

# **PREPARATIONS OF THE BRIDE**

## **PART 5**

### **"THE VALLEY OF ACHOR - PLACE OF REGATHERING"**

Hosea 3:1-3... "then said the Lord unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine. So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley: And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee".

So far in our study of Hosea, chapters 1 & 2, we have seen from both the individual and the corporate perspectives the irresistible beauty of God's sovereign interaction in the lives of His people. He uses the utter helplessness and hopelessness of man's fallen condition to magnify His All-sufficiency! As the Lord said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor. 12:9); He takes advantage of our inadequacies, by using them to amplify His abilities! It is an indisputable truth that man left to himself will ultimately come to an end; he is irreversibly turned toward destruction. In fact, as long as man is separated from God, **EVEN AT HIS BEST, HE IS HIS OWN WORST ENEMY...** and he will most certainly bring himself to eventual ruin! Rather than bettering himself, or ascending **UPWARD** into the higher life of the Spirit, experience has proven that his tendency is to gravitate toward the lower parts of "the earth", toward those things which bring the greatest gratification to the flesh. It is from this living "hell", this selfish pursuit for passion and pleasure, that all of his problems arise! Notwithstanding, no matter how impossible the situation may seem, or how incurable the condition may appear, when man has come to the end of his strength and God is called on the scene, **HE CAN AND WILL MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!** He may not always do it when we say to, or in the way we think He should. He may not necessarily change the circumstances to conform to our conceptions, but more importantly, when true repentance is made, **HE WILL CHANGE HOW WE LOOK AT OUR CIRCUMSTANCES** (His transformation program works from the inside out)! When we can view things from His divine perspective, and seek only to abide in His perfect will, when we are content in whatever state we may be in, then we will be able to say, **"I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHICH STRENGTHENETH ME!"** As long as we are desirous to submit to His Lordship, we can be assured that He will not suffer us to be tempted or tried with more than we can bear; **HE WILL CERTAINLY MAKE A WAY OF ESCAPE... AND OPEN UNTO US A DOOR OF HOPE,** that we might bear **ANYTHING THAT COMES OUR WAY!** This is how He makes overcomers out of us! He can take the disappointing, frustrating failures of men, the mistakes made by the weakness and limitations of the flesh (including our own), or the catastrophic conditions which intrude upon our lives and threaten our world, and cause them to serve in His plan for the ages!

As our meditations have unfolded, the basic theme that has run throughout our past four messages is God's persistent dealings with His people concerning the spirit of INDEPENDENCE; that is, of their trusting in themselves, or some other means, rather than totally depending and leaning on His outstretched Arm. In His Eyes, this spirit of INDIVIDUALITY is synonymous in scriptures with ADULTERY or IDOLATRY! From the first account in the book of Genesis in Eden's fair garden, this has been the main obstruction God has confronted in establishing a true STATE OF ONENESS, or "marriage" relationship with His people. Therefore, down through the ages, He has steadily and methodically aimed at revealing the absolute folly of having confidence in the flesh, by bringing His elect into "the wilderness"; that is, into conflicting circumstances specifically designed to be beyond their control, into situations totally beyond their ability to cope with, thereby drawing them unto Himself. It may be a "tailor-made wilderness", created solely by God for the purpose of our spiritual growth and development; or it may be a wilderness condition we have brought upon ourselves through rebellion. Either way, He knows how to teach us the eternal lesson that "WE OF OUR OWN SELVES can do nothing"! Over and over He has clarified this invaluable message to our hearts! He alone can straighten out the "mess" we have made of our world, and bring lasting peace out of the chaos!

#### EPITAPH OF THE OLD MAN

Last month ("Valley of Achor --- Place of Renewal") we closed the article by confronting a double dilemma with the idea of restoration and remarriage for Israel. We noted that first of all, according to the law in Deut. 24, once a woman had been given a bill of divorcement from her first husband, and once she had joined herself unto another husband, SHE COULD NOT RETURN UNTO HER FIRST HUSBAND, even if she should receive a divorce from the second... seeing that she was then considered to be "polluted" to the first. Their relationship could never be the same! Secondly, we pointed out that according to Rom. 7, as long as that woman's second husband was still alive, she was still bound to his law. Only if he should die would she be free to marry whosoever she desired.

Both conditions were applicable in Israel's case. She had been married to Jehovah, but because of her repeated violations with IDOLS (the graven personification of images conjured up from men's carnal, corruptible imaginations), she was given a bill of divorce. The real issue was not her relationship with statues of wood or stone; but what those figures represented (it is a known fact that the worship practices of every "foreign god", whether it be to Baal, Molech, Ashtoreth, or whoever, were designed to either express a particular attitude of the flesh, or gratify it's lustful passions! This is why the gods of the heathen were so attractive to Israel; they were specifically fashioned BY man to appeal TO man's basest desires and deepest emotions! They bowed themselves before gods they had made in THEIR IMAGE)! Simply put, Israel became "joined" to her lower, Adamic nature; she was "married", as it were, to THE OLD MAN!

Nevertheless, because of the great love wherewith He loved her, and because of the glorious redemptive promises He had previously made, 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! What was this mysterious means by which Israel was loosed from the law of her "second husband", and enabled to return unto her first? And how was it that she was cleansed from the stains of her habitual harlotry?

Through the glorious process of IDENTIFICATION, we found that ALL THREE (Christ, the woman, and the "old man") were nailed to the Cross; ALL THREE died; but ONLY TWO emerged from the grave in the newness of LIFE! 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)! Hallelujah! 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 former relationship He had maintained with them, and the commencement of the new. The door of opportunity was now opened to them into the very Presence of God... AND INTO HIS GLORIOUS REST (Heb. 4)! They could cease from their own works behind the veil, and repose in the righteousness of God!

The rent veil marked the end of separation, the "middle wall of partition" which for so long had parted the people. It spake of the end of separation between the high priest and the priest-hood; between the priesthood and the people; between Jew and Gentile; between male and female; and between the heavenly Bridegroom and His Bride! You recall that under the previous relationship, God set a border around the foot of His holy mount (lengthening, as it were, "the hem of His garment"), lest the people should break through and gaze upon His glory. Only Moses, "the friend of the Bridegroom", was permitted into His Presence. After that, when the Tabernacle was built, only the ordained representative, the anointed high priest, was permitted to go behind the veil, into the Holy of Holies; all others were forbidden. The reason was because the hearts of the people had never 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 veil 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 veil! 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!

HE TAKES AWAY --- THAT HE MIGHT ADD

Contrary to the common principles of mathematics, the Lord often divides that He might multiply (and by doing so, He confounds the "wisdom of the wise" with His so-called "foolishness")! He purposely allows disruptions, tribulations, and divisive conditions to come into the lives of His people for a season, with the object of severance and separation FOR THEIR GOOD in mind (take, for example, Abraham and Lot; Joseph and his brethren; Jacob and Esau; Job; David and Saul, etc.). During the process, usually what comes to our attention is the division or subtraction that is occurring, and the loss that might be suffered; but "He TAKETH AWAY the first, that He might ESTABLISH the second" (Heb. 10:9)! Once the work is done, however, He takes the remnant that remains, and causes an increase to come of it, as He says in Jn. 15:2... "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit HE TAKETH AWAY: and every branch that beareth fruit HE PURGETH IT, that it may bring forth MORE fruit". What is true of CHRIST THE CORPORATE TREE, is also true for us as INDIVIDUALS, as well (seeing that we are referred to as individual "trees"; Isa. 61:3). He is concerned with every "branch", or relation in our lives, and is able to discern which areas are unprofitable from those which are refinable! As a result, He causes both the events which results from JUDGMENT (that which He "TAKES AWAY"), and the events which come from CHASTENING OR DISCIPLINE (that which He "PURGES"), to maximize the overall fruit-bearing potential of THE TREE OF LIFE!

This principle became abundantly clear in God's dealings with Israel. We know that in her "day of visitation", her "Valley of Roiling", a door was opened unto Israel; and yet, as a nation, she refused to enter in. She was given the opportunity to be joined unto the Lord, to make Him their strength, to become fruitful; and, alas, she would not. As a result, her house was left unto her desolate; and in A.D. 70, before that generation passed away, "not one stone was left upon another"; judgment came and totally destroyed the city, and scattered the inhabitants abroad. THE "BRANCH" OF WICKEDNESS WAS TAKEN AWAY (Matt. 25: 37-42), THAT A RIGHTEOUS "BRANCH" MIGHT BE GRAFTED IN (Jer.

33:14-15; Rom. 11:13-36)! Despite the purgings, the persecutions, the hardships, and afflictions, there was a remnant of believers who "followed on to KNOW the Lord", who found refuge in "the Shadow of the Almighty". These were reserved unto Him as "a kind of FIRSTFRUITS OF HIS CREATURE"; and hidden, as it were, "for a moment, until the indignation was overpast" (Isa. 26:20)! When brought to a point of decision, they chose to trust the Lord, to keep "the word of His patience". And as a result, HE SPREAD HIS SKIRT OVER THEM; they were kept from "the hour of temptation" (Rev. 3:10)! Therefore, God used the falling away and diminishing of Israel to serve His purpose; for by it, He reconciled the world to Himself (Rom. 11:11-12, 15)! He opened the hope of salvation to all men, by visiting the Gentiles. His intentions were "to take out of them a people FOR HIS NAME" in this present age (Acts 15:14), that He might provoke Israel to jealousy (Rom. 11:11). And in due season, when "the times of the Gentiles" are fulfilled, if they abide not still in unbelief, He shall receive them again!

## SEPARATION ... IN HIS PLAN

Even among His followers, He wielded the bloodstained Sword of separation, WITH GOOD INTENTIONS. He knew that not all who began with Him would go all the way; SOME OF THEM WERE DEAD BRANCHES; and so He divided, that He might multiply! What started out as "great multitudes" were drastically reduced when His sayings got "hard" (Jn. 6:60). HE PURPOSELY CONFOUNDED THEM, THAT THEY MIGHT DEPART FROM THEIR COMPANY! He proved that they were merely following Him for the natural benefits, not for the Words of eternal life. But those who patiently remained, however, were blessed to behold Him turn STONES (His HARD sayings) INTO THE LIVING BREAD! He opened "the eyes" of their understanding, when once He had severed the insincere from their midst! What a miracle!

Next we find Him with His disciples at the Passover feast... there they ALL pledged their allegiance to Him, to stay true to Him "til death would they part"; and yet, in the garden of Gethsemane when the pressure was on and the end seemed eminent, we read that they ALL forsook Him, and were scattered "as sheep without a shepherd". They did not yet have the strength of constitution to remain at His side... because they had not been joined unto Him in Spirit! They were still thinking of saving themselves! Nevertheless, this still fit into His pattern for good; for you see, it was appointed of the Father that He should walk through "the valley of the shadow of death" alone; that He might be able to eternally identify with the sufferings and rejection of His people!

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. Sinais"! 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)! Hallelujah! Now that's what I call FRUITFULNESS!

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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!

Those first-century saints found that this Marriage relationship with Christ was a present-day experience they could count on; and yet, there was a future sense which they could look forward to, as well. It is true that in their generation, those who submitted to His cleansing work, walking through the "troubled waters" of His dealings, experienced an intimacy and closeness with Him... and comprised His Bride for that day. But from the broader perspective of God's plan of the ages, they were but a part of that CORPORATE BRIDE which He would gather together from every nation in the coming generations; a company of believers who had come out of the "Babylon" of their day, and submitted to His Husbandly authority! They were but the founding members of a growing Body, taken from His riven side; united by a common bond, and which would increase through the passing of time!

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! As long as we walk in His will, all of heaven will back us up! 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)!

However, while we have learned that this state of union can be A PRESENT REALITY to us, we have also come to understand that it is likewise A PROCESS. As much as we would like to believe otherwise, there are still a lot of offensive traits of "Adam" hidden in our hearts, ways of his that from time to time we adorn ourselves with. HE MAY LEGALLY BE PRONOUNCED "DEAD", BUT HIS WARDROBE IS STILL HANGING IN OUR CLOSETS! Therefore, our Lord is progressively preparing us, maturing us, and bringing us into a virginal state, as Paul stated to the Corinthians: "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: FOR I HAVE ESPOUSED YOU TO ONE HUSBAND, THAT I MAY PRESENT YOU AS A CHASTE VIRGIN TO CHRIST" (II Cor. 11:2)! More accurately, we are now ESPOUSED to the Lord: We are progressively "putting off the old man and his deeds", and "putting on the New" (Col. 3:9-10)! We are growing up INTO HIM, daily learning of the vast responsibilities of being a comparable companion of Christ! And just as God repeatedly "roiled" the waters of Israel for the purpose of cleansing and sanctification, this still serves as a timely method of dealing with us today. HE HAS US IN HIS "WASHPOT", washing away "the filth of the daughters of Zion"! The difference is, not only does He deal with us EXTERNALLY (through our various trials and tribulations), but INTERNALLY (through the attitudes and feelings that rise within us), as well! This graphically portrays the action God uses to

bring to our attention things that have settled within our hearts (which oftentimes we are not even aware of), things which must be eliminated from our lives, before we are fully prepared as a Bride "adorned for her Husband"! There is an awesome work going on inside of us, a work which only God can do! Israel proved that she could not do her own "laundry" right; for even after her many washings, ordinances, and rituals her garments were still "spotted by the flesh"! She just couldn't remove the stains! We are told in Eph. 5:26-27, however, that CHRIST HIMSELF does the "laundry" at His House! He is sanctifying and cleansing His Bride "with the washing of the water by the Word"! And, thank God, He will not cease with the roilings and the rinsings, until He has completely accomplished His objective! He shall present unto Himself a Church "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish"! Hallelujah!

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Rom. 6:6 says, "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". The Greek verb used in the original text for "is crucified" is in the perfect passive indicative tense, meaning that it shows an action that has been completed IN THE PAST, with ongoing results IN THE FUTURE. In other words, the initial act of Adam's crucifixion has already taken place; but the full effects are still being wrought today! It is a "time-released" procedure, specifically designed to gradually remove every vestige of his existence from every segment of the Bride-to-be, until finally it can be said of her that she is A VIRGIN!

The reason God has worked it this way is because the Bride is not just PAST TENSE, but PRESENT; and not just PRESENT TENSE, but FUTURE! She is still in formation,

coming out of the harlotrous habits of "Babylon"! Therefore, His cleansing action is "the same YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND FOREVER" (Heb. 13:8); designed to bring total sanctification and deliverance to every part of the Body, in every generation! We are in the midst of a great dispensational process, where Christ HAS CRUCIFIED the old man, HAS BURIED him, and IS NOW purging away even his lingering MEMORY from our thoughts! He knows that as long as we can reminisce about "the good old days" with our "former husband", and ponder the path of the harlot's way (Prov. 2:17-18; 7:25-27), there is a chance we will return to the "sepulchre"! BUT CHRIST WILL NOT COMPETE FOR OUR AFFECTIONS WITH A DEAD MAN! Therefore, He is slowly but surely RENEWING OUR MINDS by His indwelling Presence, cleaning out "the dead man's bones" from within, until "the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (Isa. 65:17)! And beloved, we can be assured that the hour is fast approaching when the work shall be completed, the final separation shall be finished, and a virginal Bride in full splendor shall be unveiled for all the world to behold!

A  
VIEW  
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TOP

If you are familiar with New Testament history, you are aware of the fact that the early church was formed in the midst of intense persecution. Pressured from all sides, it seemed as if this "new sect" in Jerusalem was destined for failure. To begin with, the hostility of the Jews toward them from within the city was so violent that they were scattered abroad. And as tribulation increased, Rome became her adversary from without. Because they would not acknowledge Caesar as "lord", many were hunted down, tortured, beaten, and killed in a wide assortment of demonically inspired ways. Some were put to death on crosses, others were stoned. Some were killed as sick forms of entertainment, slowly and painfully executed for the pleasure of their sadistic captors. John Foxe has written a book entitled, "Foxe's Book of Martyrs", which describe the horrid accounts of that first-century massacre. But contrary to the intentions of their persecutors, the church continued to grow despite this extreme opposition!

Among the persecuted was John, the beloved disciple of Christ. After an unsuccessful attempt to "deep-fry" him alive in a cauldron of boiling oil, the Emperor Domitian banished him to hard labor in the mines of Patmos. It was from here that he penned his famous letter to the seven churches in Asia, which we refer to as the Book of Revelation.

John was given a unique look into the Church age; he was privileged to behold the divine processings of God in the lives of His people, both for his generation, and for future generations to come. It covered the formation of the Bride from her CONCEPTION to her PERFECTION! His vision enabled him to see from the morning of the "Espousal" beginning at Pentecost, all the way to the actual "Marriage of the Lamb" at the end of the age... ON THE MORNING OF THE THIRD MILLENNIAL DAY!

He begins his letter by first identifying the supreme Subject of his writing --- "THE REVELATION...", not of John, nor of his troubles, but ". . OF JESUS CHRIST" (verse 1). His focus was on the Answer; not on the problem!

As the salutation continues, he writes: "I, John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle which is called Patmos, for the Word of the Lord, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I WAS IN THE SPIRIT ON THE LORD'S DAY..." (1:9-10a). Here was John, in his personal "Valley of Achor"; in "great tribulation", being roiled and troubled for his witness for Christ. From the natural, there seemed to be no hope for him; his circumstances had hedged him about. As a "companion IN tribulation", he could identify with all who suffer and are afflicted. And yet, he was not discouraged; HE WAS "IN THE SPIRIT"! While in this state, he received a visitation from "One like unto the Son of Man", whose voice was "as of a TRUMPET"... with a message to each of the seven churches. We do not have the space here to elaborate upon these messages, except to say that they were given as a trumpet call, gathering A COMPANY OF OVERCOMERS out of every assembly, from every age. Continuing, we read: "After this I looked, and behold, A DOOR WAS OPENED IN HEAVEN..."; and a voice spake, saying, "COME UP HITHER, AND IWILL SHEW THEE THINGS WHICH MUST BE HEREAFTER. AND IMMEDIATELY I

WAS IN THE SPIRIT..." (4:1-2)! Praise God! His "Vale of Trouble" had conditioned and prepared him to see into a great "mystery"; it provided this rare opportunity to look beyond the veil... and it opened "A DOOR OF HOPE" before his wondering eyes INTO THE SPIRIT REALM! What was this mysterious DOOR, this glorious GATEWAY OF HOPE set before him? Why, it was the same revelation that Paul spake of in his letter to Colosse from a Roman prison, which he referred to as "the MYSTERY which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints... which is CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY: whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom;

THAT WE MAY PRESENT EVERY MAN PERFECT IN CHRIST" (Col. 1:26-28)!

How vital this is to our understanding of this all-important message John delivered; and how relevant this makes it for all believers! For while men are constantly trying to interpret this book of shadows and symbolism by it's OUTWARD APPEARANCE, ever attempting to strictly apply it's heavenly images and figurative language to some natural, literal, earthly occurrence or event, trying to force the details into the time-period of their choosing (either past or future), the Lord's perspective is OF THE HEART! IT IS THE REVELATION OF CHRIST IN THE SPIRIT, OF THE SPIRIT! It is of Christ' activities behind the veil, cleansing His Temple of all it's defilements and impurities! And while there may be times when certain world events seem to be described, it must be understood that first of all, it is a book of relevance written to the church; A BOOK OF PRINCIPLES, applicable to God's dealings and disciplines to every generation of saints! It is both DEPICTING and PREDICTING in nature, spanning the entire spectrum of time: PAST, PRESENT, and FUTURE. As long as time exists, it will neither be out of

date or before it's time. And it will be applicable until the Bride is perfected, "The Mystery" is finished, and TIME IS NO MORE (Rev. 10:6)!

John's view from the top permitted him to see within the temple, into the very heart of the matter; and that "One sat on the throne" (4:1). This One was the same who had walked "IN THE MIDST of the seven golden candlesticks". It was CHRIST, taking a reigning position in His Body, the Church! What a glorious sight this must have been; and how utterly indescribable this was for him! In John's limited, human vocabulary, he compared what he saw as best he could to those things which were most familiar to him on earth; and yet, their comparisons could do no justice to the realities of the Spirit. You would just have to be there to understand! As Jesus said, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things" (Jn. 3:12)! Simply stated, IT REQUIRES A REVELATION TO PERCEIVE REALITY!

I am persuaded that there are many in this hour who have been isolated to their own personal "isle of Patmos", "Valley of Achor", etc., who are experiencing "great tribulation", both within and without. They have sensed the moving of the High Priest within His temple, and are experiencing the most intensely personal dealings of their life. He is roiling the waters, disturbing every depth, revealing the hidden condition of the heart. And yet amidst the turbulence, there is a profound sense of calm, impossible to describe to others. It is an inward knowledge that HE IS IN CONTROL. He knows our limitations, and will not exceed them. Though at times it seems as if His "waves and billows" are gone over us, we know that "the Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song will be with us" (Psa. 42:7-8)! Yea, "the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea" (Psa. 93:4)! He will not suffer us to be moved!

More than just security, there is an intimacy... a certain sense of closeness, that everything that is happening is FOR OUR PERFECTING. He loves us passionately, and knows exactly what it will take to bring us to the altar of total surrender; where we are willing to lay down our lives, our independent individuality, and take on His Name without any reservations! He cannot be joined to an immature Bride, nor will He be joined to a harlot. Therefore be assured, dear reader, HE IS LOVINGLY DRAWING US TO HIMSELF!

to be continued...