

PREPARATIONS OF THE BRIDE

PART 4

"THE VALLEY OF ACHOR - PLACE OF RENEWAL"

As we continue in the fourth part of this series from the book of Hosea, we will resume our observation where we left off in verses 14 and 15 of chapter 2:

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to her. And I will give her her vineyards from hence, 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".

The New English Version has it: "I will woo her, I will go with her into the wilderness and comfort her: there I will restore her vineyards, TURNING THE VALE OF TROUBLE INTO THE GATE OF HOPE". What a wonderful word of promise we have found this to be! Though we may be in "the vale of trouble", passing through "the valley of the shadow of DEATH"... whether it be for purpose of chastisement and correction, or merely as a trial of our faith (to "purge", or prune back our "dead branches" of unbelief.. .not necessarily as a punishment), we are not without hope! He is there, wooing us, drawing us unto Himself, bidding us to "enter into the secret chambers", and shut the doors about us! He has provided A HIDING PLACE for the moment, a refuge for the spirit man, "until the indignation be overpast" (Isa. 26:20)! When He has thoroughly performed His whole work of chastening and discipline within our lives, and "hell and death" have served His purpose (in judging or subduing the beastly nature of man), He is able to turn our "death valleys" into Living experiences, transforming our hopelessly impenetrable "gates of hell" into glorious GATES OF HOPE, by the power of His resurrection! We must remember that HE POSSESSES THE KEYS OF HELL AND OF DEATH; and He is able to open the door at will! Those everlasting gates" swing wide at His command! Praise God!

In our last segment ("The Valley of Achor... Place of Roiling"), our focus was upon the marriage relationship between Jehovah and Old Testament Israel... and the process which He used to prepare her for it. Our main emphasis was upon the word "ACHOR", which in it's original Hebrew form means, "TROUBLE", or "TO ROIL WATER". It speaks of the deliberate act of turbulence, of agitation, of stirring up the silt, sludge, or dregs which have settled on the bottom, for the purpose of sifting it out. And as it fits into our setting, it is an act aimed toward PURIFICATION. In light of this, we were able to see how God dealt with Israel, repeatedly "roiling her waters", so to speak; bringing her into conflicts and afflictions (both within and without), restrictions and limitations, clashes and contentions, while each time bringing her face to face with her real self. In Prov. 27:19 we read, "As in water face answereth to face; so the heart of man to man". So it was with Israel; as she responded positively to each roiling, willingly passing through God's

"filter", her "wash water" was becoming clearer with every encounter. Only when she refused to submit to His cleansing process was she given over to blackness and darkness, tumultuously tossed to and fro like "raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame" (Jude 13). They found out the hard way that there was no rest in their rebellion! Their obscure and filthy condition only grew worse!

HOPE FOR THE HARLOT

Last month we climaxed our chronology of Israel's roilings with the calling out of Babylon, and the restoration of the temple in Ezra and Nehemiah's days. This in itself serves as a beautiful pattern for us to examine, concerning the waywardness, captivity, and redemption of Jehovah's wife.

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 to transpire in her life than what external chastisement, captivity, and confinement alone had produced; for Jeremiah went on to say that Israel had become a "wild ass" who was USED TO THE WILDERNESS (verse 24)! She had become a VETERAN to the wilderness; and as a result, she was uncontrollable, hardened to reproof! She had received a beastly "MARK" of iniquity, the likes of which could not be washed away with "nitre and 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 OF

HOPE" for them... and Ezekiel caught a promising perspective into the heavenlies like never 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)! Hallelujah! He promised them that there would come in the latter days a "rinsing", a "baptism", a sprinkling of CLEAN WATER UPON AS MANY AS WOULD RECEIVE HIM, the likes of which they had never been washed with before! This would not be an external washing, ordinance, or ritual, such as those which were so mechanically performed by the priesthood; but an internal work which would literally transform them into NEW CREATURES! He would wash away their filth and whoredoms like "fuller's soap" (Mal. 3:2), totally restoring them to A TRUE VIRGINAL STATE, BY THE "WASHING OF REGENERATION, and THE RENEWING OF THE HOLY GHOST" (Titus 3:5)! Praise God for His wondrous provisions!

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!

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 true that 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 by the 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 clear that 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 to remarry 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 spake 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 clarion 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, were in need of

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"!

True to form, 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 the~ 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 swear 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! Hallelujah! What an 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 thou sands 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 spake 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 were 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 astonished 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! Hallelujah! 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)! Hallelujah! 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! Praise God!

We realize that many who read these lines are presently passing through their own hellish "Valley of Achor"; quite possibly the most intense, agitating, and trying time of their entire walk with God. Beloved, if God can take such a seemingly impossible situation as the one we have just considered, and cause it to serve His purpose by opening a DOOR OF HOPE for the redemption of all mankind, can He not master yours? We would say along with our brother Paul, "And to you who are troubled REST WITH US..." (II Thess. 1:7)!

to be continued..