make optimum use of the time left to make the kingdom honours his own. Right now there is still abundant help. We can easily find persons to share with us, to put us through, to spend hours with us in counselling and in prayers. The Lord is yet causing the things that had been taught us before to be retaught again. Things are yet moving on in a convenient pace we might say.

But things shall not continue to be like that. And it behoves us to make the best use of whatever opportunity the Lord is bringing our way now. The scripture says "the son that gathereth in summer is a wise son but he that sleepeth at harvest time causeth shame. May the Lord make us wise.

In another edition we will be able to look at the things the foolish are to do in order to be able to come into the possession of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation unto an accurate knowledge of Christ. But let's take an observation now. It is a lack of consecration that caused them not to have the oil in the first instance. And a return to the life of consecration is the way to buying or receiving the oil.

In the closing verses of the parable we are told that *while the foolish went to buy the bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.* So, the preparation for entering in with him unto the marriage is the readiness of heart and mind. They were ready, they had grown, and they had acquired more of the life of Christ inside of them. They that were ready went in with Him.

Finally, we are told that the door was shut against the foolish virgins. Thus, having a place in the ruling class of the kingdom of heaven is something to attain unto. And the opportunity is not always there. There comes a time when the door is shut.

We close with one more observation in the thirteenth verse. We are told as in summing up this parable, "watch therefore". So, the main purpose of this parable is to sound a call unto a life of constantly watching and holding unto the Lord. We are to seek an increase of the prophetic spirit. Not being over-involved in the affairs, of this life. Not lost in the work of the Lord while loosing the Lord of the work. Being mindful of this: that the Lord is well pleased in our becoming more like Him than in bringing the whole world to Christ. When we are like him in union of life, then the work of the harvest will become more fruitful, more satisfying to God.

We will be picking up again some of the things said in the concluding apart of this meditation in the next edition. May the Lord bless you in Jesus name.

17

RAPTURE

DOCTRINE

EXAMINED

We have been looking at the Rapture Doctrine, examining it in the light of the scriptures of truth. We are showing that the doctrine is false. And more importantly, it tends to be injurious to the Lord's people who now ought to be in a preparation for the fullness of the coming of the Son of God in glory and power.

It will be necessary to stress again that the Bible is of divine authorship. Over forty human writers were under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as they penned their message. Now, we know the Bible is almost entirely prophetic. The Bible is a book of prophecy. On the surface some books seem only historical, such books as 1 Samuel and II Samuel, I Kings and II Kings, and much of the record of the journeys of the children of Israel through the wilderness to the land of promise. These are apparently only historical. But several passages in the New Testament make us to see that even these historical records carry allegorical essence and have prophetic undertones.

Let's understand that the figurative expressions, spiritual symbols, and imageries are employed in setting forth the message of the word of God. And, of course, we should expect a consistency in the use of any prophetic symbol. Thus, in looking at how a particular writer of scripture uses a particular word, which has prophetic carriage, and looking again at how another, and yet another writer of scripture uses that same word, we expect to find a consistency. Thus, no prophecy of scriptures is of private interpretation (2 Peter

1:20). That is, you cannot interpret a prophecy of scriptures purely in the light of the witness of one writer; other writers must be consulted.

In the series of meditation on the Language of prophecy, we examined some of the words found in the language register of prophecy. We studied the usages of such words as heaven, earth, star, the sun, the beast etc. It was a preparation we were taking on in order to be able to enter into the book of Revelation. A book on those series of mediation is already in print, and the interested reader can request for a copy. For our present purpose, it will be sufficient to draw our attention to a principle that is very useful in interpreting scriptures. Paul says in I Corinthians 2:9 – 13.

⁹But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. ¹⁰But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. ¹¹For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the Spirit of man, which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit, which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. ¹³Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

So, Paul shows us here a principle used in the interpretation of scriptures. He says in the words of the King James Version, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual". The Amplified Version of the Bible is more faithful to the Greek word translated as comparing. It says "comparing and interpreting spiritual truths by making reference to spiritual truths". So, truth interprets truth.

The meaning of this, in practical terms, is that when a writer of scriptures covers a subject matter, because he cannot give everything there is about that subject matter, the witnesses of other writers must be consulted. And in doing that, a fuller view of how God intends for us to understand that subject matter will then be before us. And we are saying all of these things in relation to the scriptures we have been examining, which scriptures are often used to teach the Rapture doctrine.

In the last edition, we examined Matthew 25. There, we found that at the time of the end, the kingdom of heaven shall become like unto ten virgins, which took their lamp and went out to meet the bridegroom. We saw as a prophetic indication, that at the closing period of the church age, during the time of the Parousia of Christ, there shall be a trooping out of believers who love the Lord from the visible denominational church systems, desiring more and more of the life and glory of the Lord.

From the very context of Matthew 25, it can be inferred that the movement of the virgins to meet the Bridegroom is a spiritual journey. It is not a sudden flight. He comes to meet us and we go to meet him. He comes to us in His word and His Spirit, and we go to meet Him as we make use of the things He shows us in our fellowship with Him. This coming is different from his appearing, his coming in the Epiphaneia, when he comes in His glorified estate, and the perfected church are associated with him in that glory.

We did mention in that meditation that we would touch on some few things that will lead to a fuller understanding of Matthew 25. We will be doing that in our meditation on "The Principal Sign of His Coming". The little we can do, for now, is to say again, that it was indicated in that parable of the ten virgins that the door was shut. The kingdom of heaven is all about those who share rule with Christ in the age to come. Heaven, in this context, is a people, not merely a place.

There is, of course, the abode of God and of spirit angels, called heaven. But in the context of Matthew 25, the heaven is a reference to a people who share rule with Christ in the age to come. And we are told the door was shut. That shows to us that the opportunity to share with Christ in the rulership of the age to come does not last forever. Proverbs 27:24 says *For riches are not forever; and doth the crown endure to all generations?* The reference is to the riches of the divine nature, the crown of life, life in its highest expression, the immortal life.

The call for a people to share in the divine glory is given only to the church. The door of invitation and opportunity is opened to all that are called, that is, all believers in Christ Jesus (Revelation 4:1) until the end of the church age when that door is shut. And from the passage, it is revealed that not all believers (all that are called in this church age) will attain to it.

The understanding in certain quarters that the wise virgins are believers while the foolish virgins are unbelievers, certainly leads to error. This is because for one to be called a virgin, he or she must have been saved by grace, filled with the Holy Spirit and have a desire for full union with Christ. They must have left the Spiritual environment of the denominational church systems and must be opening up to the prophetic word concerning the Lord's coming.

The door was shut against the foolish virgins, not because they were not believers; not even because they do not love the Lord, but because they did not have the Spirit of discernment upon their hearts. They did not have the Spirit of understanding, having picked and dropped the call to consecration until there was no longer a working understanding of the truth of the kingdom of heaven.

So, that is the little bit we want to add, that the opportunity for rulership with Christ is open to all in this age. And, at the close of the age, all of the Lord's people who have not known God in overcoming grace will have to settle for a lesser inheritance than God intended. We may want to talk about the man-child company and the Bridal class (Revelation 12) in reference to believers who walked with the Lord in overcoming grace.

In this edition, we will be looking at John 14, being one of the scriptures used to teach the Rapture doctrine. We will be reading verses 1-3,15-19,21 –23. Follow the reading carefully.

¹LET NOT your heart be troubled: ye believer in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house are many mansion, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also. ¹⁵If ye love me, keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter that he may abide with you forever. ¹⁷Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him: for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. ¹⁸I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. ¹⁹Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more: but ye see me: because I live ye shall live also... ²¹He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. ²²Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord how is it that thou wouldest manifest thyself unto us, and not to the world? ²³Jesus answered and said unto him, if a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

Now, the first thing we want to say is that there are nine distinct usages of the word "heaven" in scriptures. And the context in which the word is used in a given occasion, assist us to understand its

meaning. But it is noteworthy that in all of these usages, the scripture does not make any effort to tell us how great and wonderful the heaven of God is...

Now, some suppose that Revelation 21:24 is a description of the heaven of God. But that can only bring a loss of the real interest. The passage describes the glory of the kingdom of heaven, the church perfected and glorified, raised up as a bride adorned for her husband, united with the Lord, her husband, in the service of God in the age to come. These spiritual realities are conveyed to us using physical but prophetic symbols. May the Lord give us understanding, in Jesus name.

We are saying, that the scripture does not make effort to tell us how glorious and wonderful the heaven of God is. The reason is because everything about the divine is ultra-excellent (if we may use that phrase). Even the body, the divine body which the Lord's people will put on when they come to fullness of life in him, radiates such excellent glory that it will be blinding for mortals to behold it. Remember the experience of Saul on the way to Damascus. He just had a vision of the Lord of glory, and it blinded him.

The things that belong to the heaven of God are exceedingly beautiful, wonderful, and extremely glorious. But that is not the subject matter in John 14.

Now, in order to get into the message on hand, we will first of all, read the passage (John 14:1-3) the way it is generally understood in the Christian world, bringing out the thoughts that were built into this passage by the traditions of men to sponsor or support the doctrine of the Rapture. So, we will be reading John 14:1-3 again, but take note of the difference between what we shall read and what is given in the scripture.

We read, "let not your hearts be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me,. In my Father's house, which is heaven, are many separate compartments, which I may call mansions, for the very size of it, its beauty and grandeur. Well there are still some unfinished aspects of these mansions. I go to heaven to commission angelic contractors to put finishing touches to these mansions. And because I expect that several millions of persons will believe on me, there will be some new mansions, which will be constructed in God's house, which is heaven. I go to prepare a place for you. And you should expect that when the construction work would have been over, I will come and take you back with me to heave, and you will be having the same mansion-type with me. That where I am, there you may be also"

This is how men will have us understand this passage. And so, we sing, "in my Father's house, there are many mansions there, in my Father's house above. Happy, happy, happy we shall be, in my Father's house above". And of course, all of these things are used to sponsor the teachings of the Rapture.

Now, let us go into this scripture, faithful to the word of God, trusting that the Holy Spirit will bring great enlightenment unto us. There are three words that need be examined closely in this passage in order to be able to come into the meaning of what the Lord was telling His people. The first is the Father's house, the meaning of the Father's "house" here. The second is "mansion", and the third is "place", "I go to prepare a place for you". Build around these three words is the Lord's teaching in this passage.

We ask, what is the Father's house? And we answer straightaway that the Father's house here referred to is not heaven. The Father's house, spiritually speaking is a body of people. If you will come with me to I Peter 2:4-5. It says *to whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious...* The reference is to the Lord Jesus Christ; He is a living stone, the chief corner stone, chosen of God and precious. And we keep coming to him as we have vital fellowship with Him. So we are told in the next verse

⁴Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Therefore, what is true of the Lord Jesus Christ is true also of the believer in Him. Now, take note of the following thoughts drawn from the fifth verse. One, the house of the Lord is a spiritual house, made up of living stones, which word is used to symbolise the believers, persons who have known the Lord in Salvation and have been filled with the Holy Spirit, and are having fellowship with Christ.

Secondly, that spiritual house is a Priesthood. The reference is to sons of God suitably equipped to serve in the interest of God. So, the idea of God's people being a house to Him is closely associated with the service they fulfil amongst men in the interest of God. God's house is a body of serving sons.

We go next to Hebrew 3. Then we will find again that God's house is a people called to serve in the interest of God. Notice we have taken the witness of Peter and we want to examine the witness in the book of Hebrews. Earlier in John 14, we had seen the witness of John. We are doing all these things because the scriptures say, "In the mouth of two or three witnesses, let every word be confirmed". In these three witnesses, we will be able to see very closely that there is a consistency in the way the word "the Father's house" is to be understood in scriptures. So, let us read Hebrews 3:1-6

¹WHEREFORE, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; ²Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.

³For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who had builded the house hath more honour than the house. ⁴For every house is builded by some man, but he that builded all things is God. ⁵And Moses verily was faithful in all his house (the reference here is to the nation of Israel as a house unto God), as a servant, for a testimony of those things, which were to be spoken after. ⁶But Christ as a Son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

That confirms the fact that the Father's house is a people, and Christ is the minister in that house, building it up, making it a house of light, and beaming forth the light of the gospel of peace to all nations. The Lord Jesus Christ, quoting from Isaiah 56:7 said in Matthew 21:13, it is written, *my house shall be called a house of Prayers* (unto all nations)

Another scriptures we may want to look at, from the witness of Paul, is 2 Timothy 2:20. It says "*in a great house* (and the Father's house which we are is a great house) *there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and earth, and some to honour and some to dishonour*". Here again, God's people are pictured as a great house and this is said in relation to service, in relation to the Lord's people being vessels of service unto Him.

Again, in a reference to the fact that a believer's body can be seen as a house, Jesus told the Jews, *destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days.* (John 2:9). Quite clearly, the Father's house is a body of people constituted to serve the interest of God. Service is in view in the word "house"

Then the next word we are going to look out is "mansion". The Lord said in John 14:1 "*In my Father's house are many mansions...*" The Greek word translated mansion here is "Mone". W. A. Vine, that great Bible Scholar, who himself believed in the Rapture doctrine but was faithful in the interpretation of this word, (mone), says in his dictionary of New Testament words says that there is nothing in the word *mone* to indicate several compartments in heaven or anywhere. So the word *mone* has nothing to do with physical apartments.

What then does the word translated as "mansion" as used here mean? First the word must be understood in relation to the word "house" because the mansion is inside the Father's house. Thus, whatever meaning it has can only be in the context in which it appears here. If as we have discovered, the Father's house is a body of people, a body of serving sons, the word translated mansion here should relate to the service of God's people. Also, the word "place"; he says "*I go to prepare a place for you*" is limited by whatever understanding we have of the words "house" and "mansion".

Now the Greek word "mone" translated as mansion in John 14:1, ought to be translated "room" or abode. In the Father's house, there are many rooms or abodes; but those who translated the word "mansion" had this kind of thought at the back of their minds: "If we say in the Father's house which is in heaven there are many rooms or abodes, and each believer will be assigned a room, then for a man who has been living in a duplex " here on earth to be assigned a room in heaven is nothing exciting". So, they chose to put the right "abode" into verse 23 while leaving the word mansion in verse 1; but, it would have been more consistent to translate the word "mansion" or as "abode" or "room" in both verse 1 and 23.

The word "mone" means abode or room, a place to fill, a place to abide in the Father's house. The thoughts in this word of the Lord (John 14:1) is that the Father's house, this great house of serving sons, this house of priest and kings which the Father is raising up, of which He is the builder as well as the foundation stone, has many utility rooms within it in which different kind of services can be carried out. Putting it in a more practical way, in the Father's house, there are many realm of spiritual estate in which service may be done in His interest.

One level of service though may be equally important as other levels of services within the Father's house might be inferior to another in terms of serving the Lord's mind and purpose. So, in the Father's house, there are many realms in which the Lord's people can serve Him. Each of these realms has things about them (provisions within the room) that enable the individual standing in that capacity to serve God acceptably.

To, illustrate further, we will look at 1 Corinthians 12:4-6. Holding the figure of a house, remember that if you are in a house, you can talk about furniture and you can talk about other utilities within the room that enable the occupant to carry whatever service he wants to do there. The fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22,23 are adornments in all of these rooms, while the gifts of the Spirit (the nine gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12:1-10) and the ministering gifts (the five fold ministerial gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11) are spiritual adornments that enable those who occupy these rooms to serve God in the power of the Spirit. Let us read 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

⁴Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. ⁵And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. ⁶And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God, which worketh all in all

There are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit. These spiritual gifts when possessed by persons, who dedicate themselves and walk with the Lord in consecration, make possible the development of ministries. Coming to the estate of ministry is to become either an apostle, or a prophet or an evangelist or a shepherd or a teacher.

The spiritual gifts are by the Spirit, but the various offices (called administration in verse 5) are expressions of the office of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the great apostle, the Apostle of apostles. He is that great prophet God promised to send (Deuteronomy 18:15; John 1:21), He is the great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, the great Evangelist who reaches a soul before any man can reach him. He is also the Teacher of teachers; the Adonai. So, the ministerial offices are part expressions of the office of the Lord. That is why we are told that there are differences of administration, but it is the same Lord.

Again, there are diversities of operations. Each ministry gift has the sphere of services marked out for him. For example, in the early church, James was a resident apostle. He did not travel out. Peter was a travelling ministry as much as Paul; but there was still some distinction. Peter ministered mainly to the Jews while Paul mainly to the gentiles. Thus, even in the same room such as the apostolic office, persons occupying the same sphere of service have distinct operations assigned them.

So, in John 14, the Lord Jesus Christ was talking about going to map out strategies for the proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom. We are told in Ephesians 4:8 that *when HE ascended up on high, he led men who were hitherto captives to the flesh and captives to the world... He led them captive unto himself.* Other translation says *He led captivity in his train.* Then He gave back these captives of His as gifts to the church. The reference is to men and women that God had laid His hand upon, totally arrested for His use, and whom He has filled with His Spirit and grace to serve His will. These are given as ministry gifts to the church.

We are talking about the Lord mapping out strategies for the proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom. That is the subject matter of John 14, 15, 16 and 17. The entire discourse, which was given after the Last Supper, among other things prepared the disciples for the work they were to do after his death and resurrection. In John 14:3, He says *If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself so that where I am, there you may be also...*

Not "where I shall be" as in a reference to Heaven or to His ministry from the invisible sphere of the heavens, but "where I am" presently in relation to the Father's plans and purpose, the position I occupy as the Son of God upon the earth, the great works that I do, the kind of entrance I have into the Father's mind and knowledge of His plans, that where I am, you may be also. He said in verse 12 of the same chapter, *verily, verily I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to my father.*

The Lord was talking about lifting them up into a position where they can function as sons of God, where they can have the same relationship with the Father that they saw Him have, where they are able to do the same works and even greater works than they saw him do. This is the place in the Father's house where the Lord was talking about.

Yet the question may be asked "In what respect did He go and prepare a place for us?" It was in His going unto the Father. He had to die, be raised from the dead and be glorified with the glory of the Father before his disciples will be able to enter into that place in the Father's house he had in mind for them. The disciples were to receive power (power to live as the sons of God, power to know the Father in an intimate manner, to know His will, His truth, His plans and power to be witnesses of the glory of the Son of God) when the Holy Spirit is come upon them (Acts 1:8). We are told in John 7: 39 that the Holy Spirit could not be given because Jesus was not yet glorified.

He had to be glorified first; He had to ascend to the realm of divinity and glory. "I go to prepare a place for you" he said, "and *If I go, I will come again, and receive you unto myself.* The reference is not to the Epiphaneia, the coming of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory. The coming again, in this sense is the coming of the Lord in the Holy Spirit.

So, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the exalted Christ, coming to carry out the work of Christ through the medium of such yielded vessels, such servants of God as are apprehended by the Lord Jesus Christ. By the Holy Spirit Baptism, He comes to us again and receives us to Himself, bringing us to that estate where we are more able to relate with Him and the things of the Kingdom.

Thus, let us read from verse 15 of John 14 and follow the reading carefully.

¹⁵If you love me, keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter that he may abide with you forever, ¹⁷Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him, but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you and shall be in you.

The Lord came again to the disciples in the baptism of the Holy Spirit; but he came after he had completed the arrangements for the disciples to go forth with the gospel of the Kingdom and make disciples of all nations. We read on

¹⁸I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you.

I will not leave you comfortless; I will not leave you like orphans.. The reference is to the time period from His resurrection to His Second Advent; a period spanning about two thousand years. He is not going to leave us in those days as orphans, but He will come to us in the person and power of the Holy Spirit.
Verse 19

¹⁹Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more, but ye see me because I live, ye shall live also.

We see Him in the working of His Spirit, in the Holy Spirit making Christ known to us in the revelation of His word and the unveiling of His power and glory. The world seeth him no more, but we see him and because he lives, we live also.

²⁰At that day, ye shall know that I am in the Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

This is not something to be known when we get to heaven, but something to be increasingly known and experienced here on earth. Verse 21

²¹He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him...

When He unveils or reveals Himself to us; we have wherewithal to serve Him. So, in verse 23, He says *If a man loves me, he will keep my words...* If a man loves me, he will keep my Logos. He will admit himself to the full range of my Logos, detailing the works of faith, the labours of love and the patience of hope. If a man loves me, he will keep my words...

²³... And my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him

So the word "mone" or "abode" or if you like "mansion", is in reference to what we become when the divine Spirit carries out a work within us. As we walk with the Lord faithfully, the divine one makes His abode in us, equipping and fitting us to become a temple of witness unto Him, and a habitation of God by His Spirit.

We shall take one more reading confirming what has been said, clarifying further, the meaning of having a place in the Father's house; with that, we shall close. Zechariah 3. There, Joshua, the high priest of the nation of Israel was shown clothed in filthy garments and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him in his ministry. The Lord had mercy on him, reached out to him and cleansed him of his iniquity, causing him to have a change of raiment. In verse 6-7 we are told

⁶And the angel of the LORD protested unto Joshua, saying, ⁷Thus saith the LORD of Hosts: if thou wilt walk in my ways (remember John14: 21,23 He that hath my commandments and keepeth them... If a man loves me, he will keep my words...) and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give you places to walk among these that stand by

Thus, quite evidently, "places", "rooms", "abodes", "mansions" are positions of service and honour in the Father's house and it is as we learn to follow the Lord faithfully, faithful to His revealed will, faithful to all aspects of truth that have been revealed, that we find the Lord working in us by His Spirit, fitting us to serve the Father's interest even more faithfully.

May the Lord Bless you and keep you alive to His voice and to His will at this time of the end, in Jesus name, Amen.

18

RAPTURE

DOCTRINE

EXAMINED

We are continuing in our meditation on the Rapture doctrine, showing its fallacy and its evil, and then going ahead at the end of all these discussions to establish what the scriptures teaches on the true hopes of the believer; the hope of perfection and glorification which the Lord has marked out for the overcoming church.

If you will turn with me to 2 Thessalonians 2, we shall be taking the next passage in our examination of the Rapture doctrine. We will be looking at the first eight verses of this chapter in the light of what we find in Hebrews 10:25.

Now you will recall that the Rapture doctrine simply put, says that the Lord will descend from the heaven, the starry heavens, into the atmospheric heavens, that is the sky. Then Christians everywhere who have died, and supposedly still in the grave, will be raised up from their graves, in a quick flight to meet the Lord in the air; Christians who are remaining and love the Lord will be caught up with them in an instance of time (i.e. suddenly) in the clouds.

Then the full body: Christ and His people, will now move beyond the stars into the heavens of God, which is supposed to be located beyond the highest star; and when we get to heaven, each one of us is to be given a mansion in God's house. The first major activity after that will be the marriage to Jesus. Thereafter, for seven years, we will be combing the nooks and cranny of heaven, rejoicing, plucking fruits from the tree of life that grows in one street in heaven. There are not many streets in heaven but only one, the tree of life grows everywhere on that street, and we will pluck from its fruits and eat.

Thereafter, after we have satisfied ourselves with the splendour of heaven, there shall be a great gate opened from heaven, and right from beyond the starry sky, we will be looking at what is going on, on earth. It is said that after we have left the earth, there will be calamities, destruction, tribulations and the nations of mankind will kill themselves; and almost everyone, will be destroyed.

Then after seven years of rejoicing to see mankind, including those of our relations who have not known God destroyed in this way, we will now come from heaven. The Lord Jesus will sit on a white horse and we also will sit on horses, and with the sword, we will fight with those persons who are remaining on the earth and destroy them. Thereafter, it will be wedding reception on earth.

This is how the doctrine goes, and we will be showing that it is absurd. Even common reasoning will find a lot of contradictions in that scheme: getting wedded and after seven years you do the wedding reception on earth. Then we will rule over ourselves on the earth and then go back to heaven after a thousand years. Brethren, in understanding, let us be men. These are days God is teaching the church concerning what the true hopes of the church are so that faith coming to us in the environment of the revealed word will enable us to respond to God appropriately.

So, let us come to this passage, one of the several used to teach the Rapture doctrine. We have deliberately left 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17. We believe we will be picking that up at the end of these series of meditations. Again, 1 Corinthians 15 is another passage that we have deliberately left out. We will be looking at these passages after we have gathered enough insight from other scriptures that will assist a better appreciation of the things given us in those scriptures. Therefore, please turn to 2Thessalonians 2:1-8.

¹NOW we beseech you brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, ²That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. ³Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition. ⁴Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. ⁵Remember ye not, that when I was yet with you, I told you these things? ⁶And now

you know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. ⁷For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he is taken out of the way. ⁸And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

Our first object is to show what this passage is not saying in order that we might be able to understand what the scripture is saying. Now, I will read again verse 1, showing how many in the visible church systems will have us understand it. This is the way it reads. "Now we beseech you brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our being caught up together unto Him"; that in essence is how they will have us understand this verse.

In order to have a clear understanding of what the apostle Paul was saying here, we are going to look closely at some words. It will be appropriate to have an entrance in to certain key words used here, for it is only in that light that we can understand this scripture. The first is the word "coming" as used in this passage "I beseech you by the coming of the Lord".

The word "coming" here is the Greek word "Parousia". Parousia means presence. Now if Paul wanted to show to the believers that the Rapture had not taken place as some suppose he was labouring to do in this passage, then all he needed to do was to tell the people "Ah, ah, don't you know I am still around, Peter is here, John is here, everyone is still around. If we have been caught up in the air, will you not know, for your seeing us is sure enough proof that the Rapture has not taken place".

That would have settled the matter if the coming of the Lord and our gathering together unto Him referred to in verse 1 were to mean the Rapture as brother Finis Dake and other preachers of the Rapture doctrine would have us believe. These are great men and we are not attempting to belittle them in any way, but we all must realise that in this hour, the Lord is making everything clear, putting all things straight. They might have stumbled in this doctrine in their days, because the time was not due for the church to enter into the fullness of the inheritance and so they had little light on the high calling, but we upon whom the end of the ages have come cannot afford to make the same mistakes.

Thus, if the word Parousia here were to be understood as Rapture, the argument Paul was making would have been totally unnecessary. Reading again from verse 2 of 2Thessalonians 2; it says

²That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or troubled neither by spirit...

The word "spirit" here is small letter is. Thus, it refers to prophecy, vision, dream, a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge and all such manifestations of the Spirit bringing a message to the people. So the phrase "by spirit" means by a word spoken by man as from God. Then he says

²...nor by word (that is by teachings nor by letters as from us (the apostles) as that the day of Christ is at hand (has already arrived)

If what the coming or Parousia means is "Rapture", then what we should be understanding from verse 2 is that "well the day of the rapture has arrived, the rapture has taken place and we are troubled because

we have not been caught up". But, we must understand that the Parousia does not mean "Rapture". "Rapture" is a strange word only because it is assigned a meaning that is not found in scriptures

Thus, the first word of note there is "Parousia". We have said time and again that the word "Parousia" refers to the presence of the Lord, which the Lord communicates to His people at the commencement of His Second Advent. From Matthew 28:20 where the Lord told the disciples "Lo I am with you always even to the end of the age", we know that the Lord has always been present with His people, but in the appreciation of the Lord's people of His presence, there is so much ignorance.

He is present but we do not see Him, as we ought. Many times, we create things in our assemblies that suggest that we are looking at the Lord as someone that is outside. Hence, we make a temple, decorate it and when we pass by the temple, we bow our heads; but God does not dwell in temples made with hands, we are the temple of the Living God; you are the temple of the Living God.

So, what does it mean then if the word "Parousia" is "presence" and He has always been present with us? What is Paul then saying? Paul is saying there will be a great activity of the Lord Jesus Christ towards His people that will make us enjoy more and more of His presence so that it will be a journey from the state we are in now into the state where we are fully in fellowship with the Lord.

The Lord's presence will be so real and strong towards us. We are journeying from His presence into His presence. There will be a manifestation of the divine to the faithful among the Lord's people in an increasing manner, (Remember from Hebrews 9:28). The purpose is to prepare, perfect and glorify the faithful.

Now, how does the Lord show His presence in a way beyond how we have known it before? We answer that it is by His Word and by His Spirit. The word "rain" in spiritual parlance (that is, in scriptures) refer to the outpouring of the Spirit of understanding, of knowledge, of wisdom to the church, so that they will accurately know Jesus in actual experiences. So, in Hosea 6:3, we are told that He will come to us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.

There is the early rain; there is the latter rain. The early rain is given by the Lord Jesus Christ (as we know it and experience it by the teaching of the Holy Spirit) to make us to know and experience the earnest of our inheritance, the down payment of our inheritance; we are restored as it were to all that Adam lost in the fall from glory to shame.

All that Adam lost is restored to us in the early rain of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, bringing us the fundamentals, the beginnings of the doctrine of Christ, showing us how to live above sin, to break free from the hold of sicknesses, walk in prosperity and peace, be saved from adversities, delivered from extraneous influences, evil attitudes, evil spirits. Learning to minister by Christ; learning to show God's saving compassion to man; growing in the things of the Spirit.

All of these are what is called the early rain teaching of the Spirit. The Lord comes and keeps coming in that rain to His people who have not known these graces.

Then, he comes again in the time of the perfection of the church not as the early rain but as the latter rain. Remember the latter rain is needed to ripen the fruit, the seed of which had been planted during the early rain. Now in our natural setting, in our world, farmers do not plant until after the first few rains. These rains are the early rains.

But, the rains given are not strong enough to bring the fruit to maturity, to a ripening stage. So, although there is rain in between these seasons of rain, (the early rain and the latter rain), towards the time the harvest is expected, the farmer must receive another measure of rain. That rain (the latter rain) is given to mature the fruit and to ripen it. This natural situation is being used by the Lord to teach us spiritual things.

So, there has been the early rain, and there is the latter rain. When he came in the early rain, we rejoiced and said, "The Lord has visited us". In every meeting, where the Lord's power, grace and glory show us the various blessings of redemption and we receive them, we have rejoiced and said God has visited His people.

The Lord comes to us in the teaching of God's Word and in the ministration of the Holy Spirit. To say there is a season called "Parousia" the great presence of the Lord revealed to those who are hungry for Him, is to say there will be more release of God's Word, more release of God's Spirit, a great outpouring of God's Spirit and God's Word that will mature the believers and bring them into fullness of life in Christ.

This is what the "Parousia" is all about; a time when the Lord Jesus Christ makes Himself more and more known to us, opening the scriptures to us as never before, the Holy Spirit leading us to appreciate more and more of the things He has prepared for us. This is the meaning of the "Parousia". He has always been with us, but we shall know His presence as never before, by His Word and by His Spirit.

Then next, Paul is saying to the people "we cannot say that the day of the Lord is already at hand". You may want to read verse 2 of 2 Thessalonians 2 from the amplified version of the Bible". The word "at hand" means "have already come", "has arrived"; but when we understand that there is a season called "Parousia" which is given to prepare us to receive His Epiphaneia", (the time when Christ comes in glory and we are found in His glory), then we shall understand what Paul is saying in 2 Thessalonians 2.

The question is to be asked, what was really troubling the people? If what they simply heard was that "the day of Christ is already here", "the Parousia is already here.", what then was troubling them? It is because the apostle had taught them that at such a time, when that season sets in, there would be great times of deep fellowship in the Word to profit all with the things that God is releasing to his ministers: the revelation of God's Word and the great operations of the Holy Spirit. So, they knew there would be a gathering together, so much the more as the believers, by God's Word and Spirit, see the day of glory approaching (Hebrews 10:25). The people were wondering whether they were not already losing out on the things the Lord had begun to do in the church.

That is the context, and it shows to us that there is a great connection between the Parousia and the gathering together of God's people unto Him (verses 1 and 2 of 2 Thessalonians 2); because there will be more meat, more food in God's house, more exciting revelation of the glory to come, the Lord's people will be mindful to gather together unto Him.

Brethren the Word of God is being revealed as never before. The Holy Spirit is doing a tremendous work in the fellowship meetings of all those who have broken free from the hold of the denominational church systems and are gathered together unto the Lord and are seeking His face. The gathering together after this manner shall increase as we see prophetically by the Spirit of God, the day of glory getting nearer and nearer. That is what Paul is saying here in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2.

The next thought we want to pick up is that we are told that the day of the Lord, the "Parousia" will not set in unless there comes a falling away first. What does Paul mean by a falling away? It refers to a time when quite a number of God's servants will be a shame to the gospel. That is the greater many of the leaders in the visible church system will be saying one thing and doing another. It will be a time when there will be so much of spiritual poverty in the church; when moral failure, the works of the flesh are prevalent in the midst of the assembly of God's people; when there are widespread abominations within the church systems, in places that were once holy unto the Lord. That is the falling away.

Of course, Paul tells us by the Spirit of prophecy in this same chapter and in many other scriptures that a major characteristic of this falling away is that there will be overdone respect for man, even leading to the worship of man in the stead of God. Men will occupy the place of Christ in His house; sitting over the throne of men's hearts, showing themselves to be God.

Let us come to verses 3 and 4. There is a son of perdition. This son is actually a many-membered person (body). We are told that this son of perdition will exalt himself so that He as God sitteth in the temple of God showing himself to be God. It is with great pain that we make this observation that there is evidence of much blindness in the midst of God's people. Can you imagine someone saved by grace just as you were, filled by the same Spirit and you have to kneel down before you talk to him? Men, who are servants of God, parade themselves with such airs that literally demand that people should worship them.

However, we know that it is when spirituality is low, when people have not the fear of God again in the church systems, that these things take place; when we see that abominations are everywhere present in what ought to be called holy places, (Matthew 24:15) we are told "let him that sees it flee for his life."

Yet we know that this work of the Spirit will intensify. He will open the window into the contradictions in the denominations and call out of these systems, the willing hearted. With a continuous going out of men and women from these systems, what we shall find in the denominational church systems will just be open treachery and shame.

If you are sincere with yourself and you have a mind for the glory of God, you will understand that things are really awful in many places; we are not talking about places where Jesus is not preached as Lord and Saviour, but places where the people have already known Jesus as Lord by virtue of the new birth and are baptised with the Holy Spirit. We are not talking about dead orthodoxy, sleeping dead churches, but churches we might rightly call Pentecostals!

We are seeing and witnessing such a great love for money, such terrible passions, that we know that the falling away is already there and is a sign that the day of the Parousia, the season of God making Himself greatly manifest to us in His Word and His Spirit is already upon us. These things, (His Word, His Spirit, the revelation of Christ, the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain) are given to us so that we can deliver ourselves from the contradictions and confusions in the visible church systems and seek the Lord and His true worship. For then, shall he, working in us, bring us to perfection. The Lord bless you in Jesus' name. Amen

19

RAPTURE

DOCTRINE

EXAMINED

IN LIKE MANNER

We are examining the rapture doctrine, as it is taught in the church world. Our approach is to look at bible passages that are often used to teach this doctrine. In this edition, we will be looking at yet another passage, (Acts 1:9-11). We will be showing that what is commonly taught, is not in harmony with the truth and its spirit. This will be the last scripture we will look at before proceeding to I Thessalonians 4.

Come with me to Acts 1:1-11. In order to get a proper flow of the thought, we will take the reading from verse 1.

¹THE FORMER treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and teach. ²Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he, through the Holy Spirit had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen. ³To whom also he shew himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. ⁴And being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. ⁵For, John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit, not many days hence. ⁶When they therefore were come together, they asked of him saying Lord wilt thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel? ⁷And he said unto them, it is not for you to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. ⁸But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. ⁹And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up and a cloud received him out of their sight. ¹⁰And while they looked steadfastly towards heaven as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel; ¹¹Which also said, ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into haven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go to heaven.

Now, the first question we want to ask is this: In what manner did the disciples see Jesus go to heaven? We are told in verse 9 that he was taken up and a cloud received him out of their sight. Notice that the cloud here is singular; "a cloud received him out of their sight". Thus, it is not as some think that he was just going up until he entered into the skies and the clouds covered him up. No. We are told that a cloud received him out of their sight.

Now what is this cloud that received the Lord Jesus Christ so that he was no longer visible to the disciples? We answer by saying that clouds are often used in the scriptures to represent the presence of a divine being. Many times under the Old Testament, especially in His dealings with the children of Israel, God was shown to descend or appear to them in a cloud. (Exodus 34:5; Num. 11:25; 12:5 Exodus 16:10, 19:9 etc.)

We are told in Exodus 13:21 that the Lord went before the children of Israel in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of Fire by night. Again, I Corinthians 10:1 says "they were all under the cloud". Thus, clouds can represent a visible spiritual body with which the divine makes his presence known.

Secondly, clouds are used to represent servants of God (spirit and humans) in their capacity to serve divine interest. Psalm 104:3 says "He maketh the clouds His chariots." Isaiah 19:1 says "God rideth upon the clouds". In other words, he carries out all his activities through his messengers.

In Job 37:21, we are shown that God's servants are light bearers. The light of God is in the clouds. In Proverbs 3:20 we are told that the *clouds drop down dew*. According to Ecclesiastics 11:13, *if the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth*. The reference is to the rain of the word of God and of His Spirit released through the ministry of a servant of God. We are told in Zechariah 10:1 that when God is to pour out the rail of life, the rain of blessing, the rain of His Word and of His Spirit upon His people, He first of all makes bright clouds; He raises up men and women unto Himself, fills them with his Spirit, and by their ministry, they bring the rain of God upon His people. Thus, true servants of God are clouds with water (Jude 22).

In Acts 1:9; the cloud in question is a manifestation of the divine spirit. We are told that a cloud received Him out of their sight. In other words, at a point in the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ to the heaven of God, He dissolved the human body with which He had appeared to the disciples and communed with them and took on a spirit form, the form of a cloud. He took on that same spirit form he had before he became man, the same cloud of glory that had appeared to God's people all throughout the Old Testament era. It was the same cloud of the divine presence, that Shekinah glory that received Him out of their sight.

Now we have said in our meditation on the body of His glory that the Lord Jesus Christ was by resurrection made a life-giving spirit (I Corinthians 15:25). That is after his resurrection, he took on spirit nature; but, for the first forty days, he needed to appear to His disciples

The disciples had been greatly discouraged, shattered by the fact of His death. It was as if the declared purpose of His labour among them for three and a half years had been aborted. Moreover, the gospel concerning the messiah was to be founded upon the fact that He died for our sins and was raised from the dead (I Corinthians 15:12-18).

¹²Now if Jesus Christ be preached that he rose from the dead how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not raised: ¹⁴And if Christ be not raised, then is our preaching vain and your faith is also vain. ¹⁵Yea and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified that He raised up Christ whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. ¹⁶For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: ¹⁷And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. ¹⁸Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.

So, forgiveness of sin and deliverance from its power, deliverance from the power of death, the hope of coming into life with God through resurrection are all made possible to the human race through Christ's death and resurrection. If Christ were not raised from the dead there would have been no hope of life for mankind, both the ones that are physically alive and those already dead. Thus, there was a need for the disciples to know without any iota of doubt that Christ had risen and for this good news to be preached to all men through the ministry of these witnesses.

But since the Lord Jesus Christ had returned unto Spirit nature, there was no way the disciples could know assuredly that He has been raised from the dead except He shows Himself to them. The Lord of necessity had to appear to them. Thus, we are told that He showed himself alive to them by many infallible proofs, being seen of them, forty days. He also used the occasion to teach them, to open their understanding and to re-establish their faith in the kingdom of God.

Recall what we pointed out in the meditation on the body of his glory, The Lord Jesus Christ though present with them throughout the forty days was not visible for the greater part of the time. And when he made himself visible by appearing in human forms, it was for a little time. After He had fulfilled the purpose of that appearing, he will dissolve the visible human body with which he had appeared and take on his spirit body.

In addition, he did not just appear to them in one particular human form, neither did he appear with the human body that he had before his death (passion). Rather, the specific form with which he appeared was tailored to suit the given occasion. As we said earlier, the purpose of doing this was to impress upon the mind of the disciples the fact that He is no longer human and they should not ascribe to him in His present glory any specific human form. Otherwise He could just have appeared in one human form.

Here in Acts 1, the Lord had just made the final appearance to the disciples and the time had come for Him to finally depart into the spirit realm, into the heavens of God, never to appear to them again in the forms he had been appearing in those forty days. And we are told that when he had finished speaking to them he was taken up.

And of course, we are not to suppose that the heaven of God is located somewhere in space above the skies. We normally say heaven is above. But the reference is to the fact that the heavenly life and glory are far above earthly (human) life and glory. We should realise that the heaven of God is not located in the material universe. Rather, the material universe is a part expression (a visible expression) of the vastness of the heaven of God. The heavens of God are all about us. In Him we live, move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

But the Lord in His departure into the Spirit world went up to give notice to the weak minds of the disciples that he is ascending to heaven. We are told that as he was taken up, he took on the form of a cloud, that same bright cloud that had always represented the presence of the Living God. And He was no longer visible to their sight.

Thus, we see very clearly that the Lord Jesus Christ ascended to heaven not as a man, but as a Spirit being, in a body of cloud. And we are told that he shall come in like manner. He went to heaven as a spirit being, and he shall come in like manner, as a Spirit being. This is why in many of the scriptures where the Second Advent of the Lord is mentioned; there is a reference to clouds. John says in Revelation 10:1

¹And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud; and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire.

Remember, we have said that the Lord Jesus Christ comes as the archangel, the chief messenger: 1Thessalonians 4:16. So this angel here is not just any angel but the Lord as the messenger of the covenant, the one that carries out all the Father's purpose in redemption. He comes clothed with a cloud.

Again in Revelation 14:14 he says,

¹⁴And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.

In 1Thessalonians 4:17, inferring that we are to be caught up into the divine spirit nature, into the same glory of life that the Lord comes with. It is said, then we which *are alive and remain shall be caught up*

together with them in clouds. Daniel also says (in Daniel 7:13,14), I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven (a phrase describing persons that have taken on full spirit nature), and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom that all people, nations and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

So, the Lord comes as a Spirit being. And since he is a Spirit person and has come to His infinite glory, he would not need to take on human flesh again. Some say that when the Lord comes, he will come as a man and stand upon a certain mountain. He will be seen literally fighting against the nations riding upon a white horse.

We know that all of that comes from a misunderstanding of scriptures. How can Christ ride upon a white horse to fight in this modern world! Neither does he need any such thing to discipline the nations. Remember how He dealt with the nation of Egypt. The judgements of God were rolled out one after the other and at the end of the day, it was clear that the God of glory had visited Egypt and manifested his power. In a reference to his power to break down all oppositions, he says *I am the Lord God that brought you out of the land of Egypt; out of the house of bondage.*

God (and by that we mean the Logos for we are told in John 1:1 that the word was God) has ruled the world hundreds of thousands of years, ruling over his creation ever before recorded human history in the creation of Adam and Eve. He has been ruling the world in hundreds of thousands of years from the unseen realm. He does not need to be physically present in the earth as a man in order to take the kingdoms of this world unto himself.

He became flesh in the first advent, partaking in the human nature, for the purpose of death. And he can never be subjected to that limitation again. When He was a man, He was limited and could only be in one place at the same time; but now in His spirit glory, He can be everywhere present at the same time. He wields unlimited glory and power.

So, we are saying that the Lord Jesus Christ who was taken up as a Spirit being will come in like manner, as a Spirit being. In addition, what we have seen concerning the activities of the Lord among His people in his first advent are shadows of things that shall be fulfilled in a greater manner in the church world at the time of his Second Advent. In particular those activities of the Lord among the faithful remnant in those forty days after his resurrection are typical of the activities the Lord is to carry out among those of his people who respond to the voice of His words at the time of His Parousia.

Remember in those forty days, though invisible, the Lord as a Spirit being was present with the disciples, He taught them the matters of the kingdom, and He breathed upon them. He fully prepared them to receive the outpouring of the Spirit. He is going to come in the same manner. At the time of His Parousia, He is going to be present among His people though invisible. It will be a time of a great unveiling of the word revealing to God's people the greater matters of the kingdom. It will be a time of great release of His presence among His people. He will bring the faithful to full union with Himself. These will possess the Holy Spirit in all fullness.

However, all these activities are to be known only by the faithful among God's people. This is why the prophet said in Isaiah 59:20 *And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob.* Just like the whole of the covenant community of God's people were ignorant of the Lord's presence and activities among the disciples during those forty days and continued in their religious activities unaware of what the Lord was doing, the church world, and by that we mean the unfaithful among the Lord's people, is to be ignorant of the activities of the Lord in the time of His Parousia.

His presence among His people at that time will be as a thief in the night. It will be a secret or hidden work. Matthew 24:39 *say and they knew not until the flood came*. So the Lord will be present among the faithful, He will reveal Himself and manifest himself to them in the power of His Word and Spirit until they are caught up into the same estate of glory that He is, even though the majority of the people will not be aware of what the Lord is doing.

In addition, we find that it was not all of the covenant community that saw the Lord ascend to heaven only a faithful remnant that witnessed that event. Majority of the Lord's people (the Jews) were attending to their religious activities and were unaware that anything of significance was taking place. And it is to those faithful remnants that the angels gave the promise that the Lord shall come in the manner they saw him go to heaven (Acts 1:10-11). Thus, we are shown clearly in the scriptures that it is not all of the Lord's people that shall have the honour of seeing the Lord as He is and associating with him in his second appearing.

Not all saw Him go and so not all will witness and partake of His Parousia and the fullness of life He gives at His Epiphaneia. Hebrews 9:28 says it is to them that look for Him, who exercise a deep longing and desire for full union with Him that He will appear to the second time, not as an offering for sin but as the Lord of glory, to bring them unto full salvation. Isaiah 33:14-17 show also that it is those among God's people who are living an overcoming life, who had submitted to his dealings as a refiner's fire and as fuller's soap at his Parousia, that will be granted the honour of seeing him in his beauty and glory at the time of His appearing.

So, the Lord is not to be seen visibly by the world, nor is He to be seen and associated with by all believers. The Bible says He dwells in a light, which no one can approach unto, whom no one hath seen nor can see (1 Timothy 6:16). It is only the faithful, the overcomers that will see Him as He is and associate with Him, they will be raised up into the same estate of life that He is. Then shall they see Him and associate with Him in His glory; for then it will be spirit to spirit, an association of divine beings

We close by asking and answering this question: if the world is not to see him visibly, and many in the church world are not to see him in the fleshly nature, then what meant by this scriptures that says *behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him* (Revelation 1:7)?

Now, apart from the fact that clouds are used to represent the presence of God and also servants of God in His service, they (especially dark clouds) can also symbolise an impending judgement. We mentioned this in the message on the Parousia of Christ by referring to Matthew 26:59-66 where the Lord said that the generation of Jews that crucified him were to see the son of man sitting in the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven. And we said that the clouds of heaven there referred to the event of tribulation that was to come upon that nation.

So, clouds can be used to symbolise troublous events that are upon a people and there is consistency in this use, because it is from the dark clouds that floods are released upon the earth. We are shown from Matthew 24 and Luke 17 that the flood is a symbol of the great tribulation that are to come upon the world.

So, clouds can symbolise events of divine judgement. Other relevant scriptures that may be consulted in this regard are Genesis 9:14; 1 Kings 18:45; Ezekiel 38:16 and Joel 2:2. We know that the time of the Epiphaneia has this characteristic that it will be a day of clouds and thick darkness (Joel 2:2). It will be a dreadful day as the wrath of the Almighty is visited upon the ecclesiastical and political systems of this world.

The clouds, with which the Lord comes here in Revelation 1:7, refer primarily to the tribulation that shall come upon the world at the time of his appearing. This is evident from the words that follow in Revelation 1:7. When He comes with clouds and every sees Him, we are told that all kindred of the earth shall wail because of Him.

That brings us to a consideration of that phrase "every eye shall see him". What does this mean? The seeing here, as we said before, does not mean all the earth will see Jesus Christ visibly, coming in the physical clouds. Seeing here means coming into understanding, seeing with the eyes of the hearts (Ephesians 1:18). In the days of His flesh, Jesus spoke of some who hear but are not able to see into God's purpose or to perceive what the Lord was doing. He says *they seeing, see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand* (Matthew 13:13).

And here we are shown that it is the events of the tribulation that will awaken the consciousness of the world, including the careless professors of religion, to what the Lord is doing in the earth. Remember Matthew 24:39. They knew not until the flood came.

By the time God's great judgements begins to be revealed in the earth at the time of the Epiphaneia, it will be come clear to all of the human race that things are no longer the same, that the one that has the right to rule has already taken unto himself His great power and has begun to reign (Revelation 11:17). We are told that when the kindred of the earth thus see him, the result is that they will mourn because of Him.

Thus there is going to be a great cry of lamentation and woe among the human race in the days ahead. In the words of Zechariah 12:11-14, it shall be a great mourning, beginning with the Jews. The sheer weight of the judgements of God will cause all mankind to cry out for the Lord, as a man mourneth for his only begotten son. In fulfilment of the prophecy of Haggai 2:7, the Lord shall become the desire of all nations.

Right now the nations do not desire Him, but He shall shake both the heavens (the ecclesiastical kingdoms of this world) and the earth (the political kingdoms) the sea and the dry land. He shall shake all nations and the result of these terrible judgements, is that the whole of the human race will be turned to the Lord.

The seeing mentioned in Revelation 10:7 refer to spiritual sight, understanding, coming into an awareness of a reality. The human race shall see him as Lord, King, Redeemer, and Saviour. They shall see Him as the sovereign King, the only one worthy to rule in the affairs of men.

So, the reference is not to seeing the Lord physically. The only way in which the world is to have a visible sight of the glory of the Lord is by seeing him revealed in his people that have come to the fullness of His life. These are the members of His body, the Feet Company, the body through which He would carry out all of His activities in those days. These are the ones to reveal the beauty and glory of Christ to the nations. This is why the scriptures refer to the manifestation of the sons of God.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 bears this out very clearly. It says.

⁷And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. ⁸In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction (all these are figurative ways of expressing the intensity of the divine judgments that shall visit the world at the time of the Epiphaneia) from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, (the next verse: verse is the verse of note. It says). ¹⁰When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

Thus, He is to be seen and admired in his saints who have taken on the fullness of his life. The Epiphaneia will be the most glorious day for the faithful, the overcoming church (and of course, we are not

talking of a day of twenty-four hours). But it will be a time of great darkness and gloom for the unfaithful and for the unbelieving world. May the Lord bless and keep you, in Jesus name.

20

RAPTURE

DOCTRINE

EXAMINED

In this edition, we will begin an examination of 1 Thessalonians 4; the principal text that is used to preach the rapture doctrine. We will take our reading from the thirteenth verse and we will read straight to the end of the chapter.

¹³But, I would not have you to be ignorant brethren concerning them, which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others, which have no hope. ¹⁴For if ye believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep with Jesus will God bring with him. ¹⁵For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them, which are asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. ¹⁷Then we, which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. ¹⁸Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

We will like to look at a few questions that have bothered the hearts of the Lord's people all through the generations, both in Old Testament age and in this gospel age. People have been asking this kind of questions and since they have so much bearing upon our subject, we might as well take them.

The questions run thus: What happens when a man dies? Where are the dead? If a man dies, shall he live again? What is the condition of the dead? If the dead will be raised up, how are the dead raised up and with what body do they come? These questions are actually to be found in the scriptures in one form or the other; and it will be profitable to take some of the questions reading them out from the scriptures.

If we turn to Job 14, the 13th verse, we will find one of these several questions asked. It reads *If a man dies, shall he live again?* And then in I Corinthians 15, in the 35th verse, we find two of the several questions we have asked. I Corinthians 15:35 says *but some man would say How are the dead raised up and with what body do they come?*

Of course, since the scriptures provide answers to these questions we are armed with the knowledge of the true state of affairs with the dead and how the dead shall be raised. Remember our concern in this meditation is the believer in Christ. So let us answer the questions, which will lead us into the exposition of our set passage (I Thessalonians 4)

In the light of the scriptures, we are shown that when a person dies, the Spirit essence of the person ascends to God who made it while the body eventually turn to dust (remember that phrase: *dust thou are and unto dust shall thou return Genesis 3:19*) So, there is the destruction of the body after death; the body through decomposition returns to the dust from where it was taken, while the Spirit goes back to God.

In addition, we are told that at the point of death, there is a cessation of all activities and consciousness. A dead man has no knowledge, no understanding and no remembrance whatsoever.

Now to the next question: When a man dies, shall he live again? For the believer, the hope of the resurrection from the dead is taught in both the Old Testament and New Testament scriptures. If this is so, then the next question comes to mind: how are the dead raised, and with what body do they come? This is quoting literally from I Corinthians 15:35.

We will be taking the second part of the question first: "With what body do they come?" Now, the two questions asked by Paul in I Corinthians 15:35 are answered in the verses following them; from verses 36-48. Paul's emphasis was on the second aspect of the question - *With what body do they come?* He tells us "the body that dies is not the body that shall be."

Remember we are talking about the believers now; the dead in Christ. Paul tells us that *there are bodies terrestrial and there are bodies celestial*. Terrestrial bodies speak of earthly humans, visible or physical bodies, made of dust, made of flesh and blood and adapted to life on earth in. Celestial bodies on the other hand are spiritual, invisible bodies, adapted to the life in the heavenly realm.

For the believer who is to inherit the Kingdom of heaven, we are told that it is not the body that was that shall be; that there is going to be a change from the human body to a spirit body. It's the body that shall be (the Spiritual body) that is taken up at the resurrection; this is important.

If we turn to 2 Corinthians 5, we see this truth clearly set out. We read verse 1. Paul says

¹For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Let us take the reading in a simpler form so as to bring out the meaning. "for we know that if our earthly human body which is now indwelt by our soul were dissolved in death, we have another body, another building, another dwelling place, This building is made of God, not made with hands. It is eternal in the heavens". So, here we find that the body that the believer will resurrect with is different from the body that is buried when he sleeps in Jesus.

The other part of the question is "how are the dead raised?" The dead are raised up by the voice of the Son of God. In John 5:25, we are told that *the hour is coming when the dead shall hear the voice of the*

Son of God and they that hear shall live. So, there is a close connection between the voice of the Son of God and the resurrection of the dead.

In the passage quoted (John 5:25) the reference is to the raising up of persons who are physically alive but dead in trespasses and sins, raising them up from their spiritual death state to stand before God in newness of life. Ephesians 2:1 confirms this. It says *And ye hath he quickened, (or made alive) who were dead in trespasses and sins.* Verse 4 and 5 says *But God who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*

In verse 28 and 29 of John 5, we are shown that the same voice of the Son of God is to raise up from the dead all those who are physically dead and buried. So verse 28 and 29 reads thus:

²⁸Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the grave shall hear his voice, ²⁹And shall come forth...

The phrase "all that are in the grave" is used to represent persons that are physically dead. So there is distinguished between those that are physically alive but dead spiritually and those that are dead and are buried; but one common thing is that whether a man is physically alive but spiritually dead or physically dead, it is the same voice of the Son of God that raises the dead.

This again shows to us clearly that the trumpet that is to sound in I Thessalonians 4 and I Corinthians 15 is the sound of the voice of the Son of God as shown in Revelations 1:10. It has nothing, absolutely nothing to do with a physical trumpet.

The two things we have found in John 5 and I Corinthians 15, we can also see in Job 14, which we referred to earlier. We read verses 14 and 15 of Job 14 again. It says

¹⁴If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait until my change comes. ¹⁵Thou shall call and I will answer thee. Thou shall have a desire in the work of thy hands.

"Thou shall call and I will answer thee". So, it is by the voice of the Son of God that the dead are raised. Remember we are examining this subject only in relation to those who have entered into a covenant relationship with God, who have come to a righteous standing with God. When any such die, the body returns through corruption to the dust while the soul/spirit returns back to God.

The Bible teaches that at the point of death, the believer enters into a sleep. He stays in a waiting condition, not conscious of his environment. He knows nothing and remembers nothing, He is in a state of sleep; a complete state of inactivity. More about that will be said during the course of this meditation but, let us come quickly to 1 Thessalonians 4.

Now Rapture doctrine goes like this: the Lord Jesus Christ would descend from heaven, and stand somewhere mid-way between the earth and sky, some say he would just descend into the air, just visible to the earth, just below the sky. Then believers who are dead shall have their grave opened and in an upward flight will go to meet Jesus. Then we who are alive and remain will in the same instance of time be caught up together with them in the air.

A careful reading of 1 Thessalonians 4 will fault this understanding. When the believer is resurrected, does the process have anything to do with where he was buried? That is the question. Let us look at verse 14 of our passage

¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep with Jesus will God bring with him.

So, the dead in Christ come from the same realm that Jesus comes from. This is important. The dead in Christ is not coming from the earth, for he is not there. The body has returned to the dust and the body that shall be is a new creation all together. Thus, the resurrection of the dead has nothing to do with the grave where a man is buried. A significant number of people who die certainly have no graves. In any case we are not to suppose that God is bound to the dust from which the human body came in order to fashion out a resurrection body.

When the Lord comes, he comes with ten thousand of His saints (Jude 14). That is a prophetic way of saying he comes with his saints, the multitude of people who have lived overcoming lives in the days of their flesh, who are awakened from their sleep to take on their spiritual bodies and be united with the Lord.

So, for persons who have lived overcoming Christian lives, living in hope of full union with Christ; from the day they die, their bodies returned to the dust while their souls and spirits are in divine keeping; but they have no conscious existence in the heavens of God.

Now, some suppose that when a believer dies, he enters into his reward and begins to enjoy the glories of the heavenly life. Then, at the time of resurrection, he comes to the earth and picks his body...etc. But we are shown very clearly that before the time of the Parousia or putting it more emphatically, before the time of the Epiphaneia, when the Lord comes in all of His glory, the believer who sleeps is having his soul and spirit in the presence of God, (meaning that the Lord has him in remembrance) but he himself is not conscious. This is a truth so clearly revealed in scriptures and the Word of God has no respect for our dreams and visions when they are in contradiction of it.

One of the most destructive doctrines that has made its way into the church is that when a person dies, he is more alive in death than when he was physically alive. This is a very fatal error. When the believer dies, he sleeps in Jesus, and the whole period of time from when the believer dies up till when he is raised up to glory in the Parousia or the Epiphaneia is like an evening gone in the sight of the Lord. We sing the song, but we do not know the principle involved when we say

Oh God our help in ages past

Our hope for years to come

Be thou our guide when life shall last

And our eternal home

Then one of the stanzas says

A thousand ages in thy sight

Are like an evening gone

Short as the watch that ends the night

Before the rising sun

In the realm of God there is timelessness. This is why he is the Ancient of days. There is a total arresting of time. All things remain in the exact form they were at the point of entry. So, the soul-spirit of the dead in Christ, all the graces that have been acquired, all about the believer are in the presence of the Lord, but there is no consciousness until the resurrection body is taken.

So, returning to our passage, we will be reading again verse 14

¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep with Jesus will God bring with him.

When he comes, he comes with the saints. The graves are not going to be opened to cause something to rise up in an upward flight. It is not the body that shall be that is buried in the grave, neither is the building of God, our house which is from heaven, located underneath the earth. The body, which shall be, is spiritual.

With this observation, we can now read 1 Corinthians 15:35

³⁵But some man would say How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come? ³⁶Thou fool,. that which thou sowest is not quickened (that is made alive) except it dies: ³⁷And that which thou sowest: thou sowest not the body that shall be, but bare grain, It may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: ³⁸But God giveth it a body as it has pleased him, and to every seed his own body

Let us go to verse 42. Paul having drawn his example from the physical world declares that as it is with the natural, so it is with the Spiritual. If you plant a seed of corn, you cannot harvest a mango fruit. What body that shall be given will depend on the seed sown. In us, the seed of eternal life has been sown in the preaching of Christ and the body will correspond to that image and likeness of Christ. And so in verse 42, Paul began to compare the physical body with the resurrected body that the believer shall take on. It says

⁴²So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption it is raised in incorruption. ⁴³It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory; It is sown in weakness: it is raised in power; ⁴⁴It is sown a natural body: it is raised a spiritual body. ⁴⁵And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul, he last Adam was made a quickening spirit. ⁴⁶Howbeit, that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural and afterwards that which is spiritual (Take note of verses 47 and 48 very closely) ⁴⁷The first man is of the earth earthy (that is as to the substance of the body); the second man is the Lord from heaven. ⁴⁸As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly (Verse 49 is the verse of

choice. It says) ⁴⁹And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

You find that the resurrection body is what Paul calls our house; a building of God, eternal in the heavens. So, it is a spirit body that the believer in Christ Jesus shall put on and he certainly has no need for the dust of the earth. We have said that when the Lord comes, he comes with his saints.

In closing, we ask the question "If the raising from the dead is not from the physical grave, then what does Paul mean when he says *the dead in Christ shall rise first* " To answer this question, we read again 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 15

¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep with Jesus will God bring with him. ¹⁵For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them, which are asleep.

The word "prevent" is not a proper translation of the Greek word used here. The right word is "precede". We who are alive shall not precede those that are asleep in entering into the glory of the resurrection. Rather, the dead in Christ shall rise first, and enter into the resurrection glory ahead of those of us that are alive. The fact that they are physically dead does not place them in a disadvantage in relation to those of us "alive and remaining". Rather, they will come first.

The rising here has nothing to do with coming out of the grave or a physical ascension, but being awakened into a realm of glory and honour in the Spirit. Remember in Ephesians 2, we are told that we are raised up at the time of our being born again to sit together with Christ in the heavenly places. Of course we know that we were not caught up to anywhere when we became born again, but there was a spiritual height we attained to.

The rising actually speaks of our entrance into the full glory of the resurrected life. In this regard, we are told that it is the dead in Christ that rises first. They enter into the glory ahead of others. This again demonstrates that there is no truth in the rapture doctrine, which says the dead in Christ will rise from the grave and at the same instance of time we will be, caught up with them. We are told that the dead in Christ rises first. Our rising together with them is not at the same instance of time.

We will be looking at this more closely in other editions. May the Lord really bless you and keep you in Jesus name. Amen

RAPTURE DOCTRINE EXAMINED

We will be going straight to our meditation. We have been looking at the rapture doctrine for some time now. Simply put, the rapture doctrine says that at some point in the immediate future, the Lord Jesus Christ will descend from heaven, which is supposed to be located beyond the stars, and will come down to the visible sphere just below the sky, blowing a trumpet with a loud sound.

One says that the trumpet that the Lord Jesus Christ will sound is being polished for about two thousand years now; that God has assigned an angel whose only duty is to be polishing the trumpet. The Lord Jesus Christ will take this trumpet to the mouth and blow a loud shout. Then the graves will open, and the dead in Christ who are supposed to still be in the grave, in an upward flight, will go to meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the air, just below the skies.

Then, we who are alive and remain till the sounding of the trumpet will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air. Thereafter, the full body: Christ, the head and all persons that have been caught up to meet him will proceed in an upward journey beyond the sky to the heavens of God.

Then in the Lord's house, we will be given our one-room -apartment, which will be as big as the size of a mansion. Then, after the welcome ceremony, we will get married to the Lord Jesus Christ; and for seven years, the one thing we will be doing is getting acquainted with the expanse of heaven and occasionally looking down at the suffering masses on earth where our kits and kin who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ will be in great tribulation; and we will say "good for you; we preached Jesus to you but you did not believe".

That system of things will continue for about seven years while we will be visiting one another in heaven. Then at the end of the seven years, we will all come down to the earth. If there are still some few remaining souls on the earth that have not been destroyed by the tribulation, then Christ will ride upon a white horse and we also riding upon horses, will get rid of these ones.

Thereafter, there will be the wedding reception of earth, and we will rule for a thousand years, Christ the king and we rulers with him. Ruling over whom? We do not know, but we are told that we shall reign with Christ a thousand years. Thereafter, we depart to heaven again, leaving the earth uninhabited, and there in heaven, we begin to enjoy the bliss of eternal life.

Of course, there are several shades of this simple outline, but all are to the same intent. People are very sentimental about this doctrine and many are agitated when it is being shown that the doctrine is not only false but dangerous also. It is counter productive in the sense that it prevents

the Lord's people from seeing what the true hope of the church is; that blessed hope, the glorious inheritance

We as the Lord's people cannot take upon ourselves a lifestyle that accords with the teachings of scriptures, if things are kept so vague and people are not motivated. This is why you find that though sermons are preached that the rapture may take place today, yet in the same breathe, they say the end of all men is six feet below the ground.

So, though much lip service is still being given to the rapture doctrine in the visible church system, it no longer has that hold over the hearts and affections of the Lord's people as it used to. In its place are materialism and prosperity sermons that have become perversions because they are wrongly emphasised. We believe that the Lord is putting all things straight and that we as God's people will be quickened to see what the true hopes of the church are, so that we might stir up ourselves. Faith comes by hearing Christ preached in His word.

We will be going into the scriptures 1 Thessalonians 4, which is the most popular passage, used to preach the rapture doctrine. We will be reading from verse 13 to 16.

¹³But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them, which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others, which have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. ¹⁵For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we, which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them, which are asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall raise first.

In the last edition we asked a series of questions: what happens when a man dies? How are the dead raised? A consideration of these questions is very important. For example, when a believer dies now, we say he has gone to be with the Lord. And such a statement is warranted, because it is in conformity with the scriptures. The Bible says very clearly that when a person dies, the body returns to the dust, but the spirit/soul of the man returns to God who made him. We are concentrating for the purpose of this meditation, on believers. So the Spirit/soul returns to the Lord, to be present with the Lord. He is held in everlasting remembrance before the Lord and remains in a state of inactivity, in a state of unconsciousness until the time of the resurrection.

Concerning the question how are the dead raised, and in what body do they come? From the teachings in 1 Corinthians 15 among many other scriptures, we say that the body that shall house our new creation man at the point of resurrection, is not this physical body which is said to be vile and corruptible (Philippians 3:21), but a spirit body. That being so, we showed in the last edition that verse 14 of 1 Thessalonians 4 is quite instructive. When Jesus comes, He brings with Him those of the saints that have slept.

We have already shown that there are three time periods associated with the Second Advent of Christ Parousia, the Epiphaneia, and the Basilea. The "Parousia means the time of the great presence of Christ among His people beyond what the church has known before. It is the first phase, and sets in at the time of the Second Advent of Christ. The purpose of the Parousia as we have earlier observed, is to prepare the church in a great and final work of Christ in the midst of His assemblies; to raise up a body of overcomers.

It is for the purpose of perfecting the church that the Parousia is given and for that glorious, full enjoyment of the Lord's presence. But it is in the Epiphaneia that the Lord comes in the fullness of His glory to be associated with by all of His own who have submitted to His dealing in the Parousia.

There is a sense in which all of these three time periods that are phases in the Second Advent of Christ (the Parousia, Epiphaneia and Basilea) can be called "Parousia", in as much as His presence with His people shall be so great with all limitations removed.

In the Garden of Eden, at the fall, Adam fled from the presence of God. Then the voice of the Lord God was heard walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And Adam fled from Him. But when His presence comes to the church in the same dimension as Adam knew before the fall, and even more, then they that look for him, that earnestly desire him, shall be caught up to the same realm in a change that comes to them.

That is something that belongs to the Epiphaneia, while the Basilea is the millennial reign of Christ, the time when the glorified Christ (head and body) shall rule over the nations of the earth shepherding them back to God.

Returning our minds to the 14th verse of 1 Thessalonians 4, we are told that when the Lord descends from heaven, them that are asleep in Him, will He bring together with Him. Since the believer is at death, already present with the Lord, and he is not coming for a body made with dust, there is therefore no connection between the Lord's coming and graves opening. There is not going to be the upward flight as we suppose which is a misinterpretation of this passage.

We take the fourteenth verse again.

¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him,

He comes with ten thousand of his saints (Jude 14). That is a prophetic numbering of the multitude of His people that are saved who lived overcoming lives. When he comes, he comes with this cloud of people. This is important.

The view that graves will be opened at the coming of the Lord and saints that have died will take an upward flight, suggest that these saints are still in the grave. But we know, to be absent from this physical body, if in physical death, is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5-8).

Perhaps it is supposed that when the trumpet sounds, the new creation man first of all goes to the grave, then picks up the body of dust and begin to ascend in an upward flight, then somewhere along the journey, he changes the body of dust for a spirit body. All that is very absurd. May the Lord help our understanding in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We come to the fifteenth verse. This verse introduces us to a key principle in understanding this passage. It says "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord..." Thus what Paul is teaching here is revelatory, it is prophetic. The things that are to be revealed are rolled out in prophetic symbols, figurative language. And since scriptures interpret scriptures, by referring to other scriptures we will be able to have a clear understanding of this passage.

Now, in the fifteenth verse, he says those of us who are alive and remain unto the Parousia of the Lord shall not precede those that have slept. Again, we say that the word 'precede', means that we

that remain unto the Parousia of Christ shall not attain to the fullness of the glory ahead of the dead in Christ. We shall have no advantage whatsoever merely because we are physically alive and remain of the number who received the Lordship of Jesus Christ over their lives in all material details. But they shall attain to the glory first. Thus, the word "prevent" actually means, "precede", to come ahead of. We shall not precede these ones in attaining into the full glory of the Son of God. They who have gone ahead of us will enter into glory first.

Then, we showed in the last edition that from the time of the death of a believer to the time of the resurrection is called a sleep. In the heavens of God, we enter into another time zone. Another way of putting it is that there is complete arresting of time. There is timelessness. There is neither day nor night; it is an eternal brightness in the heavens of God.

Thus, from the time Paul slept to the time of the resurrection, is the same semblance as when we slept yesterday and woke up this morning. This is important. When men die, they are no more active after their death than they were before. In fact there is a cessation of activities, there is neither knowledge nor understanding (Ecclesiastics 9:10). Until the time of the resurrection, absolutely nothing is remembered by the individual. The individual is in a state of unconsciousness. He awakes to the unlimited life and glory of the first resurrection if he had lived an overcoming life. So to the dead in Christ, it is just like sleeping in the evening of yesterday only to wake up into newness of life in the morning.

We come to the sixteenth verse. Referring to the characteristics of His ministry in the Parousia, it says *the Lord himself shall descend from heaven ...* From the Spirit realm the Lord descends in His word and by His spirit. The Lord's people are enlightened, they are taught, they are empowered, they are filled with His spirit and with His word. Their sights are opened to more and more fellowship with Christ.

It was a loss of fellowship at the fall. Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden; it was communion lost. In the fullness of our redemption, we shall come to fullness of union with Christ.

So, coming to 1 Thessalonians 4:16, we read again;

¹⁶For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.

We saw earlier that the voice of the divine is regarded in prophetic scriptures as the sound of a trumpet. So, it is not a physical trumpet. The trumpet is the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Angel (Messenger) of the covenant, as it will be manifested in many of His servants rising up with a new sound. In Revelation 1:10 John says

¹⁰I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.

This voice that was like a trumpet sound was the voice of the Son of God. The effect of that voice is as the sound of a trumpet, arresting the attention of John.

In Paul's mention of the trumpet in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, allusion is made to Numbers 10 that tells us that the blowing of the trumpet is the ministry of God's word detailing things that belong to our

redemption. In this connection, the reference is to the matter of the fullness of our redemption, that which is to bring us to perfection and fullness of life in Him.

So let us return to the sixteenth verse of I Thessalonians 4. We are saying that in the voice of the archangel, Christ is shown to be the Messenger of the covenant. He is the Servant of servants. He is the principal one that makes known the mind of the Father. It is when He speaks that all others can speak. The principle is there in Amos 3. The prophets and servants of God can only speak when the Lord Himself has spoken. So, it is the voice of the archangel, a ministry initiated by Christ, it is the trump of God declaring things in the mind of God for the full redemption of His people.

We will move a little bit into the seventeenth verse. But before we do that, we will show another absurdity in the rapture doctrine. We will read verse 17 and comment.

¹⁷Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.

Let us try to understand this situation physically as it is set forth in the rapture doctrine. The word 'air' here in the Greek, and even in English usage, speaks of the lower atmosphere, where breathing is not impaired, where it is not difficult to breath. Now as we move up, the air becomes rarefied, so at a point, an individual will need oxygen to go further upward. Thus the word air is the lower atmosphere.

Now, if we will be meeting the Lord in the air, which is the lower atmosphere, then the physical picture is that we are caught up with them in the clouds (in the sky) to meet the Lord in the air. But that will amount to a contradiction, because, the sky is above the lower atmosphere here called air. Literally, we cannot be caught up in the cloudy sky and then meet in the lower atmosphere of the air, for that will mean coming down and not going up.

Now the word "the" in the phrase "in the clouds" is added there by the translators of the Bible. It is not there in the original and it does not make any sense whatsoever. Properly put, the scripture should read this way: "then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air".

In the remaining part of this edition, we shall be talking about what it means to be caught up together with them in clouds.

First, it indicates that there is going to be a change in our entire being. Cloud is a prophetic symbolism of a spirit being. Remember the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 1). As the apostles looked at the ascent of the Lord, we are told a cloud received him from their sight, not the cloud of the sky, but the cloud of a spiritual body. He dissolved the physical body with which He manifested Himself to them, and the same pillar of cloud that followed the children of Israel all through the forty years of their wilderness wanderings, that Shekinah glory, that Shekinah cloud, was the form the Lord took on when He ascended to the heaven of God.

So the word "cloud" implies we receive a change in our body Philippians 3:20,21 confirm that. It says,

²⁰For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: ²¹Who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself.

The word clouds indicate a change in our body and being. We shall be full spirit beings on account of that change. 1 Corinthians 15:52 says "*I shew you a mystery, we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed... for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven.*

The word cloud there is indicating that a change will occur. But by the time this is happening to believers that are physically alive and are living overcoming lives, the Epiphaneia would have set in. So, a change in nature from human to spirit is indicated.

Again, the clouds indicate that multitude of persons shall enter into this same experience at the same time. It shall be in clouds, in batches that men and women shall break free from the limitation of corruptibility and mortality into the incorruptibility of that changed life, becoming one with the Lord Jesus Christ in every respect. May the Lord cause you and I to be one "in that number", in Jesus name. Amen.

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RAPTURE DOCTRINE EXAMINED

In the last two editions, we examined 1 Thessalonians 4. From what we have seen so far, it is clear to the discerning and we hope it is clear to all, that there is no reason to doubt whatsoever that the rapture doctrine is false. It is blinding, it is dangerous in as much it draws the attention of the Lord's people away from the true hopes. Even now, it can be said that the greater majority of God's people do not even know what the true hopes of the believer are. But we trust that as we go through this passage, whatever remains to come to a true and proper understanding of the things revealed will be graciously taught us by the Lord.

Come with me to 1 Thessalonians 4. We will be examining the thirteenth and fourteenth verse to start with. Our purpose in this meditation is to carry our examination of this passage a bit deeper. Verse 13 and 14 opens the subject matter of our meditation and set out the goals in the mind of the apostles as he penned the words that follows,

¹³But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

We showed in past discussions that when a man dies, he truly dies. He is no more active in death than when he was physically alive. The word "sleep" is only here used in relation to Christians. Since the hope of the resurrection is in them, they are said not to die but to sleep. Again, the death sentence that came upon all men through the sin of Adam (Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:21) has been taken away from the saints at the point of salvation (John 5:24).

Then, the second point is that the believer who sleeps in Jesus will be awakened from that sleep at the time of Jesus "Epiphaneia". We are told that God will bring with Jesus them that are asleep in Him. We saw that when a believer dies, the body returns to dust while God receives the spirit. Solomon says in Ecclesiastics 12:7 the Spirit returns back to God who gave it.

Thus, at the point of death it can be said that the believer is present with the Lord or has gone to be with the Lord, the meaning being that his spirit is with the Lord. In that condition, the believer is said to be asleep, unconscious of anything around him.

We pointed out that at the time of the Parousia, or more particularly, during the Epiphaneia, the believers who slept in the Lord, who had lived in the light of full union with Christ, are awakened from sleep, into fullness of life in the Spirit. In the coming of the Lord to lift us up into fullness of life, we are told that He brings with Him these saints that have risen into their glory. This is important. When Jesus comes, he will bring with him those that have slept. They will come together with Him.

Now that forecloses the impression given in the teaching of the rapture that we the graves will open and believers in Christ that are dead will rise up and take a flight to meet Jesus in the sky.

The next point made is that the body that shall be is not dust. When the Bible says in Genesis 2: 7 that God made man of the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of Life and man became a living soul, the reference is to his being fitted for earth dwelling.

However, from the authority of 1 Corinthians 15, we learn that for the believer in Christ Jesus, the body of the resurrection is not flesh and blood, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of heaven. Paul assures us of this in 1 Corinthians 15:50. So for the Spirit of man, upon being awakened from sleep to return to the earth, to the grave in which the body was buried, then turn its dust into human body is all very absurd.

Then the fourth thing we said is that it is erroneous to suppose that the Lord Jesus Christ will blow a physical trumpet. A divine being, a spirit being, by the virtue of the glory of His nature does not require physical assistance to get His voice to be heard. It is evident from Revelations 1:10 that the voice of the Son of God is as the voice of a trumpet.

So, the trumpet as used by Paul in this prophetic passage (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17) is an allusion to Numbers 10. It discourses the ordinance of the blowing of the trumpet. Also, from Isaiah 58 and

other scriptures, we learnt that the trumpet signifies the ministry of the word of God in the power of the Spirit of God. It specially relates to the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus, a call to divinity of persons redeemed from among men to be a kind of first fruits unto God involves a trumpet ministry.

That is the point we got to; we will be continuing from there. In the 16th verse of 1 Thessalonians 4, we are told, *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first.* In the original the phrase "descend from heaven" appears last in this verse. So this is the way the verse will read if it is given a transliteration: "for the Lord in a commanding call or in a shout in the voice of the archangel, in a trump of God, will descend from heaven and the dead in Christ shall rise first". Now we move to verse 15 of 1 Thessalonians 4. It says

¹⁵For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we, which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them, which are asleep.

We have already observed that the phrase "the word of the Lord" means that what is to be revealed are given in prophetic language. The Word of the Lord gives the things and whatever message brought forth must be interpreted in the light of other scriptures. The word pictures given are of spiritual realities and not of physical things. Thus, it will be very inappropriate to understand this passage literally.

We showed in the last edition for example, that if we are going to be caught up in the cloud to meet the Lord in the air, then it will be an absurdity, because the air is the lower atmosphere round about us while the cloud is more identified with the sky. Since the sky and the cloud are above the air level, then it will be very absurd to be caught up in the physical clouds and to now descend again to meet the Lord in the air.

Then again, the word coming in the above verse is Parousia and ought to be translated presence rather than coming. "We which are alive and remain unto the Parousia of the Lord, shall not precede them that have slept". "Coming" indicates motion and mission. It shows the one being referred to as being on a journey, in a motion; but the word "presence" indicates rest, it indicates bearing, it indicates honour, it indicates authority and power. Thus, the word speaks of the presence of the Lord in the church in glory and power carrying out a work in her.

Of course we have already shown that the whole passage is to teach that those who sleep in Jesus are not lost, and that we that are alive and remaining will not be the first to enter into the glory but that they (the dead in Christ) will enter into the glory ahead of us. A little later, we shall show what happens when the dead in Christ rises first and the effect upon the waiting church; those who are said to be the "alive and remaining" ones

We come to the 16th verse. From there, we learn that it is the shout; it is the voice of the archangel and the trump of God that we are to interact with in the presence of Christ. We will recall that when the children of Israel were journeying through the wilderness, Balaam took up a prophecy, and one of the things he said was that "the shout of the king is among them" (Numbers 23:21). That speaks of the bearing, the power, the royalty and the majesty of a king being among the children of Israel.

The very presence of these spiritual realities helped them in all their conflicts through the wilderness and in the battles to possess the Promised Land. Within a few years, forty-two battles were fought and won, because the shout of the king was among them, the authority, power, glory

and majesty of a king was in the midst of them. We are told, "In the word of the king, there is power". So, we are to understand that at the time of his descent from heaven, the Lord takes upon himself his great power and begins to exert the fullness of His saving influence upon the church to bring them to perfection.

Now, we want to show some similarities between the Genesis 3:8 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16. Lets see Genesis 3:8. The situation we find in that verse was a continuous thing. Let us read it and we comment thereafter.

⁸And they heard the voice of the Lord GOD walking in garden in the cool of the day; and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD amongst the trees of the garden.

Now, the question may be asked? Was that the first time the Lord was coming into the garden to have fellowship with Adam and Eve? We may put another question forward: what was the form of the Lord's visit to the garden? Did he appear in a visible human body and then talked with Adam? If he has been coming to Adam, then what was the form of the fellowship?

We can show that the Lord in His heaven did have fellowship with Adam by manifesting His presence. It is His presence here in Genesis 3:8 that was described as the "cool of the day". His presence was witnessed to by some changes in the environment of Adam.

Now, some suppose that "the cool of the day" refers to the evening period when the sun must have gone down, since that time period is more suited for relaxation; but a quick look at the things written in Genesis 2 will show to us that all of the earth as at then was in a temperate condition. There was nothing like scorching heat. In addition, the marginal translation of the phrase "in the cool of the day" actually means "in the wind of the day" (if your Bible has a margin you can check that out to convince yourself).

So, the divine presence was manifested in the gentle wind with which Adam was familiar. The voice sounding from the wind occasioned Adam's instruction and his responses. That was the character of the fellowship Adam and Eve had with God. Remember also Elijah. He knew there are certain forms in which the Lord normally appears to his servants. He heard of the earthquake, the fire and the mighty rushing wind (all of which were used to manifest the presence of the Lord to His people under the Old Testament), but, the Lord was not in any of these; The Lord came in a still small voice

One of the manifestations of the Lord's presence is wind. Here (in Genesis 3:8), the whole setting is that of fellowship. So, the Lord came and kept coming to Adam. The water of life that came forth from His mouth prepared and empowered Adam to fulfil His mission. Remember the phrase in Genesis 2:10 "and a river went out of Eden to water the garden". That symbolises the supply system of God towards Adam in the place of Fellowship with God. For although Adam dwelt in a garden condition physically, the whole earth being in a likeness of a garden, it was the condition of His heart and soul at the time of creation that is the garden in reference.

So, we are emphasising just one thing: whereas in Genesis 3 the scriptures shows that the presence of the Lord was known in just two things, in the wind of the day and the voice from within the wind, that of 1 Thessalonians 4 contains a little more detail. We read in the verse that follow 1 Thessalonians 4:16 that the Lord is present not only to empower His people, but also to bring about a change in nature. The 17th verse says

¹⁷Then we, which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

We saw in the last edition what the word "clouds" means. It indicates that a change of body takes place at this point. The believer puts "down" mortality and corruptibility and takes on incorruptibility, immortality and life (1 Corinthians 15:53). The phrase *to meet the Lord in the air* refer to fellowship, an association with the Lord on the Spirit plane; association of persons of the same kind, Spirit-to-Spirit.

We have said time and again, that God is lifting up some in the human race, the overcoming church particularly, from the human nature to the divine nature. Verse 4 of 2 Peter 1 says, "Whereby are given unto us, exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might become partakers of the divine nature". So we are to partake of the divine nature. The divine nature consists of the divine life, which emphasises character, and the divine body, (which is a spirit body). The divine body will house our new creation man at the time of full resurrection.

There are two things that we need to emphasis as we begin to bring this message to a close. One, the phrase "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 does not suggest a change of physical location; it may or may not. For example, in 2 Corinthians 12, there was an experience Paul says that he had in the days of his flesh in which the same "caught up" was used. He says

¹IT IS not expedient for me doubtless to glory; I will come to visions and Revelations of the Lord

In other words, the experience Paul is about to describe has to do with visions and revelations of the Lord. In verse 2, he says

²I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell. God knoweth;) such and one was caught up to the third heaven.

Paul, was physically present on the earth, but had an out-of-body experience. He was "caught up", but there was no change in nature. His new creation man was made to interact in the visions of God with the things that were brought before his mind; but in 1 Thessalonians 4, we shall not only interact with the Lord in the fullness of knowledge, there shall be a change of nature. We shall be like him in his spirit glory.

Now, we want to comment on that phrase which says we shall be "caught up together with them". The reference in the pronoun "them" is to the dead in Christ that are risen. Remember the purpose in 1 Thessalonians 4 was to show that those who are dead in Christ are not disadvantaged. That in fact, if they have lived overcoming lives, they will enter into the glory ahead of us who are alive and remaining.

Now, the question is to be asked, "what really happens when the dead in Christ are raised up from the dead and are brought into the glory of the resurrected nature, sharing with Christ in his divine essence? This is actually the subject matter in verse 17. when Paul, John and Peter, using these ones as examples, are awakened from their sleep and raised up into the fullness of their

inheritance (unlimited glory and power), they will be ministering from beyond the veil. That is, they will be ministering from the Spirit realm to the church.

The effect upon the church as they minister under the headship of Christ is that there will be increased awareness of God's plans and purposes in the church, great changes, great lifting up. It will be more or less like the ministry of spirit angels, except that they will carry greater glory, power and honour, for they will be divine beings.

We are being shown that it is as the church receives their heavenly ministries and respond to the Lord, submitting to all the promptings and leadings of the Spirit in our lives, that we are going to be caught up into the same estate of glory which they have already entered. That is very important.

At the hour of the descent of the Lord from heaven, there would be times of great spiritual encounters in the church. It would be a time of marked spiritual awakening for the faithful among the Lord's people. There will be increased activities of ministering spirits towards the church. And we are saying that apart from the general ministry of angels who ministers in a subordinate sense for the heirs of the great salvation, there will be the ministry of saints who have been raised up into their glory towards the church assisting her to come into the fullness of her inheritance.

And these spiritual activities will become more and more intensified as we approach the time of the Epiphaneia. From the time the descent of the Lord sets in and the Parousia of Christ is introduced, the dead in Christ (those who lived overcoming lives and have been judged worthy of sharing with Christ in His throne) begin to enter into their reward; each man in his own order. At the time the Epiphaneia is setting in, there is a myriad of divine beings coming with the Lord in ministry towards the overcoming church to lift her up into the same glory. 1 Thessalonians 4 says *"them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him and we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them."*

That is the meaning of that phrase "together with them". It means "in cooperation with them", as we receive their ministries, which actually constitute the ministry of the Lord towards us. If you will turn with me to Ephesians 2:4-6 you will find a similar usage of the phrase "together with"

⁴But God, who is rich mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us; ⁵Even when we are dead in sins hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) ⁶And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

You may be wondering why the word "together" appears again and again in this passage. For example, what does it mean for us to be quickened together with Christ, raised up together and made to sit together with Christ in heavenly places?

Now, let us, first of all, note what this passage is not saying in order that we might better understand what it is saying. We will all agree that Paul is not here saying that all believers were quickened, raised up from spiritual death, at the same time. This is evident because we did not all become born again at the same time. Our quickening took place at different times. Again, we know that there was no time when we were physically raised up into some heavenly places.

But we are told in this passage that He has raised us up and made us sit in heavenly places in Christ. So, the raising up must be spiritual and so also the heavenly places. These heavenly places are realms of life, power, grace and glory in Christ, which we enter into on account of our being in Christ, knowing and walking with Him. At the point of coming to Christ in salvation, we

experience a spiritual upgrading, an elevation. We were raised up and made to sit in the first of these heavenly places in Christ. And like we said, we did not all experience this upliftment at the same time.

Besides, all believers are not all seated in the same heavenly place in Christ. Some are seated in the first heaven while some are with Him in the second heaven, depending on our level of walk with Christ. So the word, "together with" (for it is one word in the Greek) does not mean the togetherness of the persons being raised as happening at the same time but the togetherness of the person being raised with the agency that makes that experience possible. Let this truth sink into you.

And what Paul is showing in this passage (Ephesians 2) is that all our growth in grace, and our entrances into the things God has prepared for us in redemption are received only in union with Christ. That is, as we fellowship with Christ, receive His word and submit to Him, we are made able to receive His life.

So the quickening together means that the quickening has been as a result of two things working together. He releases power and we co-operate with Him by accepting the power. Taking for example, the work of salvation, God does not just see somebody sitting somewhere and say "you are saved". No. it is under the testimony of the word of God that the person is positioned to receive the blessing. The word of God goes forth, he hears it and believes it, accepting it's testimony and receiving Christ into his life and the person is saved. And of course, the person is not saving himself but responding to the one who can save him.

The same is true with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. A person can be saved for twenty years but if he does not respond to the witness of God concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the power and glory it brings into the believer's life, he would remain without that experience. In other words, he has limited his growth in Christ by his own prejudice against the baptism and activities of the indwelling Spirit.

That of course does not take him out of the kingdom but he remains perpetually seated with Christ only in the first heave, in the outer court. But then, there is a second heaven, which the baptism with the Holy Spirit together with life in the Spirit assists us to come into. And there is also a third heaven. If a believer receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit but does not yield to the workings of Christ in His life, he will not enjoy in actual experiences, the blessedness of sitting with Christ in the second heaven.

So the "together with Christ" means that our raising up is in co-operation with Christ. All our growth in grace will be as we respond to the Lord of grace. If Christ does not let out grace no amount of fasting and praying and exercise in the Spirit will get us any experience in redemption. By the same token, if God should let out His grace and we are not receiving it, we cannot have an experience.

Thus, it is two-fold; a work done together. He lets out grace and we responding to that grace effectually enter into the experience. And so Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 6:1, receive not the grace of God in vain". A person cannot in idleness hope that spiritual increases would come to him. It is as he exercises himself in the Lord that the grace of the Lord becomes effectual in his life.

So, returning our minds back to 1 Thessalonians 4, we find that the phrase "together with them" means we shall be caught up into the same estate of glory, which they have already entered into only as we receive their ministries and submit to the same. At the time of the descent of the Lord, the dead in Christ are awakened and enter into their reward and ministries. And as they begin to exercise their ministries towards the Church, the divine presence becomes so strong in the midst

of the Church. Just a little sincere effort at seeking the Lord and there is a tremendous release of help.

May the Lord help us to know that these are not ordinary days. Events of great proportions and eternal significance are taking place in the heavens, of which we cannot afford to be ignorant. The scriptures are being opened as never before. And this opening up of the plans and purpose of God in redemption is but a first step towards our being caught into the same glory.

There shall yet be mighty workings of the Spirit, divine visitations or appearances to the faithful. Such manifestation of the divine presence that will utterly change a man's spiritual focus, prepares him to receive the glory that is to be revealed. And it is as we see the Lord's glory and submit ourselves fully unto His voice that the Lord will bring us into great favours. If we continue to maintain this disposition, we receive to be accounted overcomers and are then judged worthy of divine honour. May the Lord keep us alive in Him to witness the days of glory ahead of us, in Jesus name.

23

FIRST

RESURRECTION;

NOT RAPTURE

God is leading us on to glory. He has shown us a way, a way we have never been before. There are mountains to climb and there are valleys to cross. But before us there is an open door. The scriptures have shown that many saviours shall come out of Zion. And on account of this, our souls can rejoice in the Lord our God. This open door no one can shut. The word of the Lord, this gospel of the kingdom shall prosper exceedingly in this city, in this nation and all over the earth, and all oppositions shall prove to be weak against the might of the Lord's Spirit and the Lord's word.

We give thanks to the Lord for the great mercies He is showing to the church and to this nation. An instance of God's saving mercies towards the church is seen in the sustained call to repentance that God has been sending for some time now unto His people; repentance from sin, from the works of the flesh, from error and various shades of unfaithfulness.

And with the word of repentance is a strong word of warning going forth. And let all that hear take this to heart. If you have known the Lord in forgiveness of sin, in assurance of salvation, then there is such a tremendous grace available to you to live above sin. And God is calling for self-inspection and great adjustments in our lives that will make Jesus Christ Lord indeed.

In particular, there are great excesses in the church systems, which border on being obstinate, taking the work of the Lord with levity. And there are things done in the courts of Christian ministry that is a shame to the gospel. God is calling us all unto repentance.

What the Spirit of prophecy is indicating is that many will be publicly disgraced. Many of the buildings where the Lord's people gather unto the Lord, witness so much of shame and uncleanness. Even in Bible schools. Terrible things are taking place in unexpected quarters. And all of these are marks of the Spiritual decay that will ultimately lead to the enthronement of evil in the visible church systems.

There is a warning. Let all that hear these words know that the Lord is strong who executes judgement in His house. The Bible says, "judgement will begin in the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17). And the only thing we can do (and this is a personal appeal)... the only thing we can do as God's people to help ourselves, is to look into the mirror of God's word and break from everything in our lives that the word of God frowns at.

Coming into the mainstream of this meditation, our focus is on showing things that belong to the blessed hope. We are titling this meditation "First Resurrection, not Rapture". The first resurrection gives the true hope of the believer not the rapture.

We begin by asking the question, what is the first Resurrection? The Bible teaches that resurrection is a doctrine of Christ (Hebrews 6:2). But for Christ, all that are dead would have been eternally lost, for there would have been no life after death. The Bible reveals that there are six foundational doctrine of Christ: first repentance from dead words and faith towards God, second, the doctrine of baptisms and of the laying on of hands for spiritual ministry, and lastly, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgement. The six doctrines are in three pairs.

These three pairs of doctrine show in a sense, three distinct spheres of our walk with God. And when we talk of coming into the fullness, coming into the holiest of all, coming into immortality and life, receiving the change of nature which is associated with the activities of the Lord in the last days, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgement are two core doctrines that establish us in a fruitful walk with God.

1 Corinthians 15 reveals at least two resurrection: the first resurrection which is mentioned also in Revelation 20:4. By virtue of the word first, we know that there is also, at least, a second resurrection. We are shown that it will be every man in his own order, as the message of Christ comes and men open up their hearts to receive and submit to it, in this age, and in the next age.

However, the hope of the church, the highest and best, the richest and most glorious of the inheritance of the saints, come under what is called the first resurrection. And the Spirit of prophecy is indicating very strongly that men and women are already entering into this highest and best grace of redemption in growing degrees. And it is quite instructive that while God is leading some unto fullness, He is calling us into repentance. When somebody is a week old in the Lord, he ought to know and actually knows within himself, what God approves of and what He disapproves of. And we are talking especially of breaking free from the works of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:19-21.

There is the first resurrection, the hope of the church, a glorious hope. In contrast, "rapture" is a dangerous doctrine in as much as it blinds the Lord's people to the present day ministry of Christ

at this time of the end, as He prepares the church for the greatest manifestation of His glory here on earth.

So, let us come to Philippians 3:7-14. We shall first of all show that the first resurrection is in two stages, the second part being time dependent. We read.

⁷But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. ⁸Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ: ⁹And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. ¹⁰That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering, being made conformable, unto his death; ¹¹If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. ¹²Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. ¹³Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things, which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things, which are before, ¹⁴I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul, as indicated in verse 11 had the longing for the "out-resurrection from among the dead" as the driving force in his walk with God. It certainly had an impact on his ministry too. The first resurrection, which is in two stages, is something to attain to. This should hold out an irresistible appeal to all who truly see its glory. Just so, its promise would not fail to continue to strengthen the spiritual resolve of those who accept its demands of consecration and habitual submission to the leading (rule) of the Spirit of the indwelling Christ. First resurrection secures to those who attain to it, throne placement.

Besides, for Paul, he longed to see the full process completed in him without his having to experience death. The resurrection of the body, the second stage of the process enables one who is physically alive to break free into incorruptibility and life; free from death and associated limitations. In visible physical form, yet a fully developed divine spirit clothed with incorruptibility – this is the "resurrection from among the dead" (Philippians 3:11) that Paul had unyielding passion for as attested to in our passage.

However, this second stage of the process of the first resurrection, the full responsibility of the body is dependent on two things. First, it sets in only after the first stage of the resurrection is fully (successfully) completed. We shall elaborate on this later. The second thing is that the resurrection body can only be given at the time of the Second Advent; at an hour slated for it in the divine plan. Let us add this: this is the reason why Paul did not realise his dream of being "clothed with his house, made without hands, eternal in the heavens" – the resurrection body.

What then is the first stage of the resurrection process? How is it realised? What is indicated when the first stage is completed?

The moral and spiritual excellence of the Lord Jesus Christ reproduced in the believer is the goal of the first re process. Full development of the fruit of the Spirit is the moral part. Fully worked-in divine attributes of wisdom, justice, love and power (Isaiah 11:2,3) indicate the spiritual excellence of Christ. We now proceed to restate all of the above in more words to assist comprehension.

Moral resurrection commences with experience of the washing of regeneration and renewing in the Holy Spirit, which takes place when an individual receives Jesus Christ as His Lord and personal Saviour. Before this, in an unsaved condition, man is said to be dead in trespasses and sins. The guilt of sin is forgiven; the power of sin is destroyed. With this is an impartation of the hatred for sin and the love of righteousness.

There is a further development of war against sin and coupled with the practice of righteousness, indicating sanctification experience. The grace that secures Christ, as one's sanctification will see the individual able to submit to the workings of the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit begins to develop in all earnestness. In the same measure, the self-life, (propelled by the carnal mind) is gradually overcome.

In the process of time, given a faithful continuance in the above, there is an experiential deliverance from sin, and a full crystallisation of the moral perfection of Christ. This in brief is the process involved in the moral resurrection.

Spiritual resurrection has to do with the Lord imparting into our lives attributes of wisdom, knowledge and understanding, which enable us to know the mind of the Lord fully and to serve God according to His good pleasure. The Bible says David served his generation by the will of God. So spiritual resurrection relates to knowing and sharing in the attributes of God: wisdom, knowledge, understanding, compassion, power, grace etc, possessing those graces of the Spirit in increasing measures.

This (spiritual resurrection) together with moral resurrection, constitute the first part of the First Resurrection. When fully accomplished in the believer, they qualify him or her to receive the second part of the First Resurrection (the redemption of the body), which takes place suddenly or instantaneously.

Now, let us read verses 11, 12 and 13 of Philippians 3 and see how Paul declares that it is as we take on more and more of the moral and spiritual beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ, that we are qualified to receive the second part of the resurrection. This consists of the resurrection of the body, the redemption of the body: the body being lifted from corruptibility and mortality to incorruptibility and life.

That second aspect is sudden, not gradual, incorruptibility. It is something God reveals at the time of Jesus' Epiphaneia. He imparts that element of total change, at the time of the Epiphaneia. And believers may enter into the experience only when that time sets in.

But, let us see how verses 11-13 of Philippians read and that will help us. Verse 11 says *if by any means I might attain unto...* So, it is something that is to be attained to. Grace is at work, but not submitting to the grace of God is like receiving the grace of God in vain. And the grace of God is a Teacher, a Saviour (Titus 2:11); it continues to lead us into the image and likeness of Christ in everything.

So, Paul here says, "if by any means I might attain". There was something to be attained unto; it is moral and spiritual resurrection. If he attains to this, then there will be a breaking free from death. The phrase "the resurrection of the dead" in verse 11 is "out resurrection", a resurrection out from among the dead ones, an experience that would lift him up so that he becomes a full grown spirit man, coming into incorruptibility and life.

In verse 12 he says *not as though I have already attained, either was already perfect*. He knew he must continue to grow up until he comes to the fullness of Christ. Then God will do his part of bringing total change to wit, the redemption of the body.

True enough as we shall show, there is a work of the Spirit of God in our bodies from the time of salvation to the time we experience in full, the moral and spiritual resurrection. Divine healing and divine health results from the work of the Spirit in our bodies as we cleave by faith to the testimony of Christ in this regard; but the redemption of our bodies is sudden, terminating the ageing process. It signals our coming into full spirit nature; no longer held down by the limitations of our present bodily estate.

We have quickly looked at two things *moral and spiritual resurrection*, which we say constitute the first stage of the resurrection. We know that the process is gradual. Paul, at the point of laying down his body in death had already attained to the needed grace. It is God's purpose in apprehending us is to bring us to the first resurrection; but the scriptures shows that not all of Gods people will attain unto it.

For some, the process of moral and spiritual resurrection is almost nil. For others, it is going on at a slow pace. There certainly are some that are mounting up on wings as eagles. Each one of us ought to stir up himself to follow the Lord faithfully. This is not an hour to play church. This is not the hour to hide under the supposition that this thing that is being taught is not commonly believed by the church systems and so must be wrong. Wisdom is justified by her deeds. There is a witness in the heart of those that love the Lord that these things are an expression of God's love and mercy to the church, calling men into the things that belong to the fullness of their inheritance.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 shows the other aspect of the first resurrection that has to do with of our coming into the fullness of life and immortality. Recall that this stage of resurrection is sudden, not gradual. From verse 50 we read

⁵⁰Now, this I say brethren that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. ⁵¹Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep (that is to say we shall not all die) but we shall all be changed, (then the change is described in the next verse). ⁵²In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound and the dead in Christ shall be raised in incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ⁵³For this corruptible must put on incorruption..

"In a moment... ". The word "moment" refers to the force that is applied to bring about the final aspects of the redemption of our body. The word in Greek is "atomos" from which we have the English word "atom". It is not a moment of time but a moment of force.

Its suddenness is shown in the other phrase, "in the twinkling of an eye". This has to do with the suddenness with which persons who have attained to the fullness of the moral and spiritual resurrection are brought into the "redemption of the body". This "atomos" is according to the working of God's irresistible power (Philippians 3: 21). So, divine power is going to change this physical body and cause it to be transformed into a spirit body, a divine body, a body that befits the New Creation Man already developed to the full stature of Christ.

The resurrection body waits to be received at the completion of the moral and spiritual resurrection. It says, "The mortal shall out on immortality". It is not going to be a change of body, but a change in our bodies. It is going to be a fashioning of this body and it will be by the power of Christ. This is reserved only for those who "overcome and keep his words to the end".

Thus, it amounts to a false hope and mere delusion when we suppose that we can just remain the way we are as spiritual babies, unexposed to the things of the Kingdom and to the moral and spiritual glories of the Lord Jesus Christ and then expect to be catapulted to divinity at the sound of some physical trumpet. What purpose will that serve? May the Lord deliver us from folly.

The word "meet" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 conveys the idea of welcoming and receiving a dignitary. The meaning becomes clear when we look at what happens in our secular world when a dignitary, say a president, is to visit a state. The governor of that state, together with other state functionaries goes out to give the president and his entourage a befitting welcome.

The persons who are to meet the Lord in the air are persons who have come into great status and honour in the Kingdom; persons who are full-grown, who having taken on the fullness of Christ's life have become divine. So, it is a meeting of Christ with Christ; not a meeting of Christ with babes. He receives unto himself in full union, not a babe, or a person laden with imperfections, but a church that is without spot or wrinkle or blemish or any such thing (Ephesians 5:27).

Hence, there is held out for us a hope. For those alive in this hour that know Jesus Christ as Lord experientially in their daily living, God will do a quick work. It will be in the environment of His Word and of His Spirit. God does all He does by the power of the spoken word. His Word clothed with the Spirit of God.

God is reacting against the decay in the church systems. With it a people are coming out of the hold of the denominational walls, coming into a free atmosphere where the Word of God and the Spirit of God are leading men and women into greater experience in God. May the Lord cause you to be a part of this great body that the Lord is raising up.

When we pick up this subject again in the next edition, we shall once again discuss the first resurrection in its two stages. The first part being, moral and spiritual resurrection and the second part being the redemption of the body. The Lord bless you, cause his face to shine upon you and do you good. The Lord bring you into a peculiar fellowship with him and cause you to cleave to Him with all your heart in Jesus name.

24

FIRST

RESURRECTION;

NOT RAPTURE

In entering into this meditation, we want to say again that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Pattern Son. Salvation brings us into sonship with God. Through salvation, the seed of Christ is planted in us and as that seed is grown to full life, we are placed as God's sons indeed. So, if we want to see the glories that belong to full sonship, then we look at Jesus in whom is found all that the Lord wants to reproduce in us.

Then, there is this man, the apostle Paul. He is the pattern disciple. If we want to know how to follow the Lord and so come to full sonship; we have an example in Paul. In this teaching on the first resurrection, we shall be looking at this man's life and ministry. Through the things that are revealed concerning Paul, who expresses in his life and service, the true longings that should be found in every disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, we may come to a fuller understanding of the blessed hope.

We begin with 1 Timothy 1:16. Paul says of himself here:

¹⁶Howbeit for this cause, I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long suffering for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

Now, you will find that Paul was saying that God laid hold upon him, exercised so much of mercy, love, kindness and truth towards him, in order that he, coming from his dark background, might be a pattern of the grace and power of God. The verses preceding this verse tells us that Paul before his conversion was actually a persecutor of the church, given to a religion that seemed to have its beginning in Moses, but standing against the God whom Moses served.

Coming from a total hatred for the gospel and those who believe in Jesus Christ, to becoming a pattern disciple, Paul is here saying that in him, God shows the example of the working of divine longsuffering to bringing men to the highest and best in God.

So, we are to look at the man Paul. The longings in him, the desires for full union with Christ, reveal what God expects to see in us. These things should characterise us as God's people.

Paul's passion for God's glory, his passion for God's fullness puts a question mark on the greater many of God's people. Are we indeed recipients of the riches of the Saviour's grace? If we do not find the same push in our spirits, the same motivation, the same longings, the same spirit that we find moving Paul in all of his life and service, then a charge of unwise neglect of divine love and mercies must be laid at our doorsteps.

There is something concerning resurrection that Paul tells us in Acts 24:14, 15. We read:

¹⁴But this I confess unto thee that after the way which they call heresy, so worshipped I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets. ¹⁵And having hope towards God, which they themselves also allow that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.

Now, God's word allows that there would be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. In Christ is preached repentance from dead works, faith towards God, baptisms, laying on of hands for spiritual ministries, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgement. So, there is the hope that the just and the unjust will experience a resurrection of the dead. However, the resurrection of the just takes place before that of the unjust.

The first resurrection is a part of the resurrection of the just. It is that part that relates to the inheritance of those who share with the Lord Jesus Christ in his divinity; those who are to reign with Him. Thus the first resurrection is an honour, a glory to be conferred on one having been tested and found worthy.

In this connection, let us read Revelations 20:4. There, John says,

⁴And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgement was given unto them, and I saw the souls of those that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands, and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and they shall reign with him a thousand years.

Now, if you were following the reading, you will discover that certain qualifications are required of those who reign with Christ a thousand years. These are made to be partakers of the first resurrection.

Not all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation experience the first resurrection. In fact, scriptures reveals that a difference exists between those who come to the first resurrection and those who did not give full proof of their submission to the Lordship of Christ.

In the above passage, those counted worthy of the first resurrection either are beheaded or they must have had victory over the beast, its mark and the number of his name. In the message "The mark of the beast", we gave attention to this. The interested reader can request for a free copy of the printed message.

While the things to overcome in order to have a share in the first resurrection are given in spiritual symbolism in Revelations 20:4, in the life of Paul, we see what it takes to possess the mark for the prize of the first resurrection. We see in his life and ministry, what the standard of life is that makes a man to be judged worthy of full union with Christ. We as the Lord's people ought to imitate Paul if we are to come into the honour of sharing with Christ the fullness of His glory.

Reading from Philipians 3:7-17 we hear Paul say of himself:

⁷But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. ⁸Yea, doubtless and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ. ⁹And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith; ¹⁰That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his suffering, being made conformable unto his

death; ¹¹If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. ¹²Not as though I have already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. ¹⁵Let us therefore, as many as be perfect (as many as be matured, as many as have clear understanding of God's purposes for them in salvation...) be thus minded; and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

That is, as you long for more of God, living by the principles Paul took upon himself, if there be anything about your life that will keep you from overcoming, God will make it known to you.

Thus, sincerity is required, living in consecration is required; and as we follow the Lord, hating sin, loving righteousness, God by His Spirit, will bring to our notice, anything that is contrary to His will in our lives and ministries. We read on from verse 16.

¹⁶Nevertheless, whereunto we have already attained (the things we have already known, the things we have already experienced in Christ), let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. ¹⁷Brethren, be ye followers together of me, (Paul counsels us to follow him as we see him follow Christ)... and mark them which walk so as ye have us for examples.

Coming back to verse 11, Paul says *if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead*. The reference is to one of the two classes described in Acts 24:15 as the resurrection of the just. The first of these two classes is the promise made to the overcomer of the gospel age. The resurrection of the unjust is a general promise to the entire human race. All will partake of it and it is not something to be attained to. In passing, let us simply note that the second of the two classes of the resurrection of the just, also mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:23 (b) will be addressed in another connection.

The first resurrection; the honour of sharing with Christ in His fullness, is something to be attained to. It is not a general promise held out to all men. All who believe in Jesus Christ in this age can by the grace of the indwelling Christ attain unto this glory. In our daily walk with Him we do experience His dealings. If we faithfully and habitually submit to Him, growth results morally and spiritually.

Paul laboured to attain to the first resurrection; and it is in the light of this that he gives the counsel we find in Philippians 3:15-17. There is a lifestyle that is in harmony with seeking for mastery, for honour is the kingdom of grace. We are to walk humbly before the Lord our God. We are to allow the law of His Spirit to bring about tremendous changes in our lives. A heart loyal to the cause of God receives grace to be faithful. The process of resurrection will only continue to completion in the faithful.

He began the work of salvation in us by the power of His Word and His Spirit; by the same power, he will complete it. Philippians 1:6 says, *he that has began a good work in us will bring it to completion IN THE DAY OF CHRIST*. The words in capital refers to Christ coming in glory; the Epiphaneia.

However, just as faith was created in us when Christ was preached, and we responded to the pull of the Spirit unto salvation, so it is required at every stage of our development to keep on submitting to the Lord and to the testimony of His Word.

One of the fatal aspects of the rapture doctrine is that it covers up God's purpose, and men just suppose that a physical trumpet will sound and up they fly! But brethren, an apostle of God said he did all that was in his power according to the working of grace to attain to the first resurrection. Thus, we should expect that the same tremendous changes that took place in Paul, John, Peter, and in thousands of believers since the church began, must take place in all who sit with him on the throne. Revelations 3:21 says "*to him that overcomes shall I grant to seat with me on my throne even as I overcame and am sat with my father in his throne.*" A place by Christ in rulership over the nations in the age to come is reserved for those who overcome.

So, continuous growth is a must to the believer who is to sit with the Lord in his throne. He must come forth in the true image and likeness of the Lord. A crystallisation of the full statue of Christ is the goal set before us. In Isaiah 11:1-5, we are told:

¹And there shall come forth as rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of hid roots. ²And the Sprit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. ³And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove out of the hearing of his ears. ⁴But with righteousness shall he judge the poor and reprove with equity, the meek of the earth; and he shall smote the earth with the rod of his mouth and with the breadth of his lips, shall he slay the wicked (all these speak of spiritual powers) ⁵And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reign.

The description is true of the Lord Jesus Christ and would be true of members of his perfected body. The believer is to give all diligence to ensue that he keeps vital fellowship with him who is the resurrection and the life.

Remember that resurrection is a process, the better part of which is given to incorporating Christ in us. It is indeed a gradual process, but its final stages exert more on our hitherto mortal body. Raising up the dead is an act, but resurrection is a process. This distinction must be noted carefully.

Resurrection commences at the point of the washing of regeneration, when a man experiences forgiveness of sin. It progresses at a pace dependent on a number of things: obedience to the revealed word, fellowship, consecration, the Spirit of faith and yieldedness to the government of the Holy Spirit.

So, growth in Christ' likeness is a must for the believer. The bible says concerning the Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 2:40 and *the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.* In verse 52 of the same chapter, we see the same thing. It says that *Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man. The same thing was said of John in Luke 1:80.*

All of the epistles clearly teach this one thing. God has proposed a throne of glory for everyone who follows faithfully in the footsteps of the Master. The overcoming life is the product of grace. Nothing of any spiritual value comes by our natural might. Grace utilised begets more grace. The measure of a man's submission is nothing but a proof that grace has not been disregarded or trampled underfoot

Treasuring the things of redemption means putting the same value on them as God does. This will imply faith; faith in the person of God and His word. One who opens up in this manner to Christ will continually experience a divine pull towards the Lord and his interests. Though such a one is severely ravaged by the fall prior to salvation, he will experience deep moral transformation. He shall live. And if as he lives in unbroken fellowship with God, he holds unto Jesus for the full performance of all the gracious promises of redemption, then he shall never fall; never die. Everything about resurrection is built around our Lord Jesus Christ. He that liveth and believeth in him shall never die. Christ is the resurrection and the life. (John 11:25, 26)

The great heights we must attain to are gradually but surely obtained on daily basis. Given the same degree of faithfulness, the availability of the prophetic word (meat in due season) to the individual places him at an advantage over another not so blessed. This relates to the pace at which the process of resurrection takes place. A proper understanding of this is required for one to be able to earnestly seek to partake of the present day ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. His voice sounding in the ministries inspires them to trumpet the prophetic word.

Let us know that it is not a physical trumpet that will bring about any change in us. Romans 8:10,11 says,

¹⁰If Christ be in you, the body is dead (still subject to death) because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹BUT if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken (give life to) your mortal bodies, by His spirit that dwelleth in you.

Christ in us is the hope of glory. The indwelling Christ in me is the Spirit of God that raised Jesus from the dead. Our change will come by him. The power of his working is in the medium of the revealed and received word. Through him, we slay death agencies; we mortify the deeds of the flesh. Rom. 8:12, 13.

¹²Therefore, on account of this, we are debtors not to the flesh to live after the flesh. ¹³For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit (indwelling you) do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

We are debtors. We have a debt to pay if this experience must be fulfilled in us. We owe ourselves and the Spirit of God in us some responsibilities. If we must experience the change, we are debtors not to the flesh, but to the Spirit of Christ in us. If we live in the flesh we shall die, that is we shall suffer loss (1 Corinthians 3:15) but if we through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh we shall live, we shall come to the fullness of life in God.

The above observation links us with Philippians 3 that we began with. The first resurrection is something to attain unto; and there is a manner of life the believer is to take on in order to be counted worthy of this honour. Paul says *what things were gain to him, he counted loss for Christ; Yea, doubtless he counted all things but loss for the Excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus His Lord*. The reason is that he may be found in Him, that he may know Him increasingly, experiencing the power of His resurrection on daily basis.

In Romans 8:18 he says he reckons that the sufferings that he must endure in order to win a place of honour in Christ, are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us at

the time of the manifestation of the Sons of God. He says "not as though I had already attained (at the time he was writing; Philippians 3, he had not yet attained unto the fullness of spiritual resurrection) but I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ".

There is a mark for that prize. The mark is the overcoming life. This "life" lives on the irresistible desire to be like Christ through being with Him. It is the first love. Paul had this grace. He presses on, not allowing anything to distract him or cause him to lose that focus in his spirit.

Little wonder at the closing days of his life and ministry, he could say assuredly *"for I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"* (2 Timothy 2:6-8).

Now, after calling believers to be followers together of him (even as he follows Christ) and to mark them which walk in the same manner for an example, Paul in verses 18 and 19 of Philippians 3 laments the lean spiritual condition of many in the early church. This, same condition is prevalent in the church world today. He says:

¹⁸(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now telling you even weeping (may the Lord give us the same passion for His glory in Jesus name) that they are enemies of the cross of Christ (even though they profess to be Jesus Christ in their lips and have him in their hearts so to say) ¹⁹Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly (what they can get out of the gospel in terms of material acquisitions) and whose glory is in their shame (and shameful practices) who mind earthly things)

It is terrible for a believer to live for the dust; but it is equally painful to lose a placement with Christ on the throne when God has so graciously opened the opportunity to all believers. Our commonwealth is in heaven. We must "set out affections on things above".

Not all of God's people will be stars with ruling functions in the heaven of God when the Kingdom of heaven is installed. Not all will come to rulership in the Kingdom. There will be lesser degrees to occupy. The Lord Jesus Christ talked about the least in the Kingdom of heaven (Matthew 11:11). This implies that the Kingdom of heaven is highly stratified.

To make it to the Kingdom of heaven at all, is a great honour and requires for one to be processed of God. However, let us also remind ourselves that it is God's intention for all that are called in this church age to come to the highest and best in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul says many in the church world have their belly as their god. "They mind earthly things", and "they are enemies of the cross of Christ". These are very strong words and our prayer is that we all will turn to the Lord in repentance and begin to seek him, uncommonly opening our hearts, to the light of his searching but love-filled eyes. He is our Sanctification.

The same power that transforms us and fulfils in us the deep desire of God to have Jesus to be the first born among many brethren is that which works on our body. Our resurrection body will conform to the glorious body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Lets read verse 20, 21 of Philippians 3 and close.

²¹For our conversation is in heaven (this speaks of a manner of life Old Testament be lived) from whence also, we look for the saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²²Who shall change our vile body (newer translations say he shall fashion anew our vile body) that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body (and how will he do this?) according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself...

Yes, it shall be according to the power of the indissolvable life; according to the working of the same power that makes him able to subdue moral failures in our lives giving us victory morally and spiritually. All of these things happen in the medium of the life-giving Spirit, Christ the Living WORD; the Lord from heaven. The testimony of Him and his final acts in redemption is the Spirit of the prophetic word. They that hear with effect His voice shall live (John 5:25). His voice is as the sound of a great trumpet (Revelations 1:10, I Corinthians 15:52). May the Lord keep you for Himself. Amen.

25

THE COVENANT OF RESPONSE: THE CALL TO CONSECRATION

In the last editions we looked at several things that combinedly describe the true hopes of the believer. The first resurrection, the blessed hope of being like Jesus in all of His fullness and reigning with Him. The first resurrection belongs to those accounted worthy to be clothed to incorruptibility, immortality and Life.

In this meditation, we are going to examine in practical terms, the price the believer is expected to pay in order to receive the reward of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. There is a price to pay; a cup to drink from if we must share in the highest honours of the Kingdom.

We are to distinguish between the essential character of the grace covenant, a one-sided covenant that is entirely resting upon God for its performance and the response required of the

recipients of this grace. God has bound himself with the word of oath to save to the uttermost, the seed of Christ. This is how we are to understand Genesis 22:16-18

¹⁶And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and has not withheld thy son, thy only son: ¹⁷That in blessing will I bless thee and in multiplying will I multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand, which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. ¹⁸And in thy seed shall all the nations of this earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

Paul, commenting of this in Hebrews 6:13 ff

¹³For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, ¹⁴Saying, surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. ¹⁵And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise: the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: ¹⁸That by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have a string consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hope upon the hope set before us: ¹⁹which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth that within the veil; ²⁰Wither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made and high priest forever after the order of Melchisedec.

It pleases the Almighty God to fully commit himself and all resources at his disposal to fulfil the promise he made to Abraham and his seed. Redemption is unconditionally provided and unconditionally guaranteed to the SEED. All must on account of this, be strengthened in the inner man with much assurance

On the other hand, we find numerous scriptures that counsel on the Spiritual condition in which grace may be enjoyed to the fullest. The Kingdom of grace crowns those who treasure its riches enough to heed divine counsel.

The Lord Jesus Christ teaches on the necessity of self-denial and aliveness to God as required of those who will be worthy of a place on His throne (Matthew 16:24 ff)

In the same vein, the prophetic finger in psalm 50:5 seems to indicate that God is committed to acknowledging and blessing those who make covenant with Him by "sacrifice." In between these two passages of scriptures are to be found the main elements of the challenge of consecration.

We may rightly view the covenant of sacrifice as one-sided, voluntarily entered into by those who greatly treasure the riches of divine grace. The goodness of God has provided that those who answer the high calling should be taught the way of consecration.

The believer's call to consecration is contained in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 9:23-26 (see also Matthew 16:22-28; Mark 8:31). It is taught in all scriptures, but these words of our Lord bring out very clearly the fact that all that must come into the estate of glory and honour that he now occupies, all that would become like him and see Him as He is, are required of God to pledge their humanity in a covenant of sacrifice, walking in His footsteps. Luke 9:23-26 reads

²³And he said to them all, if any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. ²⁴For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. ²⁵For what is a man advantaged, if he gains the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?

"If any man will come after me"; that is if any man will be my disciple indeed, if he will come into the same office, the same glory, the same honour I entered into, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For what is a man advantaged if he gains the whole world and at the end be a cast away? That reminds us of the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:27. He says, "Lest by any means, after I have preached to others, I myself will be a cast away"

So, it is possible to be a preacher, a servant of God and still miss out of the high calling (i.e. be a reject). The Lord himself says, *Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my father, which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And I will profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity* (Matthew 7:21-23)

Notice that in verse 23 of Luke 9, the Lord puts this matter of our call to consecration in three particulars. First, we are to deny ourselves, Secondly we are to take up our cross, and thirdly we are to follow him. In order to sponsor a more practical understanding of this subject however, we will examine seven elements that together constitute our call to consecration. These are

Self denial

The devotions of prayers, praise and worship

The study of God's word

The practice of (habitual obedience to) God's word

The practice of self judgement

Sharing in the labours of love

Developing the Spirit of the Lamb

We shall discuss each of these elements in turn.

Self denial

This occupies a central position in the believer's call to consecration. Yet it is in this point that many fall short of the call. Self is a great enemy to the believer. It is perhaps the last enemy that must be overthrown in the lives of many. The Lord Jesus Christ said *if any man would come after me, let him deny himself*. Self-denial expresses itself in many ways. We can look at it in two broad senses; in relation to things that are illegitimate (which are not allowed a believer called to share in the rulership of heaven); and in relation to things which, though legitimate, are not expedient. (1 Corinthians 6:10; 10:17)

The first part of self-denial has to do with denial of the world. We are required to deny the world and its lusts. A believer that lives in the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh or the pride of life is still very worldly and has not started to run the race set before him. He has actually not seen the Kingdom, as he should. Deliverance from fleshly and worldly lusts is the first proof that a man has received the knowledge of God. The grace of God that has appeared to us teaches us to deny ungodly and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world (Titus 2:12). Grace teaches and enables

However, world denial means more than fleeing from every appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22). It requires that the believer must separate himself from the world and its systems. A believer that gets himself very involved in partisan politics for example certainly does not know what the high calling enjoins us. The politics of this world is a dirty game. We cannot be actively involved in the Kingdoms of this world in such a manner without defiling our garments (Revelations 16:15). We must wait for the time God has appointed for us to rule and in his own Kingdom.

The same thing applies to the economic (commercial) and religious inclinations of the present world. In as much as we must live and do business in the world, there are things the believer must certainly not be involved in if he is serious with the calling of God upon his life. The believer must separate himself from all religious arrangements (assemblies) that are revealed to be contrary to God and His worship even though they are clothed in Christian garments.

We are shown clearly in scriptures that all who are to be seated with Christ in his throne must be virgins in their heart devotions towards the Lord. They must not be defiled with women (Revelations 14:4); and the denominational church systems are women. Thus deliverance from denominationalism and all the evils associated with that order of things is a must for all who seek to come after Christ. We must go to meet him out of the camp, bearing his reproach (Hebrews 13:13-14).

There is also a level of involvement in the world's affairs that defile the soul. For example, active participation on social-cultural clubs does not build God's Kingdom; (and we are not here talking of professional associations etc). It rather shows that a soul is spiritually sick and does not know what it means to be called out of the world. We are told that *no man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this world, that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier*. (2 Timothy 2:4).

We are called to be crucified to the world, and so live in a manner that makes the world itself to be crucified to us! (Galatians 6:14) Paul says, "*Let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus*" (Galatians 6:17). Our lives must be hid in Christ, in God, unavailable for the world to make use of to further its course (Colossians 3:3).

The other aspect of self-denial involves denying oneself of things that are allowed of God, things that are legitimate, the misuse of which nonetheless, could be inimical to attaining to the highest and best in the Kingdom. This constitutes a very difficult aspect for many of the called-out ones.

God has justified the believer in Christ; hence, he is entitled to all the blessings of life. He has the right to enjoy life to the full, as long as sin is not in question; however, at the point of consecration, a man's rights, his desires, longings and aspirations are laid upon the altar in exchange for the Father's will.

What influences a man's choices in life? From where does a man draw his springs (Psalm 87:7): What are his ambitions and goals? Where is his heart? Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plains of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, even as the garden of the Lord (for so it always appears to the carnal minded), like the land of Egypt, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Then Lot chose him all the plains of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east (Genesis 13:10, 11). We know the rest of the story.

Paul says, "*they that strive for mastery, must be temperate in all things*: (2 Timothy 2:5). We can unknowingly hinder ourselves by the choices we make in life. We can be so involved with our jobs and business in a manner that beclouds our primary calling. A believer can gradually lose sight of God's calling because the heart has been taken over by the legitimate cares of this life.

The call of consecration (self-denial) involves a real cost to the believer. We have our Saviour as a worthy example to follow. The Lord Jesus Christ had opportunity to become great in men's reckoning, but he sacrificed all that upon the altar for the joy that was set before him. May the Lord give us understanding. Whenever family (and extended family) demands, economic and social interests that are allowed us, clash with Kingdom demands and interests in our lives, we must know that we are to love him above all.

The hours available to us for leisure must be used to the profit of our souls and of the Kingdom. We are to redeem the time, endeavouring to carve out more and more of the hours of the day to attend to the matter of our calling. Similarly, our material resources are to be available to serve God's interest. A man certainly has not known the love of God, as he should when he holds tenaciously to his resource, straining out only a little to serve the cause of the Kingdom.

The Devotions of Prayers, Praise and Worship

The next point in our call to consecration is the devotions of prayers, praise and worship. We cannot become what God wants us to be in Christ Jesus without attending daily at the altar of devotional prayers, praise and worship. We must be daily supplicants before the Throne of grace from which we obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need (Hebrews 4:16). The Lord commanded us to pray lest we fall into temptation (Luke 2:40, 46). Paul says that one of the greatest resources in our lives as believers is a life of prayers. We are to *pray always with all prayers and supplications in the Spirit and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplications for all saints* (Ephesians 6:18)

We must labour in prayers for ourselves, our homes and the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. A believer that does not know the prayer altar intimately cannot overcome the influences of the mystery of iniquity. Such a one cannot amount to anything great in the Kingdom. The anointing flows from a broken life, from the altar of agonising prayers, from a life offered to do the will of God alone. This is the meaning of Gethsemane. In the place of prayer and supplications, we receive, in increasing manner, the supply of the Spirit of Christ (Philippians 1:19).

Associated with prayers, intercession and supplications, is thanksgiving, praise and worship. These as incense must always be mingled with our prayers. (Revelations 8:3). A soul that lives in agonising prayers and does not know the joy of spirit-borne praise and worship may have a short lifespan. In the same vein, worship may be only soulical and empty when it does not come from a heart that has known prayers, intercession and supplications.

A man that does not pray cannot really praise and worship God; for the two are complementary. For a man that lives by the altar of prayers, worship becomes a passionate appeal to the Throne and majesty of God and God cannot withhold his mercies and interventions from such a soul. In worship, we tell God that we love him, we believe in him and we give glory to him. There, we assert our confidence and faith in God and his ability to accomplish what God has shown us to be his will. It is strange, but the Bible shows us that God depends on the prayers, praise and worship of the saints God waits eagerly for it. The spiritual blessing that comes to a soul, as rain is dependent on the measure of grace he has known in the place of prayers and worship. The same is true for a local congregation of God's people; Job 36:27 says, "*for he maketh small the drops of water; they pour down rain according to the vapour thereof*".

Implied in the call to the devotions if prayer is fasting. This is a necessary element in effective prayers. The Lord says, "When ye fast..." (Matthew 6:16) In Isaiah 58, we are shown the benefits a properly used fast brings upon the believer. Fasting is a means to an end not an end in itself. It helps to bring our flesh under, to wait on the Lord in our spirits and sharpen our spiritual senses to be able to relate with God more effectively on issues we have brought before him.

The believer may assign to himself regular days of fasting (even if it is just one day in a week); time separated to commune with and wait upon the Lord. Through fasting, we can know great leaps in our prayer life.

The Study of God's Word

In prayers, praise and worship we talk to God, but for fellowship (communion) to be complete, we must allow God to talk to us. God talks to us through his word (the written word) and the operations of the Holy Spirit, revealing the mind of God. Of these two, the word of God is the supreme means by which God communicates with his people today. In fact, all that God will say through the operations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit will always be in agreement with the written word.

For us to know the plans and purposes for us, His will for our lives and for His church, we must study the word of God. We cannot know Him his ways, thoughts, plans and desires for us and for His people except we come into His Word; and if we do not know Him, we cannot love Him. If we do not know what He has freely given to us in Christ, we cannot enjoy these things. If we do not know His plans and purposes, we cannot serve Him aright. If we do not know His will and mind about a matter, we cannot obey him, neither can we pray, for the Word of God is the fuel of prayers.

God will not have us to be ignorant concerning things that belong to our redemption (1 Corinthians 10:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:13). Neither can the believer afford to be willingly ignorant (2 Peter 3:5); for to be devoid of knowledge is to perish! (Hosea 4:6) We must be enriched in God's word, if we must have a fruitful prayer life and live successful Christian lives. The word of God must dwell in us richly (Colossians 3:16). Paul says for us to *study to show ourselves approved unto God, a workman that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth* (2 Timothy 2:15). Peter says we should be *ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh us a reason for the hope that is in us* (1 Peter 3:15)

The word of God has the power to instruct, guide and change us if there is a hunger for it, and a thirst for righteousness. The called must long for the bread that proceeds from the mouth of God. He must daily ask for the heavenly manna that quickeneth. He must create time and learn to wait on the word of God in the reading of the scriptures. (For even the mere reading of God's word brings profit), in the systematic study of God's word and in meditation.

In this regard, there are two environments the believer must regularly place himself in order to hear God's word. The first is personal fellowship; the second is the fellowship of the body of Christ. Personal devotion with God is vital to the Christian life. It is the believer's birthright, but there are many things the believer cannot hear from God and know about him except as he receives these of other members of the body of Christ. It is both unfaithfulness to God and folly on the part of the believer to habitually absent himself from the fellowship of like-minded believers. We are counselled to *forsake not the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some* (Hebrews 10:25).

If the believer is to grow into all that God has planned for him, he must make full and faithful use of his personal fellowship with the Lord and the fellowship of the local expression of the body of Christ to which he belongs.

The Practice of Obedience

The called in Christ must not only put himself in a position where he can hear God's word, he must obediently practice God's word. James 1:22 says, *but be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. We are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ* (1 Peter 1:2)

The Bible teaches that the believer has power to obey God's word. *As many as received him, he has given the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name* (John 1:12). Sin cannot, and should not have dominion over the believer. For him, the Lordship and tyranny of sin has been broken and he is commanded to live in righteousness. 1 Peter 1:14 says *as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance, but as he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.*

To hear the word of God and not seek to obey it (put it into practice) is to be courting divine displeasure; *"for the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God, but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected..."* No matter what a man may claim to be doing or have done for God, if in his own life, he has not learnt to practice obedience to God's word; he will come to a great loss at the end of the day. Such has actually built his house upon the sand (Matthew 7:31-27). We are to practice obedience to God's word in all things, both in little and great things (2 Corinthians 2:9). They come into the same glory with him indeed who have learnt to *follow the lamb whithersoever he goeth* (Revelations 14:4). Whatsoever God reveals to us in His will, we must do, if we are to be found approved in His sight. This touches on all aspects of our lives.

It is in learning to walk in the light of God that we have, that we are able to sustain real fellowship with God and to continually hear his voice (1 John 1:7). God will stop speaking to us if he sees we have a habit of disobedience. Obedience to God's word is also the only proof that we love God. The Lord Jesus Christ said *if ye love me; keep my commandments* (John 14:15). It is as we cultivate habitual obedience to the voice of God that He builds his life into us.

God exercises a lot of patience towards his people in this regard, giving the necessary assistance and help (rain) needed for us to bear fruits. We also are called to be patient with ourselves. It is by patient continuance that we inherit the promises. James 5:7 says *be patient therefore brethren, unto the coming of the Lord; Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receives the early and latter rain.*

The Practice of Self Judgement

Associated with the practice of obedience is the practice of self-judgement. The scriptures enjoins us to *judge ourselves that we may not be judged* (1 Corinthians 11:13). We are to examine ourselves daily in relation to our calling and how we are faring on the path that God has called us unto. (2 Corinthians 13:5)

At the end of the day's activities (at least) a believer should be able to sit before God in the quietness of his spirit and look over the day, how it has been. Has he lived in the consciousness of God's presence? Has he brought any profit to the Kingdom, assisting another to come into a better knowledge of God? Are things beginning to spring up in his life that are injurious to his spiritual aspirations?

All the above questions and more the believer ought to consider daily. Where he finds shortcomings, he is to cry out unto God and receive grace from the throne to live a better life. In addition, he is to make the necessary self-adjustments that the light of God's word and wisdom would indicate.

The practice of self-judgement is a vital element in consecration. It helps to keep a soul focused on the heavenly calling, looking unto Jesus. Through self-judgement, a man is able to see failings in his life, and deal with them before they take root and become an embarrassment both to him and to his Lord. The journey to failure and apostasy (such as make a believer unfit for the Kingdom) is actually a very long one. A man does not fall in a day. It takes a long time of wilful disobedience and rebellion for a soul to come to that point. God often speaks, corrects, strives and seeks to intervene in a man's life long before he becomes a reprobate (2 Corinthians 13:5).

When a man has learnt to judge himself, examining himself daily, with a heart ready to make any necessary self-adjustments, such a man cannot fail (1 Thessalonians 5:9). Somebody has said that given the covenant of grace, and God's commitment to fulfilling His promises towards the seed of Christ, a believer must really be determined to fail, for him to fail. May the Lord give us grace to understand this.

The practice of self-judgement is closely linked with watching. The porter is commanded to watch (Mark 13:34). The Lord Jesus Christ commanded us *to both watch and pray, lest we fall into temptation.* We are to watch over our lives, our homes, and our ministries.

We are also to watch over the church (the local expression of the body of Christ with which we are associated), and watch events around us to hear, through any of these, the voice of the Lord unto us on any particular issue.

We are also to watch men, individuals that God may indicate something about to us. By that, we are able to follow the Lord's mind and leading. May the Lord enable us to be faithful in this aspect of our consecration.

Sharing In the Labours Of Love

The labours of love concern services that are carried out with a view to bringing an increase of God's rule, government and redemptive blessings to others. Our lives are to be laid down for the blessing of our brethren. We are told that *greater love had no man than this, than a man lay down his life for his friends* (John 15:13)

Our participation in the labours of love should stem from the understanding of Christ's love for us. He loved us and gave himself for us. In appreciation of that love, we give ourselves to serve the purpose for which he died. Paul says, *the love of Christ constrains us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them* (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15)

One of the characteristics to be developed in the seed of Abraham (which we all are; Galatians 3:29) is that the seed is to be a blessing. Through the seed, the nations of the earth are to be blessed. Thus, each of the called must learn how to bring blessings to men through the gospel.

There are three spheres in which we can share in the labours of love, apart from the offering of our natural resources to serve the cause of the Kingdom.

Praying for the prosperity of the gospel of the Kingdom in the lives of men and women in the local assembly to which we belong and also in other fields of Kingdom work.

Labouring in the midst of the local church by means of the measure of the gift of Christ that has been given unto us (Romans 12:3; Ephesians 4:7). Each believer is expected to be a blessing in the local church in which God has placed him or her. Through a faithful and dedicated use of the gift of grace, the believer is to grow into a steady ministry within the local church. If he continues in faithfulness, the believer is eventually raised up into the estate of the five-fold ministry (Ephesians 4:11) and he becomes a ministry gift in the body of Christ everywhere.

Looking up unto God for direction and guidance to share the gospel of the Kingdom with others of the Lord's people who have not come to the proper understanding of God's purpose for us in Christ Jesus i.e. our brethren that are still in the denominational church systems, as well as ministering to the unsaved.

Every believer ought to be involved in all of these three divisions of the labours of love in an increasing manner. God will require of us what we have done with the knowledge and graces he has given us (Matthew 25:14-30). We must love truth enough as to make ourselves servants of truth. God is to come to profit and great increase on account of our lives.

In relation to the labours of love, we are called not to love our lives unto the death, (Revelations 12:11). Even if the labours of the Kingdom will cost a man his life, he must be ready to give it up if he is to be accounted worthy of Christ. In Matthew 10:32,33 and 39, we are told, *whosoever therefore shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that looseth his life for my sake shall find it*. The Lord spoke these words on the occasion of the sending forth of the disciples to share the good news of the Kingdom with their brethren (the lost sheep of the house of Israel)

Developing The Spirit Of The Lamb In The Face Of Oppositions And Persecution

The general environment in which all the called-out ones are to be tested is unfavourable to righteousness. The present world lieth in wickedness. The world is opposed to God and to His rule. Thus, every effort at righteousness, every advance of the Kingdom, is strongly contested by the world.

The implication of this is that in our participation in the labours of the Kingdom, (especially in the last sphere mentioned above), we are bound to meet with opposition. Hence, the Lord says in Matthew 10:16-18, *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues (many times, scourging is done with the tongues of men); and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the gentiles.*

Enduring in a loving disposition, persecution, contradiction and opposition that come one's way in the course of doing the Father's will is part of the calling of the believer. The Passover (Christ) must be eaten with bitter herbs (Exodus 12:8). Paul says, you and all they that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12)

We can only escape opposition of men when we are not faithful. If we are faithful in our consecration vows and do the things we ought to be doing, men will persecute us. They will call us odd names; they will mock us, spite us. We will be seen as infectious disease and many will shut doors of opportunities against us, just for his sake. We are told in Matthew 10:24,25 that *the disciple is not above his master, or the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciples that he is as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?*

We will encounter pain as we seek to share the message of the Kingdom with our brethren. There is just no other way to it. Men will growingly persecute you; and quite often these will be your own brethren; men and women who claim to love the Lord Jesus Christ and to be serving Him.

This has always been so in the history of the church, right from the days of the apostles and right through the dark ages. The Lord says in Matthew 10:21, 22 and in John 16:2 *and the brother shall deliver up the brother to death; and the Father the child, and children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be out to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. They shall put you out of the synagogues, yea, the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.*

The persecutions, tribulations, trials and pains that come a believer's way in the course of serving truth, may however increase or diminish him. If the persecutions and tribulations are taken in a wrong spirit, (that is the believer develops hatred against the persons persecuting him, and rather than praying for them, begins to curse them or speak evil against them; or develop hatred or cold-heartedness towards God), then the believer has not learnt right the way of the LAMB of life. Unless that condition in him is corrected, he may lose what he could have gained on account of his faithfulness in following the Lord.

For sufferings for the gospel's sake to add credit to us, we must maintain a sweet and loving disposition in the face of opposition. We are not to lose our savour (Matthew 5:13). We must not return cursing for cursing or railing for railing. We must not develop hatred for our brethren or our fellow men or murmur against God. Rather, we must take everything in the Spirit of Jesus and even increase in our labours for the Kingdom. Matthew 5:11, 12 says, *blessed are ye when men revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake,*

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven for so persecuted them falsely the prophets which were before you.

Tribulations ought not to separate us from the love of Christ, nor distress, nor persecutions, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword (Rom 8:35). Philippians 1:29 says, "For unto us it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake". When we have learnt to endure persecutions and afflictions for the gospel's sake, then are we walking in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then will we as lambs; be found with the principal Lamb upon the mount Zion (Revelations 14:1). What a joy that will be.

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THE PRINCIPAL SIGN OF HIS COMING

In Leviticus 23:1-5, we read the following words

¹And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying, ²Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, concerning the feast of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations; even these are my feasts. ³Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall not servile any work therein; it is the Sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings. ⁴These are the feasts of the Lord, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their season. ⁵In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's Passover.

These words introduce us to the seven feasts of the Lord. We are told in verse 2 and again in verse 4, that these feasts are feasts of the Lord. He calls them my feasts", but he says they are for a holy convocation. They relate to God's people and so those ones must be gathered unto the Lord

The seven feasts set out experiences in redemption, (each founded on the other before it) that God had prepared for his people in Christ Jesus. It is important to know what God wants to do in this final hour in order that we might be able to understand where we have reached in the Lord's programme. God is a God of purpose. The Bible says *known to God from the foundations of the*

world are all his works. God lays out a plan and then he goes ahead to execute it. Whatsoever he does, is in harmony with what he has set forth at the beginning.

Perfect wisdom mapped out this plan; perfect power will realise it. There is nothing to alter in God's plan of redemption. There is nothing too high or holy that he cannot accomplish. God cannot settle for a second best or abandon his project of redemption midstream because He lacks the power or resources to bring it about. Whatever is taught in the New Testament as belonging to the inheritance of the saints is something that can be realised by submitting to the working of his power.

So, no matter how high and holy, no matter how exalted is the position to which the church is called, God will not settle for anything less. He has the power to realise his purpose in a willing and obedient people. Isaiah 1:9 says *If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land.*

Here in Leviticus 23, we are introduced to God's plan for His people. The book of Leviticus has this important characteristic, that it is wholly revelational. The contents, from the first to the last verse of the book are directly revealed from God to Moses. In the books of Genesis, Numbers and Deuteronomy, quite a number of the chapters take the form of historical record, but in the book of Leviticus, the God that has chosen to come and dwell among his people, lets them know how they are to approach Him. So, the book of Leviticus is wholly revelational.

In Leviticus 23, we find that there are seven feasts of the Lord. These seven feasts are grouped into three categories. We have the feast of Passover with two other feasts included in the celebration (the feast of unleavened bread and the feast of the waving of the sheaves or First-fruits). Then we have the feast of Pentecost. And then the third is the feast of tabernacle or Ingathering. This third feast (the feast of Tabernacle) like the first (the feast of Passover) has two additional feasts included in its celebration: the feast of trumpets and the feast of atonement.

We are told that each of these feasts is to be celebrated in its season. We are also shown that when the season comes for each feast to be celebrated there is to be a proclamation, a blowing of the trumpet and a holy convocation unto the LORD.

We have observed earlier that feasts in the Old Testament are shadows of the redemption that is in Christ. The Old Testament writings, ceremonies and worship are but shadows of good things to come, which good things came through Jesus Christ (Colossians 2: 17); Hebrew 10:1). Thus, we should expect that these feasts have their antitypical fulfilment in us individually and collectively.

From the divine standpoint, the feast of Passover answers to the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross sourcing our redemption. He is the Passover lamb that took away the sin of the world. In the feast of unleavened bread, we see the holiness of life that Jesus manifested throughout the thirty-three and a half years of his humanity. Then, in the waving of the sheaves (otherwise called the firstfruits), we are shown his resurrection from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15:20 says *but now is Christ risen from the dead and has become the firstfruits of them that slept.* We are told in Roman 1:4 that He was declared to be the Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness and by the resurrection from the dead.

The feast of Pentecost, from the divine standpoint, symbolises the coming of the Lord unto His people in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of the exalted Christ coming to indwell His people and working redemption from inside of them is the substance of the feast of Pentecost. Then in the feast of Tabernacles, Christ clothed with the glory and honour of the Father in His throne shall come to bring those who eagerly wait for him into the same estate of life. So, we see in Christ the fulfilment of these feasts.

For the believers the feasts show the program of God for him in redemption. The church is to journey from one experience of rest and glory in Christ to another (a higher) experience, ever onward, until she comes into fullness of redemption. She is to experience Christ in Passover with its two associated feasts. She is also to experience Him in Pentecost. And finally, she is to experience Christ in Tabernacles (with its two associated feasts).

For the church, the feast of Passover has been in fulfilment since Calvary. In 1 Corinthians 5:7, we are told that *Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us. We are commanded to keep the feast not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.* When a person receives the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and experiences the new birth, he can be said to be celebrating the feast of Passover. He has passed from death unto life (John 5:24). Of course in that same encounter, the power of sin over the soul is broken and the capacity is installed within the believer to live in newness (holiness) of life. The person experiences a raising up from the dead, as it is written in Ephesians 2:1-6 *we hath he quickened who was dead in trespasses and sin... and has raised us up together with Christ (by grace are ye saved, and he begins to live as one that is alive from the dead (Romans 6:13)*

Thus, at the point of salvation, the believer is brought into the reality of the feast of Passover with the two associated feasts of unleavened bread and firstfruits; and he is called upon to continue in that experience. He is to keep the feast (living in the reality of the Passover; living as one that has been raised from the dead) not with old leaven (the old man), neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. So, for the church individually and collectively, the feast of Passover is already an experience fulfilled.

The same is true of the feast of Pentecost. We are told in Acts 2:1 that *when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a mighty rushing wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting, and there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.* The baptism with the Holy Spirit opens the door for the celebration of the feast of Pentecost.

By the experience of Pentecost, we are introduced into the supernatural character of the Kingdom. We are clothed with power, brought into a sphere where we can manifest dominion over the forces of darkness and over sickness and diseases. In Pentecost, we receive the power for victorious Christian living and are made able to serve the Lord in the power of the Spirit.

The coming of the Lord to the church in His power in these two feasts and in related teachings is in scriptures called the early rain; and all that may be experienced by the church under the rain answers to the earnest of our inheritance or the firstfruits of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:5, Romans 8:23). The phrase "the earnest of our inheritance" suggests that there are things in our redemption beyond these two feasts. There is a fullness that is yet to be entered into by any of the church class.

In the same way, the phrase "the firstfruits of the Spirit" indicates that there are riches in the Spirit life reserved by God for His own. Hebrews 4:9 says, *there remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God.* The glories of the life lived in "the fullness of the spirit" fulfil the feast of "Rest". We are told that there is a labour required of the church to enter into this fullness of rest (verse 11 of Hebrews 4). Howbeit, it is not going to be a labour in the flesh, but brought about by divine help.

The third feast celebrated completes the work of redemption in us. It is the fullness realm. With it, the church age is wound up. The perfected church is then unveiled as the Kingdom of heaven. This introduces the millennium reign of Christ.

There are times and seasons with God. The season must set in for a specific purpose of God in redemption to be realised. The very words we find in Acts 2:1 confirm this. It was when the day of Pentecost was fully come that the Holy Spirit was outpoured upon the church. Also, in Galatians 4, we are shown that it was when the fullness of time came, that God sent this son into the world as the Passover Lamb.

The feast of Tabernacles shall be celebrated in three parts. The first is the feast of trumpets, a memorial of the blowing of trumpets (Leviticus 23:24). Typically, this takes place on the first day of the seventh month (the last month in the religious calendar of Israel). Antotypically, we may separate between the ministry of the Word announcing the season and the emergence of Kingdom prophets of the order of Revelations 11:34. Their ministry will be revealed as the actual fulfilment, as the actual celebration of the feast of trumpets.

The second is the feast of atonement, which takes place on the tenth day of the seventh month. This is followed by the feast of Tabernacles itself, which, takes place for eight days, from the fifteenth day of the month. The time of the Tabernacles is a time of great rejoicing; a time of great ingathering. The seventh month actually coincides with the time of the latter rain, when the people gather in the full harvest of their land.

The feast of atonement speaks prophetically of our attaining to full moral and spiritual resurrection. The feast of Tabernacles antotypically, points to the promise of the redemption of the believer's body from corruption. Thus, there are two great experiences associated with the fullness of our inheritance, which are to be fulfilled by Christ in the church at the time of the end. The first is the atonement: the experience of moral perfection, full deliverance from sin and its effects. The second is the redemption of the body. According to Romans 8:23, it is the redemption of the body that will signal our adoption as full-grown sons of God.

Our objective in this message is to state clearly that the antitypical celebration of the feast of trumpets precedes the experiences of perfection and glorification. In fact, the trumpet ministry is required to produce the atonement transformation. Whenever the Second Advent is discussed in the New Testament, reference is made to the blowing of trumpets.

The Parousia of Christ cannot be separated from agencies released to the church to secure its purpose. The presence of these agencies is sufficient evidence that the promise has set in. The "trumpet ministries and the Spiritual movement birthed by it are signs in the heavens of the Parousia of Christ.

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THE PRINCIPAL SIGN OF HIS COMING

In the last edition, using the symbolism of the feast, we were introduced into the programme of God for the church. We saw that there are three great experiences in redemption that God has prepared for the church. It was observed that while the first two feasts are associated with the coming of the Lord enabling us to reap the firstfruits of the Spirit, the third feast is associated with the coming of the Lord to bless us with the fullness of our inheritance.

We also saw that it is in the closing period of the church age, the time of the Second Advent of Christ that the church is to enter into the antitypical fulfilment of the feast of Tabernacles. Then we went ahead to show that the particular feast that announces the season of the Tabernacles is the feast of trumpets. It is for this reason that we are shown in the scriptures that the coming of the Lord in his Second Advent is to be accomplished by the blowing of the trumpets. The following are scriptural references to buttress this: 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18; Matthew 24:30-31; Revelations 8:2-6; 10:7; 11:5, 1 Corinthians 15:50-54.

With this introductory summary, let us get into our subject: *The Principal Sign of His Coming*. We are looking at the principal sign of the Lord's "Parousia" in the context of the parable of the 10 virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). The principal sign itself is given in Matthew 24:30-31, but we might not be able to get full entrance into this thought except we first consider the question asked by the disciples and the answer the Lord gave. The question itself is in three parts. Matthew 24:2 reads:

²And Jesus said unto them, see not all these things, verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.

The reference is to the Old Testament temple. The disciples had mentioned in verse 1 how magnificent the temple was, drawing the attention of Jesus to the architectural beauty; but Jesus taking advantage of the situation speaks prophetically into the situation of Israel telling them what shall be.

There was to come a grievous tribulation upon the nation. The effect of the tribulation was to last almost two thousand years; from AD 70 when the Roman armies came against Jerusalem, destroyed the temple and the city, and carried the remnant captive into all the nations of the earth. We are told in the Luke account that the captivity and indignation was to last until the times of the gentiles be fulfilled (Luke 21:24).

Now when the Lord spoke in the above scriptures, (Matthew 24:2) concerning the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem, the disciples assumed that this terrible thing that was to happen to Israel would coincide with the end of the World. Though Jesus answered their question as to when these things shall be, he also spoke of the time of the end.

So, let us read verse 3 of Matthew 24 as we consider the three-fold question of the disciples.
Matthew 24:3

³And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately saying tell us when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?.

They desired to know of the Lord when the temple shall be destroyed. They also wanted to know what would be the sign of the coming of the Lord; and since they knew that the coming of the

Lord would bring an end to this present world (this present age), they asked again what shall be the sign of the end of the age.

"What shall be the sign of thy coming?" That is our present focus. We are looking at the principal sign of the Lord's coming. In other words, we are looking at the prophecies of Matthew 24 in the light of the last two questions of the disciples: what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the age? Now we come quickly to verses 29-31 of Matthew 24 where these questions are answered.

²⁹Immediately after the tribulations of those days...

The reference is to the tribulation that was to come upon the nation of Israel, tribulations of such dimensions that have never been seen in the history of that nation. We are shown here that the ending period of that captivity will coincide with the time of the Second Coming of the Lord. It will be a time of returning favour back to Israel and of judging the nations, bringing a time of trouble and distress upon the nations of the earth.

In our meditation on "Understanding the times", we saw that Jerusalem was to be trampled underfoot of the nations until the times of the gentiles be fulfilled. So, all of these things: the fulfilment of the times of the gentiles, the restoration of the Jews back to their land and the return of favour to that nation, the beginning of the time of troubles for the nations etc, are all associated with the Second Advent of Christ. We will read verse 29 again, and continue the reading straight to verse 31.

²⁹Immediately after the tribulations of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light and the stars shall fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: ³⁰And then shall appear the sign of the son of man in heaven: And then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn. And they shall see the son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹And he shall send his angels with a great sound of the trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

So, here is given us the sign (not signs but sign, showing that it is the principal sign) of the Lord's coming. This sign is said to appear in heaven. The heaven here is not the sky. In verse 29 for instance, we are told that "the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light and the stars shall fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken". Of course, this is not speaking of the physical sun, moon, stars, etc. Even though things do appear now and then in relation to these heavenly bodies, the heaven referred to here in verse 29 has to do with the church world and the religious heaven.

There is a whole lot going on in the unseen realms. The result is that there so much distress among men. Luke 21:26 says *men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things, which are coming upon the earth.*

Also, the heavens referred to in verse 30 where the principal sign of His coming is to appear is not the sky, but the normal sphere of the church. It is the church that is the heaven in reference here. Ephesians 2:6 says, *we are sitted with Christ in heavenly places* even though we are physically present on earth. It is from that spiritual height that the church conducts her affairs.

The sign of the Lord's coming, the principal sign, is to appear in heaven among the Lord's people. It is to be seen only by those who have known Jesus Christ in salvation, especially those walking

in faithfulness towards the Lord. It is a sign to be seen by heaven dwellers. Philippians 3:20 says, *for our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the saviour the Lord Jesus Christ ... Revelations 12:12 says, therefore, rejoice ye heavens; and ye that dwell in them...*

So, the heaven is a people, or put differently, heaven is the sphere of spiritual activities and fellowship of the Lord's people. This sign, the principal sign of the Lord's coming, is to appear in heaven. It is a sign to be read among the Lord's people. The world of men will not be able to discern it, for this aspect of the sign is not expected to be understood by them. The sign is addressed to the church of Jesus Christ with a view to preparing her to receive the coming of the Lord.

In verse 31, there is something to note with the appearing of this sign. Remember that we have already shown that associated with the coming of the Lord is blowing of trumpets. With this at the back of our minds, we can now read verse 31 of Matthew 24. It says

³¹And he shall send his angels with a great sound of the trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other

Just like it was observed earlier, the word "angels" here refers to human messengers, the angels of the churches (Revelations 1:20), human persons suitable anointed by the Holy Spirit and given grace by the Spirit of prophecy to go forth with a ministry to the Lord's people concerning the second coming of the Lord.

The trumpet speaks of the ministry of the word. Not just any ministry of the word, but that which has to do with the ministry of Christ in the church at the time of the end. It is the sound of the trumpet that goes forth when men speak concerning the seasons that they are in. So, not all teachings, not all the anointed teachings can be said to be the sound of the trumpet, but that, which relates to the current season.

Here, we are told that it is "a great sound of a trumpet", implying two things. One: it comes with great clarity, great power and great anointing. Secondly, it is the greatest message to be given to the church, since it directs her attention to the final aspects of the work of redemption.

Then next, we are told that the focus of the ministry of these angels of God as they go forth with the great sound of the trumpet will be to gather the elect. That which is gathered is the elect, not just a gathering of persons. Here again, the activity is restricted to the church, people foreknown of God as belonging to Him in a special way, men and women that have been chosen to have a special place in the body of Christ from the foundations of the world. They are elects; they are such before the ministry reaches them.

Again, it is implied that the gathering of the elect, will be a world-wide phenomenon. It says from one end of the heavens to the other. Across the church world, in all the nations of the earth, this activity of gathering the elect will be taking place.

At the time of the coming of the Lord, His Parousia, there is to be a gathering together of the saints unto Him (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Luke 17:23 says *where the soma (the body of truth enlightening God's people as to the fullness of their inheritance) is, there will the eagles be gathered together*. In Psalm 50:1-5, we are told that at the time when the Lord shall call to the heavens from above and the earth that He may judge His people, there is to be a gathering together of the saints unto him, them that have made a covenant with Him by sacrifice.

The effect of this gathering out of the church world of the eagle saints is the birthing of a spiritual movement. This will be very different from the many spiritual movements that have sprung up through the church history because it will not have human heads (it will not be something of a denomination). It will be a phenomenon emerging all over the world. All over the world, on account of the sound of the trumpet, believers will become increasingly concerned about the season that has set in, seeking to be fully joined to the Lord.

In Matthew 24:23-26 and Luke 17:37 it is shown that this gathering of the saints at the end of the church age shall not be unto a man or to some men who claim to have been specially anointed of God. But the gathering shall be unto the Lord Himself as shown in Psalm 50:5. The light of the truth of the kingdom, which the Lord comes to reveal to His people, shall be the basis of the gathering. At that time, the Lord, not men, not signs and miracles in themselves, becomes the central focus of His people. Full union with Him in His glory becomes their sole desire.

The direct result of "the sound of a great trumpet" is the emergence of a spiritual movement all over the world. a great gathering of the Lord's people, of those whose hearts and minds are responding to the Spiritual awakening.

The world however will not be aware of this great work of the Lord among His people. With time, more and more believers will come to know about it. Matthew 24:27 says *for as the lightning (or rather sun) cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west: so shall also the Parousia of the Son of man be.* The reference is to the light of the prophetic word shining into the hearts of the Lord's people (2 Peter 1:19).

So, it may begin in small degree but this sign is to ultimately overtake the church world. The light of His presence is to cover all the ends of the heaven, the church.

That introduces us to Matthew 25:1. Notice that this particular discourse begins in Matthew 24; so, it is one continuous teaching we have in Matthew 24 and 25; the chapter division being merely for our convenience. What we find in Matthew 25 are things that take place at the end of the age, at the time of the Lord's Parousia among His people.

There are two distinct prophetic views of the kingdom of heaven during the gospel age, her time of preparation. Christ kingdom now, the church, has a preview of her history given us in several parables: the seven parables of Matthew 13; the parable of the marriage feast of the Matthew 22 show several features of the church's history; but Prophecy gives the time of the end special attention. In the parable of Matthew 25:1-13, prophecy opens to us a special feature of the church at the time of the end.

The introduction of Matthew 25:1 confirms this. It says "*Then shall the kingdom of heaven become like unto...*" The word "then" means "AT THAT TIME". And we may ask, "at what time"? at the time when the things shown in Matthew 24:29-51 will be taking place. At the time when the principal sign of His coming shall have appeared in the heaven of the church. At the time when the Lord's Parousia would have set in and the Lord would have began to judge between His servants. At this time also he gives the faithful among His servants symbolic trumpets and these ones would go forth declaring the message of the coming kingdom. Yes, at the time when many of God's servants (the unfaithful) will be smiting their fellow servants (the faithful) and drinking with the drunkards, priding themselves in things which the Lord does not approve of ... *THEN shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.*

So, there is a spiritual movement that is birthed in the church on account of the great sound of a trumpet announcing the coming of the Lord. And this agrees with what we find in Number 10. The

trumpet is for the calling of God's people out of their various religious camps, unto the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

The persons involved in this spiritual journey are the elects. In Matthew 25, they are said to be virgins. This is because they are believers who proved their love for the Lord and their allegiance to him alone by responding to His call (Revelation 14:4). In the midst of the decay in the church world, its falling standards and idolatry, these ones have separated their hearts to love and serve Him rather than serve men. Their desires are towards the Lord alone, they long to be united with Him.

Secondly, we are told that these virgins WENT OUT, for so it is rendered in many other translations. And we ask, out of where? Out of the Spiritual environment of the denominational church systems. When the kingdom of heaven is to be perfected and installed the earth, and all other kingdoms are to be destroyed, the Lord's people who love the Lord are called upon to break loose from the counterfeit kingdom of the denominational church systems. They are to break free from the shackles of denominationalism.

The bible says from the days of John the Baptist until now, the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom of heaven has the effect of loosening men from their familiar religious environments and setting them on course to lay hold on the kingdom indeed. The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and it is by violence, by breaking free from human religious systems and laying hold upon the upward calling of God in Christ, that men take the kingdom unto themselves. This is very important.

They are also said to take their lamps as they proceed on the Spiritual journey to meet with the bridegroom. In Psalm 119:105, we are told *thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path*. In Proverbs 6:23, we are shown that *the commandment is a lamp, the Law is light, the light thereof are the ways of life*. Then in 2 Peter 1:19, the prophetic word concerning the coming of the Lord is shown to be a light (a lamp) that shines in dark places.

Thus, lamp, in a general sense, typified the light of God's word in its capacity to lead God's people into the revelation of His mind for them at a given time. And when we read Matthew 25:1 in the light of what we find in Matthew 24:31 regarding the proclamation of the great message of Christ's coming, we find that the lamp stand for the prophetic word; the full range of prophetic teaching that enlightens the mind and heart as to the coming of the Lord, and its purpose. Full salvation comes with this coming of the Lord.

Thus, the ten virgins are person who have been prophetically quickened to realise that the coming of the Lord is near and have began to devote their hearts and minds in seeking the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the last time (1 Peter 1:5).

Thus, there is to be a gathering of all of the Lord's people unto the present truth (2 Peter 1:12) Those who have been spiritually quickened to appreciate the present day ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. They would come out of the visible church systems neck deep in personality cults They come to true worship of God. *God is a spirit, and they that worship him shall worship him in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him* (John 4:24). We become like whom we worship.

THE PRINCIPAL SIGN OF HIS COMING

In the last edition, we saw that associated with the Lord's Parousia is the emergence of a spiritual movement. They are a body of people, breaking loose from every barrier, seeking full union with Christ. Matthew 25:1 says *THEN shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.*

The spiritual movement is a direct consequence (result) of the "great sound of a trumpet" as detailed in Matthew 24:31, *and he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.* It is the great sound of trumpet that indicates that the Lord in His Parousia has commissioned faithful messengers with the task of announcing the time of fulfilment for the antitypical feast of the tabernacles.

Now, we are told that the ten virgins go to meet the Bridegroom. Then in verse 6, we are told that the Bridegroom comes to meet the bride. Of course, this is clear because it is the message of the coming of the bridegroom, "the great sound of a trumpet" that occasioned in them a deep longing to move out of their familiar spiritual environments on a journey to meet the Bridegroom.

Thus, there is the journey of the bride to meet the bridegroom and there is the journey of the bridegroom to meet the Bride. The two journeys are interdependent. It is as the Lord comes that the ten virgins receive inspiration to go to meet Him. When in the experience of the ten virgins they do not see His coming, then, they slumber and sleep. They are only awakened when their eyes are opened to see that the Lord, the Bridegroom comes. So, we are told in verse 5... *and while the Bridegroom delayed, they all slumbered and slept.*

The delay of the bridegroom is in respect of certain conditions in his church. He delays to give enough time for the virgins to put to practice and experience what they have already learnt and to give opportunity for others of His people who love and desire him but are still in the environment of the denominational church systems, to be gathered unto Him. So it is that, when the ten virgins do not see the nearness of the Lord and the day of glory approaching, they slumber and sleep.

This slumbering and sleeping does not refer to a cessation of activities. In 1 Thessalonians 5, we are told that slumbering relates to the night. When there is darkness over the prophetic word concerning the coming of the Lord and our uniting with Him in glory, then those justifying works that the believer does in line with the message begin to diminish. Even though he may be busying himself with other good works in the Lord's vineyard, he is said to be asleep in relation to the coming of the Lord.

How then does the Lord come to His people and how do we open up to receiving the blessing of His coming? The Lord comes in two principal ways. First He comes in His word and by His spirit. Then He comes in His person. And when we talk about the coming of the Lord, we must maintain this distinction. There is the coming of the Lord in His person, in His glorified estate, and there is the coming of the Lord in His word and by His spirit.

Of course, the coming of the Lord unto His people by His word and by His spirit is to prepare them to receive his coming personally. When he comes by His Spirit and in His Word to his people, it is relative to a specific mission. We have His coming in the feast of Passover where by a person receives the Lord into his heart is delivered from the penalty of sin and becomes a new creature. Then there is His coming in the feast of Pentecost. He comes by His spirit to indwell the believer in baptismal fullness, opening him up to experience and live the supernatural life of the kingdom. Then He comes to His people in the feast of Tabernacles.

It is the coming of the Lord unto His people in the release of His word and of His spirit in this third dimension that is the subject matter of Matthew 25. He comes first in His word and in His Spirit revealing to them the matter of their full redemption. He leads them into preparations needed to experience that full salvation. Then He comes in the power of His word and His Spirit to deliver completely from the guilt, power and presence of sin.

This is the full yield of the atoning sacrifice of Christ applied to a believing soul. Then He comes again in the power of His word and His Spirit to bring those that have experienced the atonement into incorruptibility and life. This is the ultimate goal in God's multi-stage redemption program.

Thus, in Matthew 25:6, the coming of the Lord referred to is not the personal appearing of the Lord but His coming in the power of His word and Spirit lifting up those of the elect who have been under the sound of the trumpet and have fully profited themselves into the experience of the feast of atonement.

Scattered all over the earth at this time of the end are to be found home churches, local expressions of the body of Christ, where the people meet together under God to seek to know the Lord more intimately; preparation for Christ unveiling in them, being the central theme. They meet to worship God in a free environment where no one is lord over them but the Lord Jesus Christ, where they can receive ministry from one another according to the measure of grace in evidence.

The nuclei concept of the New Testament revelation is the body of Christ. This is the mystery (Ephesians 3). God would have people meeting together in one place with their hearts completely turned to Him, seeking the full unveiling of His saving purpose in their midst. The body of Christ must have a local expression all over the earth and must be constituted in the way God has purposed.

So there is a body that the Lord is bringing unto Himself, all over the earth.. In every place when the trumpet sound is heard, people with virgin heart disposition are gathered to the Lord. They do not concern themselves with meaningless titles but with the title deed of "the Promised Land" – Christ in His fullness.

There are so much of money making schemes in the church today. Many have come into the kingdom at a time when the real character of the kingdom is lost upon the church. They simply enter into the mould of their particular denominations and take on the shape. And so generation after generation, church forms are maintained devoid of life. The average church member today lacks the knowledge of God and does not have a working understanding of the kingdom of God.

A picture of the virgin church, this great sign of the Lord's Parousia, a people clothed with the radiance of the sun of Righteousness is given to us in Revelation 12:1 *And there appeared a great*

sign (the king James version says "wonder") in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. Notice again that the sign is said to appear in heaven.

It is not our intention in this meditation to go into an examination of this passage. At a time to come, God willing, when we shall take on meditation on the Epiphaneia (the Day of the Revelation of Christ, the Day in which the son of man is revealed), we shall be able to see what happens when this virgin church gives birth to a manchild and the manifestation of the sons of God begins. We shall be able to look at such matters as the tribulation of the outer court class of the kingdom of heaven (those measurably unfaithful), the emergence of the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth, the final overthrow of the kingdom of this world etc, and the place of the overcoming church in all these events.

We move straight to a second thought with which we will be closing. Now, the fact that this body of people going forth in this spiritual movement are said to be "ten virgins" indicates something very important. The number "ten" is often used to represent testing and trials with a view to obtaining perfection in one or more aspects of a man's life (Revelation 2:10). The use of the number is to indicate that the ones being gathered out of the visible church systems are going to be tested and tried by the LORD.

In this connection, we must realise that God judges us as individuals. Although God will make sure that the corporate body is fed and nourished with the word and spirit of God, nevertheless, for our ultimate placement, we are not judged collectively or in groups. Every man appears before the judgement seat of Christ for himself. And this judgement is taking place daily.

One of the things that we have been taught in the church systems is that there is a particular day of judgement in which God sits on a white throne and everyone of us is called upon in turns to give account of himself. The spirit of prophecy and light from the written word teach us that we are daily under the watchful eyes of the great Judge. A man is admitted to more favours with God as he fares well under assessment.

God is not waiting till one final day when He will begin to review what we have done in order to determine what our place in the kingdom shall be. No. What we are to become in the kingdom that is to be revealed is already being determined on daily basis.

Furthermore, we will like to say that from the time of the birth of the church, God's people have been just one body, one class of people moving in the faith of the Son of God. But at the time of the end, four distinct classes appear among the Lord's people. From the standpoint of the Lord, these four classes have always existed, but they become predominantly marked out as to their several characteristics at the time of the end.

First, there would be a class of persons that could be best described as nominal Christians. This class (which is in the majority) consists of persons who have known the Lord Jesus Christ in salvation; have received the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Spirit. Not only are they born again, some have known the Lord in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. So nominal Christians are persons who are born again and possibly Spirit Filled, and may even be servants of God.

If this is so, the questions may be asked, in what regard are these persons considered to be nominal Christians? We find the answer in the words of the Lord Himself. In John 8:31, he told the people which believed on him (not unbelievers but those who have already believed on him) *if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.* Again, in John 15:7,8, he told the disciples (persons who had already believed on him), *if ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it*

shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit; so ye be my disciples.

Nominal Christians are believers who are not propelled by a deep longing for full union with Christ. These are not looking forward to His appearing and the blessings that come with it. They evidently do not have their conversation in heaven; rather they mind earthly things (Philippians 3:19). They are not looking for the appearing of the Lord to bring them into full redemption. They have settled down for something less than God intends for them. We say again that the vast majority of believers are in this virtual nominal class. It is saddening.

Notice what the Lord said in John 8:31 and 15:8: *if ye continue in my word... if ye abide in me, and my words abide in you... then are ye my disciples indeed*". We must follow on to know the Lord: to learn of Him, to desire to possess more and more of His life and beauty. We do not yet know, as we ought to. Paul says. But a true hunger for righteousness would always be rewarded by an ever-growing knowledge of the Lord and of the sanctifying and liberating power of truth. The last part of John 8:13 says... *and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.*

So, there is this class of believers, nominal Christians, believers who no longer have a deep desire for the fullness of Christ. Growth in grace has become stunted. These are no longer progressing in God's purpose for apprehending them.

The remaining three classes of believers, which emerge at the time of the end, are found in the parable given in Matthew 25:1-13. They represent people who have responded to the sound of the trumpet calling them to come up hither (Revelation 4:1) to come up higher, to come into full union with Jesus Christ.

There is an unrestrained drive toward earthiness among the majority of God's people today. "Prosperity" teacher seem to be having a field day while the denominational churches are busy arranging meetings on how you can get a house, how you can get a wife, how you can get money, how you can do this and do that, and taking the Lord's people to God's supermarket as it were, showing them the shopping list. The sound of the trumpet is giving a distinct call beckoning on the willing hearted to come up higher.

The high calling of God in Christ Jesus has always been the central theme of the gospel, but in the dark ages, it was lost. We bless God for this hour of great recovery of truth.

So, we understand a second, third and fourth classes of believers as included in the parable of the ten virgins. They have all broken free from the shackles of denominationalism. The parable separates between the foolish virgins and the wise virgins. In other words, of all who hear and hearken to the sound of the trumpet and set their affections on God alone, some along the line let go on the Spirit of consecration. Their folly showing up in that they gradually loose the prophetic spirit: – the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the experiential knowledge of Christ.

We are told in the parable that both the foolish virgins (the second class of believers) and the wise virgins (the third class of believers) slumbered and slept. The prophetic word ministers the approaching day of Christ. Its fervour keeps all awake and working. The absence of light produces opposite effect. So, it is dimness of light that result in the virgins slumbering and eventually going into sleep.

Again, as we observed earlier, "sleeping" does not mean cessation of activity for there is a revival of enthusiasm in the churches world-wide. There has never been a time in which people have been so churchy as this present time. Places that were dead in their orthodoxy are opening the church doors wide for activities morning and evening of each day of the week; and talk about the

Pentecostal, the denominations have a living name in the eyes of the world. But the Lord thinks differently. The "virgin" congregation should re-assess themselves every now and then.

Many serious, zealous Christians are deeply asleep in relation to the coming of the Lord, and of the glories that follow.

Now, let's look again at the wise and foolish virgins of Matthew 25. The difference between the two is that the wise virgins had build up a life of consecration, so that when the light began to burn brightly again, they knew how to stir up themselves, break away from all kinds of distractions to focus their attention upon Jesus. But the foolish virgins were gradually drained of this grace through growing weary of the demands of consecration.

For the foolish virgins, to wait upon the Lord and watch, waiting patiently for Him in prayers and fasting, seemed to them a heavy burden. But for the wise ones who were relatively more faithful to the call to consecration, they were able to pick up from where they left off and began to seek full union with the Bridegroom with greater zeal.

A fourth class of believers, not so explicitly mentioned in Matthew 25, is nevertheless revealed in verse 6. Implicit in Matthew 25:6 is the fact that there is another group of Christians involved in this same spiritual journey outside of the foolish and wise virgins. Matthew 25:6 says *And at midnight, there was a cry made Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him*. Of course, we may ask, who made this cry? The answer comes: they are servants of the Lord who did not go to sleep with the rest of their brethren.

So, we must understand that slumbering and sleeping are not part of the experience that the Lord's people must go through. It is not something arranged or determined by God for the virgins in their journey to meet with the Bridegroom. So long as the light is burning, it is difficult for a man to sleep. The Lord said, "work while it is day for the night cometh when no man can work". Men do not stumble in the day but at night. When the light of God's word is burning brightly touching on the issues that belong to our full inheritance, it is impossible for men to sleep in such an environment.

Thus, the fourth class are those who did not go to sleep with the rest of their brethren. They were constantly in vital contact with the Bridegroom even when He seemed to tarry.

This fourth group can be said to be the just class. Proverbs 4:18 says *the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*. These ones are faithful above all others. They are accordingly the first of the first-fruit unto God.

Of the four classes of believers we have mentioned, only two (the just class and the wise virgins) are approved to sit with the Lord in His throne at the time when the church age is finally wound up. Only these two classes are judged over-comers and worthy of Christ. The wise virgins were not totally faithful. They had periods of slumbering and sleeping, but because they had built up a life of consecration it was still possible for them to make it to the Bridegroom before "the door was shut".

Thus, it is not enough to be under the voice of the Lord's ministry in His Parousia. It is not enough to hear the sound of the trumpet and come out of the visible church systems and be found in the midst of the body the Lord is raising up today. Each one must make full and faithful use of the opportunity afforded at this period of the Parousia to build up an over-coming life, a life of consecration. The foolish virgins later awakened to the call, but it was rather too late. Throne honours are not forever open. They were shut out.

The foolish virgins do not completely loose out. Even the nominal Christians by virtue of their saving faith have their place in the kingdom of the Lord. They come to a glory less than that of the foolish virgins.

The Lord's purpose for this parable is to destroy in us the tendency towards folly. To come so close to divinity and fail to receive it is a great loss indeed.

And that reminds us of what the Lord told the foolish virgins when they eventually came to the shut door. He said *I know you not*. Now recall that the word "know" here is the same word used in Genesis 3 where it is said, "Adam knew his wife". So it speaks of "intimate relationship with Him". Even though you obeyed the voice of the trumpet and moved out of the denominational church system seeking full union with me, you did not allow your focus to remain firmly fixed on me. You did not retain the habit of seeking me in unbroken fellowship. I do not know you as one that had sustained longing for full union with me. I cannot therefore approve you to be a bride unto me". What a painful loss that is!

May that not be our portion in Jesus name. May we have a part in one of the two classes that share with Him in His throne. May none that read this material be a cast away. May we all endeavour to make it to the higher and best that God has reserved for those who are heirs of the precious promises of redemption so great. Amen.