**A Marriage in the Wilderness**

 ***Hos 2:14-23*** Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali. For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name. And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely. And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD. And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel. And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.

 All these things written are sign posts pointing to Christ. They are written for our learning and I hope to show from this study the marriage that took place in the wilderness.

***ESPOUSAL & MARRIAGE***

 For the sake of our readers, we would like to explain the oriental custom of betrothal and

marriage, the traditions from whence the analogy of marriage in scripture was originally drawn (it is a spiritual asset to understand this, since many of our western, occidental customs are so vastly different). James Freeman, in his excellent reference book, "Manners and Customs of the Bible", relates that prior to the actual wedding consummation, there was what was known as the betrothal, or espousal. This was somewhat like an engagement but was much more obligatory. Dr. Freeman writes that "the espousal was considered the beginning of marriage, was as legally binding as marriage itself, and could not be broken off save by a bill of divorce. Hence we find that Joseph was called the "husband" of Mary (Matt. 1:19).. The espousals were made very early in life, though marriage did not take place before the bride was twelve years old. Even when the age was suitable, the marriage was not consummated for some time after

the betrothal (see Judges 14:8). AT LEAST A YEAR, or sometimes more, elapsed between the betrothal and the marriage of the maiden, to give time for preparing her outfit (and, may we add, for the bridegroom to prepare all things for their future life together)" --- end quote.

 Right from the very beginning of these verses in Hosea we see that it is God himself drawing his bride to be unto himself. This gives us an indication of the heart of our covenant God whose desire is to be our God and we, the church, his people. He says, “I will allure her.” The word allure means to open, to make roomy, to enlarge and to make simple. To make simple in the sense of singlemindedness. It is God himself that allures this woman unto himself. In ***Hosea 2:13*** he says that she has went her lovers and forgot me saith the Lord. Yet he still pursues her heart. He says I will bring her into the wilderness and speak comfortably to her. In other words, he is going to speak to her heart. He is drawing her into a covenant relationship with himself in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. This covenant relationship is called marriage. ***Eph 5:21-33***

 ***The Wilderness***

 The word wilderness means in the sense of *driving*; a *pasture* (that is, open field, whither cattle are driven); by implication a *desert*; also *speech* (including its organs): - desert, south, speech, wilderness. The wilderness is the place of proving and temptation. ***Heb 3:8*** Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness. ***Heb 3:9*** When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years.

 In Exodus, God had chosen Israel to be his bride. Not because of any beauty she possessed but because of the covenant promises given to Abraham their Father. It was God himself who brought them out of the house of bondage on eagle’s wings. God lead them to the valley of decision called the Red Sea. The great Egyptian army behind them and the Red Sea in front of them. Will they trust in the covenant God and stand still and see their salvation or trust in the arm of the flesh. God opened a ***door of hope*** for them in their time of trouble, a passageway into their foreordained "dressing room". When once they came up out of the land of Egypt, and the door was closed behind them, my, how Israel sang in the days of her youth (ref. ***Hosea***

***2:14-15***)! As Moses sang his prophetic song, and Miriam and the women danced and sang praises unto the Lord, Israel was as a love-struck girl extolling her beloved Hero for His virtues and strength! Needless to say, she was impressed, and He was glorified.

 It didn’t take long before they realized that they are in a not to pleasant wilderness. It was a hot, dry, barren, wasteland. There was no way they could provide for their tremendous needs. They were brought to a place of absolute helplessness and it brought out the worst in them. Even though God provided everything that they could have possibly needed... a pillar of cloud by day, not only to lead them in their journeys, but to shade them from the blazing desert heat; a pillar of fire by night, to warm them from the cold; manna from heaven, supernaturally provided from the hand of God, and water from a mobile rock; still they murmured, grumbled, and complained! They were not content with this arrangement... and they were not at all pleased with their role in this relationship! They had become too self-sufficient in their former relationship with Egypt to accept this kind of treatment!

 Nevertheless, God brought them to Sinai--- His nuptial altar in the wilderness! Once they

arrived, the glory-cloud arose, signaling to them that they were to pitch camp there. God

had a purpose for alluring them here! He was about to speak directly to their heart!

 As the people camped at the foot of the mount, Moses, "the friend of the Bridegroom", was called to enter into the cloud which now was settled high atop Sinai 5 perilous slopes. The terms of the marriage covenant had to be discussed! And when Moses descended from the top of the mount, he bore this message to the people: "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagle's wings, and BROUGHT YOU TO MYSELF. Now therefore, IF ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, THEN ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation". What was their response to this proposal? "ALL THAT THE LORD HATH SPOKEN WE WILL DO" (***Ex. 19:1-8***)! With this verbal consent, Moses returned unto the Lord. The espousal had begun!

 ***A THREE-DAY ENGAGEMENT***

 The next word God gave Moses was, "...Go unto the people, and SANCTIFY THEM TODAY AND TOMORROW, AND LET THEM WASH THEIR CLOTHES. And BE READY against the third day: FOR THE THIRD DAY THE LORD WILL COME DOWN in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai" (***Ex 19:10-11***). For the next two days, Israel was busily preparing for her big day! She was about to be joined unto the Lord in a special covenant, a covenant which would make her unique above all peoples of the earth! What an awesome privilege this was!

 Finally, the hour was at hand, and the bride had made herself ready (at least, that's what she thought)! I'm not sure what they were expecting on the morning of the third day, but I would suspect something quite different from what they saw.

 Why, instead of the bright and beautiful glory-cloud they were used to seeing the Lord adorn Himself with, now the top of the mount was engulfed in A DEVOURING FIRE, A THICK, DARK CLOUD, and accompanied by thundering’s, lightnings, and the deafening sound of the trumpet which waxed louder and louder! Not only that, but there was a smoke that ascended upward, "like the smoke of a great furnace", and the whole mount quaked greatly! Can you imagine the paralyzing fear that must have gripped their hearts at this sight? Here they were, standing at Sinai's sacred altar, adorned in their cleansed and sanctified garments (and no doubt, feeling rather holy and self-righteous, as well), in the Presence of the Almighty Himself, with all of His holy angels witnessing the event... but rather than being elated, they were horrified! They were overwhelmed at the bold appearance of God's "***wedding attire***"! How dare He show up looking like this? It looked like He was dressed for a funeral rather than a wedding! Why would He manifest Himself in such a way? Here He was, "roiling" their waters once again, "clouding" over the occasion with the threatening appearance of DARKNESS and DEATH! Needless to say,

they were not at all congenial!

 As the people looked on, Moses was called once again to the top of the mount. And upon his return, the Lord spake unto the people concerning the Ten Commandments. However, when the people beheld the thunderings, the lightnings, the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they removed, and stood afar off. They spake thus to Moses, "Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but LET NOT GOD SPEAK WITH US, LEST WE DIE". His response was, "FEAR NOT: FOR GOD IS COME TO PROVE YOU, and that His fear may be among your faces, that ye sin not" (***Exo. 20:18-20***). Verse 21 says, "And THE PEOPLE STOOD AFAR OFF, AND MOSES DREW NEAR UNTO THE THICK DARKNESS WHERE GOD WAS".

 By nature, whenever God visits us in thick clouds and darkness", the flesh draws back... while the heart draws near! When the dark clouds of trouble, trials or tribulation arise, the natural man does not want to hear God's Voice speak out, nor does he desire to "enter into the midst of the cloud"! He is more inclined, as Peter was, to "follow afar off"! But is alluring her, he is making an impression on her heart. She knows that God often hides Himself in the storm clouds of calamity, hardships, and affliction, using them as a means of concealing His glory until the appointed time of revelation! ***2 Sam 22:12*** And he made darkness pavilions round about him, dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies. ***1 Kings 8:12*** Then spake Solomon, The LORD said that he would dwell in the thick darkness. ***Job 38:9*** When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddlingband for it. ***Joel 2:2*** A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations. ***Zep 1:14*** The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. ***Zep 1:15*** That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness,

***Zep 1:16*** A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers.

 As we go on we will see all this come together on event!

 Once he gets past the thunderings, lightnings, and earthquakes, there is the familiar sound of HIS STILL SOFT VOICE, speaking comfortably unto him, wooing and alluring him into a place of rest and peace WHERE HE IS! This is "the SECRET PLACE OF THE MOST HIGH, the SHADOW OF THE ALMIGHTY" (***Psa. 91***)! An often-forgotten middle eastern custom is mentioned here. As a traveler during this time, there were no motels to stay in. The traveler would come to a tent and grab the tent rope and stand near the door and ask to come under the shadow of the owner of the tent. The owner would never refuse because he believed the traveler was a gift sent from God to him. He would extend the greatest courtesy, to the extent he would make his own children sleep outside to accommodate the traveler. He would provide the traveler with his best clothes and even the travelers enemies would now become his enemies.

 In Chapter 24, we read that once Moses returned from this encounter with the Lord, he spake to the people all the judgments God had given for them. "And all the people answered with one voice, and said, ALL THE WORDS WHICH THE LORD HATH SAID WILL WE DO" (verse 3; this corresponds with the way a bride would reply, "I DO")! Again, the following day after Moses had offered burnt offerings and peace offerings unto the Lord, and read from the book of the covenant to the people, they said in unison, "ALL THAT THE LORD HATH SAID WILL WE DO, AND BE OBEDIENT" (verse 7)! Sounds like they were pretty self-confident in their abilities to keep the Law, doesn't it? Well, obviously God did not share that same confidence in them; for after this, He called Moses back up into the cloud and gave to him the blueprints of the Tabernacle. What was the purpose in this? It was in the Tabernacle that the Priesthood would offer sin-offerings to make atonement for the people AFTER they had transgressed God's commands! You see, He was making adequate provisions for them to be reconciled unto Him, knowing full well of the dirt and dregs that were in their hearts, even BEFORE they were brought to the surface, and manifested! HE KNEW HE WAS MARRYING A HARLOT! As a matter of fact, before Moses even returned unto the camp, they had already broken their vows; they had made themselves a golden calf, A GRAVEN IMAGE OF A BEAST to defile themselves with! Here they were, the newlywed bride of God, dancing naked before the work of their own hands, this "god" fashioned after THEIR OWN "BEASTLY" IMAGE AND NATURE, worshipping "the CREATURE rather than the CREATOR"! This was but the beginning of a long history of

infidelity and idolatry committed by the unfaithful wife of Jehovah! They were just not going to settle for a monogamous relationship with "ONE LORD"!

 This certainly explains why God commanded Moses to set a border around the foot of the mount... lest any of the people should break through to "gaze" upon His naked glory (they were not even allowed to TOUCH the border). He was not going to expose Himself to an unfaithful people, to allow them to see Him as He is with unsanctified hearts and minds! Therefore, He lengthened "the hem of His garment", so to speak, lest they should prematurely look upon Him without first being genuinely committed to Him! What a testimony of His Holiness! He was not going to allow them to trespass into that which was reserved for a true marriage partner!

 Before we leave this area of Scripture, may we add but one more possible thought? You

know that after Moses spent forty days and nights in the Presence of the Lord, when he finally descended from that holy meeting place, it says that "he wist not that his face shone". The people therefore beseeched him to put a veil over his face, to cover the glory. While it is true that they did this basically because they were afraid of the supernatural, could it not also be said that since Moses was representing God to them, their demand signified their desire to reverse roles with their Heavenly Husband, to bring HIM into submission and obedience to THEM (seeing that it is normally THE WOMAN who wears a veil)? If this is not at least a feasible metaphor, the truth alluded to certainly holds up by way of their own historical testimony! At any rate, her request showed that she was not interested in a "face-to-face" relationship with

God! She would not comply with the God-ordained family structure of government; she sought for at least EQUALITY, if not SOVEREIGNTY in the relationship!

***FROM EGYPT --- TO CANAAN --- TO BABYLON***

Time and space would fail us to mention all the many and varied occasions Israel followed other "lovers". Even after God had so graciously brought her out of Egypt, through the preparatory course in the wilderness, and into that glorious place He had prepared for her in Canaan land, we read where time and again He called to her by the mouth of the prophets, retrieving her from the house of foreign "gods", forgiving her and reconciling her to Himself. Just listen to the compassionate heart of God: "***They say, If a*** ***man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return*** ***unto her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? BUT THOU HAST PLAYED*** ***THE HARLOT WITH MANY LOVERS; YET RETURN AGAIN UNTO ME, saith the*** ***Lord" (Jer. 3:1)***. Over and over God "***healed the land***" that was greatly polluted... only for it to become defiled again. Could He have extended Himself any more for the preservation of their marriage? Not as long as the condition of her heart was unchanged! You see, **SHE WAS A HARLOT BY NATURE**; what she did outwardly was only the

expression of what God knew was on the inside all along! This is the reason why God repeatedly "roiled" the waters of Israel, each "crisis point" served as a revelation of her own weakness; but offered them a chance to start anew with their house set in order! Finally, when it became apparent that she would not freely return unto Him, that she was not going to honor her wedding vows as she so presumptuously said she would, He gave her over to her own heart's lusts... and allowed her to suffer the consequences for her rebellion. He did what they considered to be the unthinkable; HE GAVE THEM A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT! He "put her away", so to speak, and left off from covering her. As a result, they were taken into captivity (into nations that personified their whorish and polluted hearts, that practiced the sensual worship of plurality of gods)! First the house of Israel was led into Assyria, and afterward her "sister Judah" into Babylon (you recall that by this time, Israel had divided into two houses: the ten-tribes house of Israel, and the house of Judah, composed of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin). When the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem, they left her house desolate, confiscating all the precious vessels in the temple, then burning it to the ground (***II Chron. 36***). Now the divorce was final, and the old covenant annulled! "Old Jerusalem" was carried away into Babylon!

 As it pertained to the house of Judah, her appointed time of separation was determined to be seventy years in the land of Babylon (Jer. 25). After the designated time had expired, God, in a very positive way, "roiled the waters" once again by stirring the heart of a heathen king, Cyrus, to release all those who desired to return to their homeland, and rebuild their temple in Jerusalem. What an unprecedented opportunity! This had to be a move of God; it could not be explained any other way!

 Before them stood an open door; and through it a rare chance to find favor and forgiveness with her Lord. You would think that as it happened in Egypt, there would have been a mass exodus. But it was different this time; you see, IN EGYPT THEY HAD BEEN SLAVES... BUT IN BABYLON THEY HAD BECOME CITIZENS! As time passed, they had forgotten that they had been forcefully removed from "the old landmarks" of Jerusalem, and caused to dwell in a strange land! They had been accepted and incorporated into Babylonian society, and indoctrinated with Babylonian philosophies; they openly adorned themselves in "goodly Babylonish garments" now, and freely spake the Babylonian language! To many of them (at least everyone under 70),

that's all they had ever known! They had lost their national identity! Now the people were faced with a new dilemma: either to "COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM, AND BE SEPARATE", or to remain among them, and be partakers of their predicted plagues! GOD WAS ONCE AGAIN BRINGING A SEPARATION! After this, ***Jer 7:34 Then will I cause to cease from the cities of Judah, and from the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride: for the land shall be desolate.*** Neither would be heard in idolatrous Babylon. THIS WAS THE LAST CALL! Now they stood in the valley of decision once again. The choice was theirs to make, and theirs alone... what would they do?

***HOPE FOR THE HARLOT***

 Upon her return from Babylon, we would like to think that from that day forward, she walked in absolute submission to her Husband, living "happily ever after"; but the balance of Old Testament history reveals the truth. Although God gave her space for repentance; and although for a season she walked faithfully in that space, renewing her covenant vows with Him; it was not long until her old habits began to emerge once again. The Lord had said through Jeremiah,

"***Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee... for of***

***old time I have broken thy yoke, and burst thy bands; and thou saidest, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree thou wanderest, playing the harlot... FOR THOUGH THOU WASH THEE WITH NITRE, AND TAKE THEE MUCH SOAP, YET THINE INIQUITY IS MARKED BEFORE ME, SAITH THE LORD" (Jer. 2: 19-20, 22)***! It was an indisputable fact that something greater had totranspire in her life than what external chastisement, captivity, and confinement alone hadproduced; for Jeremiah went on to say that Israel had become a "wild ass" who wasUSED TO THE WILDERNESS (***verse 24***)! She had become a VETERAN to thewilderness; and as a result, she was uncontrollable, hardened to reproof! She had receiveda beastly "MARK" of iniquity, the likes of which could not be washed away with "nitreand much soap" (incidentally, the word "nitre" refers to "mineral potash"... the cleansing

agent found in lye soap. It's Hebrew rt. word, however, is #5425, meaning, "to be violently agitated; to terrify or shake off")! No matter how much she tried to cover it up or shake it off, it was ever before the Lord! For this cause, **SHE HAD TO HAVE A COMPLETE CHANGE OF NATURE**! And this was exactly what God had in mind! But in order for us to see into God's eternal plan, we must needs look back to Ezekiel.

 The book of Ezekiel begins with the prophet being "***among the captives by the river of Chebar***". Ezekiel's prophecies came while he was amidst the exiles in Babylonian captivity (having been carried away sometime between the first and final deportations of Judah; although his prophecies were to "the WHOLE House of Israel"). In a very real way, they were in "***the Valley of Achor***"... a definite place of trouble and roiling!

 However, it was while they were in this state of captive confusion that "***THE HEAVENS WERE OPENED***", and Ezekiel saw "***VISIONS OF GOD***" (***Ezek. 1:1***)! In their personal "***VALLEY OF ACHOR***", their "VALE OF AGITATION", there opened "**A DOOR OFHOPE**" for them... and Ezekiel caught a promising perspective into the heavenlies likenever before!

Glorious as this experience was, the words God placed in Ezekiel's mouth were not entirely pleasant; to begin with, they were words of bitter rebuke and judgment (as were Jeremiah's)! Many verses could be cited here (a perfect example would be chapter 16), but it goes without saying that God was not at all tolerant of her past immoral and deviant behavior! He never has, nor ever will "white-wash" SIN! It is an abomination in His sight!

 Nevertheless, there was a door of hope opened to them, in that He later said, "***For I will***

***TAKE YOU FROM among the heathen, and GATHER YOU OUT of all countries, and BRING YOU INTO your own land. THEN WILL I SPRINKLE CLEAN WATER UPON YOU, AND YE SHALL BE CLEAN: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A NEW HEART ALSO WILL I GIVE YOU, AND A NEW SPIRIT WILL I PUT WITHIN YOU: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you a heart of flesh. AND I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT WITHIN YOU, AND CAUSE YOU TO WALK IN MY STATUTES, AND YE SHALL KEEP MY JUDGMENTS, AND DO THEM" (Ezek. 36: 24-27)***! He promised them thatthere would come in the latter days a "rinsing", a "baptism", a sprinkling of CLEANWATER UPON AS MANY AS WOULD RECEIVE HIM, the likes of which they hadnever been washed with before! This would not be an external washing, ordinance, orritual, such as those which were so mechanically performed by the priesthood; but aninternal work which would literally transform them into NEW CREATURES in Christ Jesus! He wouldwash away their filth and whoredoms like "fuller's soap" (Mal. 3:2), totally restoringthem to A TRUE VIRGINAL STATE, BY THE "***WASHING OF REGENERATION, and THE RENEWING OF THE HOLY GHOST" (Titus 3:5)***!

 This, then, would rectify the problem posed by the Law, concerning the uncleanness of

the adulterous wife. And with this word came the promise of A NEW COVENANT...not as the old wedding covenant, which was performed at Sinai (which covenant they brake); but A BRAND NEW RELATIONSHIP, unlike anything Israel had ever experienced before (***Ezek. 11:17-20; Jer. 31:31-34; 32: 37-40; Isa. 62:4-5***)! Under this covenant, Jehovah would not only walk WITH them, but **IN** them, as well; enabling them to walk in His statutes, and keep His judgments! This would truly constitute **UNION**!

***The Controversy of the Laws of Marriage***

 This was all well and good; but now there seemed to be another dilemma with the idea of a remarriage. Was it not written in the Law, that a woman could not return unto her first husband after she had been joined to another? ***In Deut. 24, verses 1-4 we read, "When a*** ***man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce, puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and when she departs out of his house, she goes and marries another man, and if the latter (second) husband dislikes her and writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house; or if the last husband dies, who took her as his wife, then THE FORMER HUSBAND, WHO SENT HER AWAY, MAY NOT TAKE HER AGAIN TO BE HIS WIFE... for that is an abomination unto the Lord" (Amplified)***. Since it was truethat the Lord had given her a bill of divorcement (***Jer. 3:8***), and sent her out of his"house" (casting her out of the land of Palestine); and since it was manifestly declared bythe mouths of the prophets that both Ephraim (Israel) was "JOINED to idols" (***Hosea 4:17***), and ***"Judah hath profaned the holiness of the Lord which he loved, and hath MARRIED the daughter of A STRANGE GOD" (Mal. 2:11)***; it was painstakingly clearthat they twain had "joined" themselves to another, even to their SECOND HUSBAND.Therefore, according to God's own irreversible decree, there was no way for her toremarry her first Husband, even if her second husband should die... or was there?

 ***IDENTIFYING THE SECOND HUSBAND***

Approximately six hundred years passed from the time that Ezekiel first prophesied of this restitution, without the slightest resemblance of its fulfillment. We know that there was that brief period of deliverance, when as many as chose the way of life and freedom came out of Babylon, and rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem; but it soon became apparent that it in no wise constituted the New Covenant Ezekiel and others spoke of. As we have before stated, Judah eventually reverted back to her old deceitful and adulterous ways, because of the condition of her heart. Her promiscuous, unchaste mindset testified that she had a whore's forehead ***(Jer. 3:3);*** she was set on the ways of wantonness!

 However, her harlotry manifested in a different way this time. As the years passed, and she had been restored to the Promised Land, it appeared as if Judah had finally settled down; at least, she was not so apt to openly embrace the idolatrous practices of her heathen neighbors. Instead, she focused on developing her own religion... adding to and improvising it as she did (during this time, the Pharisees came up with the idea of the Rabbinical order, synagogues, etc.). While it is true that they had come under the authority of the mighty Roman Empire by this time, they were still free to perform their religious duties without interference, as long as it did not demean or challenge the sovereignty of Caesar. Therefore, the chief priests and Pharisees went about autonomously determining what "the rules of the house" should be, modifying the Law to conform to their own standards, independently deciding for themselves what was good, and what was evil (sound familiar?). If they were going to stay at home, they were at least going to have it their way! They insisted on "running the show"!

 Although they probably thought that they were now reunited, and thus faithfully fulfilling their covenant vows with their first Husband, Jehovah... honoring Him through their many additional by-laws, amendments, and restrictions... with their proud and pompous parade of fleshly performances (which was all just a religious cover-up); the truth was that THEY WERE NOT SERVING HIM AT ALL! As a matter of fact, they were so caught up in their pious self-exalting works, their lofty air of self-importance, that GOD'S ABSENCE WAS NOT EVEN NOTICED! He would not tolerate the dominating, masculine role they had taken upon themselves, so this time HE had moved out of the house, WITHOUT THEIR EVEN REALIZING IT (His glory had long-since departed from the Temple)! Therefore, they continued to fashion Him AFTER THEIR IMAGE; THEY CHOSE TO CHANGE PLACES WITH GOD, taking the leading role in the relationship! So in reality, though they THOUGHT they had been remarried to Jehovah, THEY WERE STILL IN IDOLATRY, never having been actually "divorced" from their second husband! (This is what really constituted their second husband... **for what is an idol, but a false idea of God**? It is the perverted product of man's vain imagination; a misconstrued image of the True and Living God, erected and enthroned in the carnal mind)! ***Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; in that they changed the glory of the INCORRUPTIBLE GOD, and made it like to CORRUPTIBLE MAN (Rom. 1:23)***! Even though they had never clearly understood the true nature or identity of their "**second husband**", nor ever really gotten to know him (since they had only considered their external relations with him in the form of pagan religions... in which he manifested himself to them in so many different images), they were nevertheless still "joined" to him. The great mystery of it all was, **THEIR SECOND HUSBAND HAD BEEN MASQUERADING AS THE FIRST**! Sound confusing? It is! This is why they were so deceived! You see, unbeknown to them, their **SECOND HUSBAND** was not just some graven image carved from wood or stone, not some natural, tangible object that they could put away from them at will; but was personified through their own fallen, sinful nature, **AND HER "OLD MAN'S" NAME WAS ADAM**! Down through history, it was always the Adamic nature that attracted them to the immoral worship of the heathen, and that violated their relationship with Jehovah. You might say that he was REALLY living in their "house ... sitting right in their "temple" (that is, their mortal bodies! And though they had never been "formally married", SHE BECAME HIS "COMMON-LAW" WIFE! THEY WERE JUST "SHACKING-UP" TOGETHER)! ***They had changed the truth of God into a lie, and were worshiping and serving "the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25)***! Though they may not have been bowing before their second husband in the form of foreign gods or graven images, they were still abiding by his radically insane laws, and submitting to his ridiculously unbalanced judgments! He had merely switched to a more religious appearance!

 ***BEHOLD, THE BRIDEGROOM COMETH***

This was the abominable state Jerusalem was in when John the Baptist came on the scene. Though she had been physically delivered from Babylon many years before, her actions declared that she was still in captivity. She was bound in her spirit (and as such, she took upon herself the prophetic alias of Babylon)! Therefore, John came forth as "a voice crying in the wilderness", sounding the call to come out from among this wanton harlot spirit, this idolatrous, adulterous relationship with the Mystery of iniquity... and to end this union with her "old man"! His was a beckoning to break their association with the spirit of rebellion and independence!

 John was sent by God to "roil" the waters of Jordan, and to agitate and disturb the religious community which had settled on the bottom. Needless to say, he thoroughly accomplished his mission! His sharp and scathing rebukes stirred up and brought out the worst in the ecclesiastical hierarchy! How dare he suggest that they, too, needed cleansing? Didn't he know that this kind of talk would disturb the peace and tranquility of Jerusalem, by creating questions in the minds of the people?

 While John was sure to point out their "soiled" and sinful condition, he also extended to them **A DOOR OF HOPE**: ***"I indeed baptize you with water; but ONE MIGHTIER THAN I COMETH, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: HE SHALL BAPTIZE YOU WITH THE HOLY GHOST AND WITH FIRE..." (Lk. 3:16)!***

 Could it be that the long-awaited promises concerning the new covenant were about to be fulfilled? Was it possible that their prophetic hopes and dreams were finally converging at this point? And if this were so, why was the announcement coming through this radical rebel of a man, and not through the authorized High Priest? Ah, it was because John was ordained of God to call a people out of the organized systems of religion, and into the wilderness! He was arranging a meeting in the desert (typical of their spiritual condition) BETWEEN THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE BRIDE! You see, John served as "***the friend of the Bridegroom***", proclaiming, "***PREPARE YE THE WAY OF THE LORD; MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT"!***

 As they stood in their personal "**Valley of Achor**", faced with John's provocative challenge, suddenly **THE LIVING "DOOR OF HOPE" WAS OPENED BEFORE THEIR VERY EYES. JESUS THE CHRIST STEPPED OUT OF OBSCURITY, AND INTO THE WATERS**! Hallelujah! As "God manifested in the flesh", "***the image of the invisible God***", as the very incarnation of the Heavenly Bridegroom Himself, He descended from the heights of the heavenly realm to reveal His true character to them, to expose that impostor called "anti-christ", and to "***take out of them a people for His Name***" (***Acts 15:14***)! Their day of visitation had come, and the call was made, "***GO YE OUT TO MEET HIM***"!

 Once Jesus came forth, the multitudes which had previously followed John went after Him. When this was brought to John's attention, he humbly replied, "***A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before Him. HE THAT HATH THE BRIDE IS THE BRIDEGROOM: BUT THE FRIEND OF THE BRIDEGROOM, which standeth and heareth Him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's Voice: THIS MY JOY IS FULFILLED. HE MUST INCREASE, BUT I MUST DECREASE" (Jn. 3:27-30)***! And from that time on, John faded from the scene. He had introduced the bride to her future Husband!

 Although the common people received Him gladly, you would think that He would have been warmly embraced by those who seemed to know the most about Messiah... the Scribes and Pharisees; but alas, He was not. ***"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (Jn. 1:11)***. He was so drastically different from the way they had envisioned Him, so utterly "unclean" by their standards; how could He possibly be the One they had prayed for all these years? How sad it was that they had become so blind... **THEY COULDN'T EVEN RECOGNIZE THEIR FIRST HUSBAND** (it just goes to show that they never did really know Him)! He was noted as being "***the friend of publicans and sinners***", consorting more commonly with the general populous, rather than the chief leaders; and referred to as "***a winebibber and a glutton***"! It was reported that He traveled about with nasty, filthy men; His own disciples transgressed the traditions of the elders by eating with unwashed hands (***Matt. 15:2***)! And besides, rather than

commending them for their many fine achievements, He insulted them! He was not at all

impressed with their sterile illusions of religion; with their massive building projects, their pious "holier-than-thou" appearances, their long and impressive prayers on street corners, etc. Why, He even had the nerve to call them "***A WICKED AND ADULTEROUS GENERATION***" (***Matt. 16:4; 12:39; and Mk. 8:38***)! Imagine their response, if you will: "Who does HE think HE is"? He, who was reproachfully reputed to be an illegitimate child born out of wedlock, dared to speak of them as if THEY were unclean! These were stout words for those sanctimonious "stiffnecks" to swallow, to say the least... but quite appropriate!

 To the discerning heart it was obvious that the Pharisees had attempted to usurp God's covering authority over the people by Jesus' accusation***: "For all their works they do to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and ENLARGE THE BORDERS OF THEIR GARMENTS..." (Matt. 23:5)***. While this may have been just a natural performance which they used to create the impression of holiness, it most certainly revealed the deeper desire of their hearts, as well. They wanted the people to look to them as their security (quite typical of "Adam")! To understand this, it must be pointed out that one of the ancient Hebrew customs was that when a man was solemnizing marriage with a woman he would spread the hem, or skirt of his robe over her head (***see Ruth 3:9***). This signified that he would henceforth cover her, provide for her, and protect her. He would assume exclusive rights to her affection, taking her as his own. We know that in ***Ezek. 16:8***, God said***, "Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; AND I SPREAD MY SKIRT OVER THEE, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and ENTERED INTO A COVENANT WITH THEE, saith the Lord, AND THOU BECAMEST MINE"***. Of a truth, when Jehovah drew His people out

of Egypt and into the wilderness, **HE SPREAD HIS SKIRT OF DIVINE PROTECTION OVER THEM, and THEY BECAME HIS**. As they stood beneath Mt. Sinai, they came into a covenant relationship with Him, illustrated by the border established round about the foot of the mount. Beloved, as history attests, they were thoroughly covered! He took care of them completely, as long as they abode in His House! Now, as all this relates to the Pharisees, we can clearly see what their implications were, by enlarging the border of THEIR garments. They saw themselves in God's stead, presiding over the people as lords over God's heritage! THEY WERE ACTING AS IF THEY WERE THE MAN OF THE HOUSE, THE HIGHEST AUTHORITY, WITHOUT BEING IN SUBMISSION THEMSELVES! They had worked hard at gaining control over the people, at "spreading" their deceptive "skirts" over their thinking; and they were not about to relinquish their autonomous authority without a fight!

 There was one thing that agitated them greatly about Jesus: He not only spread His "skirt" over those who came unto Him, but HE DELIVERED ON HIS PROMISES! HE WAS A REAL "BREAD WINNER" in the truest sense of the word! He REALLY covered them, providing supernaturally for their every need. This the Pharisees just could not do! We have read where Jesus turned the water into wine; and how He multiplied the fish and the loaves. But His supply was not just limited to their natural, nutritional necessities; He ministered to their physical, financial, and most importantly, their spiritual needs, as well! By simply "***touching***" the "***hem of His garment***", virtue flowed out of Him like "***rivers of Living Waters***"... virtually a River of Life which parted into FOUR HEADS, watering the "WHOLE EARTH" (***Gen. 2:10***)! He ministered to "***the four corners***" (that is, the entirety) of man's realm of necessities! What a drastic contrast He made with their **SECOND HUSBAND**, who suffered them to ***"eat their own bread, and wear their own apparel" (Isa. 4:1)***! In their distorted relationship, He made THEM earn the living (if you could call it that), while He simply "kicked back", and enjoyed the fruit of their labor! What a lazy old man "Adam" is! There is really no comparison between this stagnant, putrid, broken "cistern" (***Jer. 2:13***) and Jesus!

***MAKING A WAY FOR A WEDDING***

 Although Jesus was certainly SPIRITUALLY CAPABLE OF PROVIDING for a corporate "wife" in the days of His flesh; according to the conditions afore described under the Law

(ref. ***Deut. 24:1-4***), HE WAS LEGALLY UNABLE TO. Had He lived on for thousands of years as "***God manifest in the flesh*", NOT ONE SINGLE ISRAELITE AFTER THE FLESH COULD HAVE EVER BEEN JOINED UNTO HIM IN THE NEW COVENANT**! Why? Well, for one reason, as long as He was in the flesh as such, HE COULD NOT POUR OUT HIS SPIRIT as Ezekiel prophesied. He could bless them externally, but not internally (in the manner they so desperately needed). In ***John 7:37-38, Jesus said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, Out of his belly shall flow rivers of Living Water. (But this spake He of the Spirit, which they which believe should receive: FOR THE HOLY GHOST WAS NOT YET GIVEN; BECAUSE THAT JESUS WAS NOT YET GLORIFIED)"***! It was therefore necessary that He be in a glorified state, in order to baptize them with His Spirit!

 The second reason was because once He had put Israel away, and given her a bill of divorcement, and once she became "married" unto another, **SHE COULD NOT RETURN UNTO HER FIRST HUSBAND**. As we have previously stated, looking at this from a natural perspective seemed to pose an impossible problem... but not with God! You see, He who is omniscient was not the slightest bit disturbed by this; neither was He caught off guard. Jesus was more than prepared to deal with this apparent obstacle when He came to it! As a matter of fact, He had already worked out the answer before the foundation of the world! This legal "**stumblingblock**" would merely serve as a "steppingstone" in God's eternal plan of the ages! It was incorporated into His purpose!

 After more than three years of wooing a people into the wilderness, speaking comfortably

to their hearts, "***proclaiming THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR OF THE LORD***" (corresponding to the announcement of the appointed year of espousal), the time came for a more serious phase of the relationship to develop. Up until this time, they had heard the Voice of the Bridegroom and the Bride in the city; but soon it would be heard no more. Jerusalem had received her "***DAY OF VISITATION***", but only a few had recognized it. He had offered to gather them all under His heavenly covering, ***"even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings", but they (as a whole) would not (Matt. 23:37-39).*** Therefore, He was taking His remnant Bride ***"without the gate"***, outside the camp, to bring them into a new union with Him, void of the defilements of men (and their corrupting theologies)! He was separating this people unto Himself, ***LEAVING***

***JERUSALEM'S HOUSE UNTO HER DESOLATE (Matt. 23:37)***! Oh, if only they would have collectively known the time of their visitation, and accepted His proposal!

 In preparation for this coming union with His chosen, He repeatedly spoke to His disciples a word of comfort and assurance. Though soon the terrestrial form they had grown so accustomed to knowing Him in would be taken from them, IT WAS EXPEDIENT FOR THEM THAT HE GO AWAY (***Jn. 16:7***). There was a higher union He sought with them, one that could never be fulfilled while He was in the flesh. Therefore, it was to their advantage that He go away, to return to His celestial glory. For a small moment they would feel forsaken, scattered, shaken, and roiled; but it would provide them with a time to diligently search their hearts, to carefully examine themselves, and to see whether they would patiently wait for Him or not. After THREE

DAYS, however, with great mercies He would regather them unto Himself! HE WOULD COME AGAIN... in a way that He could meet all the conditions of the New Covenant pledge! He gave them His word that this dreaded "**VALE OF TROUBLE**" they were about to pass through would ultimately prove to be a glorious "**DOOR OF HOPE**" in the end: ***"I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I WILL COME AGAIN, AND RECEIVE YOU UNTO MYSELF; that where I am, there ye may be also" (Jn. 14:2-3)!***

Finally, the hour arrived, and the time was at hand. As you know, the terms of the first

marriage covenant was sealed at Sinai; but this time, they were to be consummated at

Mt. Calvary. In His usual style, though, He shocked them all with His appearance! After a grueling night of mental and physical abuse, after a humiliating barrage of "***cruel mockings and scourgings***", after He was disgracefully nailed to the cross, and after the entire weight of mankind's sins were placed upon Him, Isaiah said, ***"As many were astonied at Thee; His visage was so marred more than any man" (Isa. 52:14)***. So terrible was this sight, so disturbing and disruptive was His appearance, that for three hours the sun hid its shining face, and the earth violently trembled in fear! Just as it was in days of old, He showed up for this special and unforgettable occasion adorned in His appalling **garments of DEATH**! Even those whom He had so carefully forewarned were not prepared for such a shocking display of agony and affliction: ***"and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not"(Isa. 53:3)***! At that point, it must have seemed that all hope was gone! In their eyes, they had come to the end of their world; ALL WAS LOST!

 The events that transpired in the days following are but history ....... but the effects are still felt today. I would imagine that to His disciples, those next three days felt like some of the longest ever known to man. THEY WERE BEING ROILED; and in the process, discovered feelings and attitudes they never knew were there. What they may not have understood, however, was that through this stressful and life-threatening time for them, A PLACE WAS BEING "PREPARED" FOR THEM... A WAY WAS BEING MADE FOR THE WEDDING! You see, while Jesus was "asleep" in death, something marvelous was occurring. HE WAS BEING "OPERATED" ON! He was reenacting that wondrous event described in ***Gen. 2:21***! For as it was in the first creation, when the Lord God "***caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam***"... during which time, He removed a rib from his side (the closest thing to his heart), and fashioned a woman from it, thereby making of himself ONE NEW MAN (**composed of "male and female"; seeing that together God now called THEIR name "ADAM"**); even so was God RE-CREATING A BRIDE FOR HIMSELF from the wounded side of Christ! He took the closest thing to His Heart (i.e. His cherished vision of a cleansed, comparable, corporate Bride), and brought it into manifestation to be "***an help meet***" for Him! Because He became the Substitute for the sins of the world, when He was nailed to the cross, she was identified with Him; when He was placed in the grave, she went there also; and when He rose from the dead, SHE APPEARED BY HIS SIDE! She had literally passed from DEATH UNTO LIFE in Christ, being re-created through His death, burial, and resurrection!

 Now here's where the glorious part comes in: we know that not only had the "**First Husband**" died, but so had the woman (***Rom. 6:8-10***). By the glory of the Father, They twain were raised up from the dead to walk together in the newness of life (***Rom. 6:4***). However, before she was legally released from the law of her "**second husband**", **HE TOO MUST DIE**: ***"Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; BUT IF THE HUSBAND BE DEAD, SHE IS LOOSED FROM THE LAW OF HER HUSBAND. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress, though she be married to another man" (Rom. 7:1-3)***. It was necessary, therefore, that her "second husband" be dead, also, in order that she might be free to marry whomsoever she willed. And this, beloved, was precisely what the Apostle Paul declared DID HAPPEN: ***"Knowing this, that OUR OLD MAN IS CRUCIFIED WITH HIM, THAT THE BODY OF SIN MIGHT BE DESTROYED, that henceforth we should not serve sin. FOR HE THAT IS DEAD IS FREED FROM SIN" (Rom. 6:6-7)!***

What a wonderful mystery this is! While ALL THREE were nailed to the cross (Christ, the woman, and her "old man"), and all three went down together into death... ONLY TWO were raised up! In the sight of God, THE OLD MAN REMAINED IN THE GRAVE! ***"Likewise, RECKON YE ALSO YOURSELVES TO BE DEAD UNTO SIN, BUT ALIVE UNTO GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD" (Rom. 6:11). "Wherefore, my brethren, YE ALSO ARE BECOME DEAD TO THE LAW (of the old man) BY THE BODY OF CHRIST; THAT YE SHOULD BE MARRIED TO ANOTHER, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God... (Rom. 7:4)!***  ***Eph 2:6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*** What looked like an impassible obstacle from the natural worked perfectly into the predestinated plan of God!

 As if that were not enough, we find in ***Eph. 2:10-22*** that during this glorious redemption process, not only did He transform "the gates of hell" into "gates of hope", and not only did He release the woman from the law of her "old man legally making it possible for her to "marry" the Man of her choice, but He also broke down "***the middle wall of partition***", which had for so long separated Jew and Gentile; allowing as many as possessed THE FAITH of Abraham to become a part of this corporate Bride! ***"For HE IS OUR PEACE, WHO HATH MADE BOTH ONE, and hath BROKEN DOWN THE MIDDLE WALL OF PARTITION BETWEEN US; having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; FOR TO MAKE IN HIMSELF ONE NEW MAN, SO MAKING PEACE; and that He might reconcile BOTH UNTO GOD IN ONE BODY by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby... for THROUGH HIM WE BOTH HAVE ACCESS BY ONE SPIRIT UNTO THE FATHER"***! Therefore, He opened A DOOR OF HOPE for ALL MEN to enter through... and as a result, "A NEW CREATION" came into being; composed of a vast cross-section of humanity, united by a common faith in the power of His precious Blood!

 Jehovah set out to REOPEN THE DOOR TO THE MARRIAGE CHAMBER; He purposed to provide A DOOR OF HOPE for this hopeless situation (***Hosea 2:15***)! With astounding gracefulness, God, through the Incarnation, moved within these restrictive laws and circumstances (which He Himself had imposed), without breaking a one! He "***fulfilled the law in Christ***", causing all the

details "***to fit into a pattern for good***"; and what appeared to be death and defeat ultimately turned out to be THE ANSWER TO EVERY PROBLEM!

 Christ, who represented "***the Image of the invisible God***" (the First Husband), was raised up as "A NEW MAN"... and thereby CLEARED of the previous relationship held with Israel (since ***"old things passed away, and all things became new"; II Cor. 5:21***). In like manner, the woman (that is, "***as many as received Him***") **PASSED FROM DEATH UNTO LIFE IN HIM**; and were thereby "***washed through REGENERATION, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Tit. 3:5)***! But the old man, who "***is corrupt according to the deceitful lust***", was left in death! The Apostle Paul declared his epitaph when he wrote, ***"RECKON YOURSELVES DEAD INDEED UNTO SIN, BUT ALIVE UNTO GOD THROUGH CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD"***... and again, ***"ye also are become dead to the law through the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Rom. 6:11; 7:4)***! In the eyes of the Lord, the old man never came out of the grave! HE IS STILL DEAD! Therefore, just as in the beginning, when a "new creation" woman was prepared for the newly-formed Adam... this resurrected woman was henceforth freed from her old man, and his "law of sin and death", and thus released to be "joined" unto the Lord in holy matrimony***! "For we are members of His Body, of His flesh, and of His bones" (Eph. 5:30).***

***THE RENT VAIL.. ACCESS TO INTIMACY***

 Not only did Jesus use "the Sword" to "TAKE peace from the earth" (that is, to bring division***, Mt. 10:34***), but also, to MAKE peace, as well: "***For HE IS OUR PEACE, Who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;*** ***having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in*** ***ordinances; for to make IN HIMSELF of twain ONE NEW MAN, SO MAKING*** ***PEACE..." (Eph. 2:14-15)***. Strangely enough, though He was considered by the religious community to be an insurrectionist, a menace and a disturber of the public peace, He actually MADE peace by TAKING AWAY every form of false peace and security they had come to trust in! Unbeknown to the mass majority in Jerusalem, when Jesus gave up the Ghost on Golgotha's hill, and cried, "***IT IS FINISHED***", a way was being prepared for them to enter into the Bosom of the Bridegroom... into "***the secret place of the Most High"!*** ***Matt. 27:51 says, "And behold, THE VAIL OF THE TEMPLE WAS RENT IN TWAIN FROM THE TOP TO THE BOTTOM"***! This act signified the end of the formerrelationship He had maintained with them, and the commencement of the new. The doorof opportunity was now opened to them into the very Presence of God... AND INTO HISGLORIOUS REST (***Heb. 4***)! They could cease from their own works behind the vail, andrest in the righteousness of God!The rent veil marked the end of separation, the "middle wall of partition" which for solong had parted the people. It spoke of the end of separation between the high priest andthe priest-hood; between the priesthood and the people; between Jew and Gentile;between male and female; and between the heavenly Bridegroom and His Bride! Yourecall that under the previous relationship, God set a border around the foot of His holymount (lengthening, as it were, "the hem of His garment"), lest the people should breakthrough and gaze upon His glory. Only Moses, "the friend of the Bridegroom", waspermitted into His Presence. After that, when the Tabernacle was built, only the ordainedrepresentative, the anointed high priest, was permitted to go behind the vail, into the Holyof Holies; all others were forbidden. The reason was because the hearts of the people hadnever been truly sanctified before Him; they had washed their natural clothes as Moses

had commanded them, but their spiritual "garments" were still "spotted by the flesh" (this came as no surprise to God)! However, at Calvary, the flesh nature was dealt with; the vail in the temple was rent; and as many as received Him were given availability into the Marriage Chamber! No matter if they were "Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female"... all were invited into an open relationship with Him behind the vail! Through the Cross, He broadened and redefined the identity of Israel to include ANYONE who possessed the FAITH of Abraham: "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, THE SAME ARE THE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM" ... "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: THAT THE BLESSING OF ABRAHAM MIGHT COME ON THE GENTILES (nations) THROUGH JESUS CHRIST; THAT WE MIGHT RECEIVE THE

PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT THROUGH FAITH" (***Gal. 3:7, 13-14***)! His Blood erased the lines of segregation, so that we are "all ONE in Christ Jesus" (***Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11***)! What began with a natural seed, who increased "like the dust of the earth", was reduced down to One (even Christ); and from the "sowing" of that singular Seed "in the earth" (***Jn. 12:24***), came a glorious heavenly seed, "like the stars in heaven" in multitude! And what resulted from the rejection of Christ by natural Jerusalem (and inevitably theirs by Him, as well) was His acceptance by and of a "New Jerusalem" people, gathered from every kindred, tribe, nation, and people... "Even us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles... as He said also in Osee (Hosea), I WILL CALL THEM MY PEOPLE, who were not My people; AND HER BELOVED, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID UNTO THEM, YE ARE NOT MY PEOPLE, THERE SHALL THEY BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF THE LIVING GOD" (***Rom. 9:24-26***)! Praise God for His infinite wisdom! He used His national rejection and the tragedy of the cross to bring forth a world-wide Bride from His wounded side!

 Again, after the resurrection, there were above five hundred brethren who were privileged to behold Him at once (***I Cor. 15:6***); but before the Day of Pentecost had fully come, only one hundred twenty of them still stood true! They were narrowed down to a faithful few, who purposed to separate themselves unto Him completely, and obey His commands to the letter. Suddenly, things began to turn around; God vindicated their faithfulness! To that handful of men and women, who had just spent the past ten days in earnest prayer and supplication, preparing them-selves as "a Bride adorned for her Husband", the Bridegroom returned in pure Spirit form; He received them unto Himself; and as a result, they twain became ONE SPIRIT (for "He that is joined to the Lord is ONE SPIRIT"; ***I Cor. 6:17***)! In a sense, He consummated the sacred wedding vows of the New Covenant with them that morning BY COMING TOGETHER WITH THEM, AND ENTERING INTO THEM! As it was with Mary, when the Holy Ghost came upon her, and the power of the Highest overshadowed her (***Lk. 1:35***), there appeared unto them "cloven tongues LIKE AS OF FIRE, and it sat on each of them. And THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH

THE HOLY GHOST" (***Acts 2:3-4***)! They became miniature "Mt. Sinai’s"! On that momentous occasion, not only did the Lord "marry" them, and "impregnate" them with His Life, but He IMMEDIATELY blessed their "womb" with THREE THOUSAND CHILDREN (***Acts 2:41***); and from then on, "the Lord ADDED TO THE CHURCH DAILY such as should be saved" (***verse 47***)!

***Union***

What a glorious experience this was, to be joined unto the Lord, to become ONE SPIRIT with Him! At that point, there was "birthed" within them A REVELATION OF THIS RELATIONSHIP, a divine consciousness that "AS HE IS, SO ARE WE IN THIS WORLD" (***I Jn. 4:17***)! And as long as they walked in the light of this truth, there was a manifestation of it! Whatever they had associated with Him, be it righteousness, peace, joy, power, etc., was now theirs by way of covenant! They discovered that to be IN CHRIST meant that He identified and took upon Himself THEIR WEAKNESSES, that they might take upon them HIS STRENGTHS! As Joel had said, "Let the weak say, I AM STRONG" ***(3:10***); they could boldly confess that through His divine power He had given unto them "ALL THINGS that pertain unto life and godliness" (***II Pet. 1:3***), and that He had blessed them "with ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST" (***Eph. 1:3***)! It was more than an empty profession to them; they had the evidence of possession attesting to the fact!

 Beloved, what was true with them is just as true with us! If we have been "born from above" and filled with His Spirit, we have partaken of the same covenant. WE HAVE ALL THAT HE IS at our disposal; what more could we need? No matter what we might face, whether now or in the future, we are more than equipped to withstand the challenge, and to emerge triumphant! We have His indwelling Presence to guarantee it! "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... Nay, in all these things WE ARE MORE THAN CONQUERORS THROUGH HIM THAT LOVED US"

(***Rom. 8:35-37***)! They were absolutely confident in the love the Heavenly Bridegroom had for them, and were therefore FEARLESS in their witness for Him (because "PERFECT LOVE casteth out fear", ***I Jn. 4:17***). Therefore, as they had "boldness in THEIR day of judgment", we can do the same! They knew that if God was for them, NO ONE could possibly be against them

(***Rom. 8:31-32***)! They understood that no one could ever do anything detrimental to them that God could not turn around for good! No weapon formed against them could prosper! They knew that NOTHING could oppose them, not even the "gates of hell" (***Matt. 16:18***). And Paul was further emboldened to say, "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is IN CHRIST Jesus our Lord" (***Rom. 8:38-39***); and beloved, this is exactly the mind He would have us to have! We will find within us a supernatural supply rising to meet the occasion, to "put us over" in life! Whatever is His in the Kingdom is NOW, AT THIS TIME, available to us, because WE ARE ONE WITH HIM (He has given unto us the "keys of the Kingdom")! We need not relegate it to some far-off, futuristic age; we have access to all the hidden riches IN CHRIST, seeing that CHRIST IS NOW IN US! Praise God! He is a faithful Provider, WHO supplies "ALL OUR NEED according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (***Phil. 4:19***)!

Amen!

Jim Moore