

# **PREPARATIONS OF THE BRIDE**

## **PART 3**

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

HOSEA 2:14-15... "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 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".

As we neared the end of our last message ("The Valley of Achor for a Door of Hope"), it became apparent to us that we would have to extend it in order to bring out the many unique facets and the rare beauty of the principles found therein. We would not have done the message justice, nor would we have been satisfied in our spirits, had we left off where we were. (There is really no stopping point with any of God's Word.. it is as infinite as God Himself)! Therefore, we pray you will bear with us, as we delve once again into this gem-laden mine of revelational truths, the second chapter of Hosea.

Hosea is a book of great importance and relevance to God's people today. In it, we discover not only how He dealt with ancient Israel, but how He deals with those of us in this hour, as well. As most of us can attest to by now, JUDGMENT HAS ALREADY BEGUN AT THE HOUSE OF GOD; and no one is exempt! As we mature in our understanding of God and His ways, however, we no longer draw back from His judgments, nor are we threatened by His fiery dealings, but rather, come to actually WELCOME them into our lives! For when the purging, pruning, and processing is over with, we are able to clearly see that it has all been done IN MERCY, with our best interest in mind. We are beginning to understand that judgment is not always the negative thing we have supposed it to be; judgment can go in our favor, as well! Though it may be a "death sentence" to the flesh, it is a "Life sentence" to the spirit (as a "prisoner of the Lord")! In this manner, God's "Judgment Seat" becomes His "Mercy Seat" to us! The great thing about it is, once we have been judged and disciplined by God's heavenly "judicial system", we can then proceed in His divine purpose for our lives bettered from the whole experience, able to bear "more fruit", and prepared to minister in the spirit of mercy and forgiveness to those around us! Therefore, JUDGMENT HASTENS RIGHTEOUSNESS!

Briefly reviewing our study for your consideration, Chapter one shows us the true definition of God's sovereignty, in that while His people often make foolish decisions (resulting in sometimes painful consequences, which God takes no responsibility for); once repentance is made, He can then take those same shortcomings and incorporate them into His predestinated plan. He is able to use our failures to His advantage, and cause them to serve in the course of our ultimate completion! Chapter two reveals that when God's people seek pleasure in anything other than His Presence, He gives them

over to their own heart's lusts... and allows them to experience what life is like in the wilderness! After they have had a chance to see themselves as they really are without Him, He comes on the scene once again to deliver them from THEMSELVES! He "proposes" to them, offering to join them to Himself; and in doing so, makes a "covenant" with the "beastly" forces that rise up out of the "earth" of their human nature! By this, He brings PEACE TO THE VALLEY! He alone is able to settle the inner conflicts that rage within the bosoms of His wayward sons, simply BY WELCOMING THEM BACK HOME! Hallelujah!

#### THE VALLEY OF ACHOR --- REVISITED

We came across an unusual reference in verse 15 of "the Valley of Achor". And we have shared previously that it is here in this valley that Achan, "the troublemaker of Israel", is dealt with. He, and all within his "house" are to be stoned, and burned with fire... a fitting end for such a covetous character as he! As we go deeper in our study, however, it is interesting to notice the full meaning of the word "Achor". It's assigned number in the Hebrew Dictionary from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance is 5911, which defines it as "TROUBLED". It is taken from # 5916, a primary root word meaning, "TO ROIL WATER; TO DISTURB OR AFFLICT; -- TROUBLE OR STIR". When we see the implications here, an insightful perspective will begin to emerge. What does it mean to "roil" water? It means to muddle it, to stir it up, to "cloud" it by agitating the dregs and dirt that are settled on the bottom. By way of illustration, you have seen where a herd of cattle have drunk from seemingly clear and still waters... and left behind them a trail of muddied and troubled waters! This graphically describes what it means to roil water; it means to foul it, to disturb it; to churn up the muck and mire, the sludge and sediment, to the top! It means TO CLOUD THE WATERS WITH ONE'S FEET!

We can see that this is exactly what took place in the Valley of Achor. Under the new leadership of Joshua, all was going well for these "new generation" Israelites; they were confident in themselves, victories were being won, and their way was prospering abundantly, UNTIL SUDDENLY, GOD ROILED THE WATERS! He fouled them, He muddled them, He "clouded" them so that their way was obscured. He stirred up the dirt and the dregs from the bottom, so that they were confronted with their true condition! Where they would have normally had no trouble conquering, God caused them to be overtaken by the men of Ai (whose name means, "iniquity")! He forced them to stop and take account of themselves, to truly examine themselves, and to acknowledge the corruption in their camp... things they had no idea were there! It was apparently all in His mercy, however, for when they sought Him with their whole hearts, He instructed them how to remove the "accursed thing" from their midst, put it in their past, and to move forward in victory once again! Praise God!

We want to stress the fact IT WAS GOD'S MERCY that stopped them in their tracks, and gave them the opportunity to change their course before it was too late. THE WORST JUDGMENT THEY COULD HAVE POSSIBLY RECEIVED WOULD HAVE BEEN FOR GOD TO HAVE ALLOWED THEM TO CONTINUE PROSPERING IN THEIR WAYS, SEEMING TO WALK IN VICTORY, BOASTING IN THEIR

SPIRITUALITY, YET UNAWARE THAT THEY WERE ACTUALLY WALKING IN DISOBEDIENCE (this is what it means to be given over to a REPROBATE MIND; to believe a lie, and be damned as a result)! In light of this, WE THANK GOD FOR HIS CORRECTIVE JUDGMENTS; for in them, there is HOPE!

On that fateful day, the Valley of Achor actually became a valley of decision for them. They were faced with a choice; either to accept God's proposal, and let Him deal with their dilemma then and there, once and for all --- or to reject His offer, and stubbornly attempt to conquer the land in their own strength. Either way meant SEPARATION; separation from God, or separation from Achan! Regardless, God was bringing this ungodly mixture between "the holy and the profane" to an end! The consequences were serious, but the decision was their's... WHAT WOULD THEY DO? You know the rest of the story!

Beloved, this is the same place where God has repeatedly brought His people from time immemorial. We have discussed how God from the beginning provided a heavenly environment for Adam and Eve to walk in, with the prospect of ascending into a higher dimension of life and glory through submission and obedience to Him (symbolically referred to as "partaking of the tree of life"). At this point, they were merely "espoused" to the Lord; they were walking out their appointed time of preparation prior to their full merging with Him. They had a promise of fully being "joined" to Him, of being wholly united to Him as ONE, but the time was not yet. In order for this opportunity to open up, God had to "roil the waters", so to speak, and allow OPPOSITION, TEMPTATION, and TROUBLE to enter into their lives for a season... so that they could see the natural inclinations of their hearts, realize that they of their own selves could never acquire this complete state of God-likeness, and look to Him, and Him alone, to bring them into it. Had they done this, their "Valley of Roiling" would have immediately opened to them "a Door of Hope" (that is, an entrance into the "marriage chamber"); but instead, THE DOOR WAS CLOSED! This was an obvious declaration from God Himself, a manifest token that "SIN LIETH AT THE DOOR", blocking their entrance! They were given this choice AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCEMENT, to be united with Him eternally "behind the veil" in a perpetual state of life and immortality; but because of the decision they made, they were "divorced" from God's Presence, driven out of the midst of the garden, and demoted to a state of lonely, endless solitude!

### 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.

It is easy to see from this, that Adam and Eve were in that intermediate stage, not yet fully matured and prepared for the kind of binding relationship the Lord had in mind for them; not yet sealed into that "married" covenant; nevertheless progressing toward that ultimate goal. They had the promise---but not the full possession! The process had been initiated---but not quite consummated! This was what was reserved for them... IF they were overcomers of all things! Therefore, this confrontation with the seductive powers of darkness was necessary; for by it, God was actually proving them, trying their hearts, and providing an opportunity for them to become His full-fledged Bride!

Oh, if only we could understand the Heart of God... how He longs for a comparable companion to fellowship with! One who He can be intimate with--- and share the fulness of His Presence! This has been His chief desire, His greatest interest, the highest aspiration above every other Kingdom issue! You see, the reason this is so dear to His Heart is because that through the intimacy of this BRIDAL relationship He will receive a SON! His desire is to multiply, and fill the earth with His Own Kind!

#### AN ALTAR IN THE WILDERNESS

We find the account of God's choosing the house of Israel to be His Bride in the book of Exodus. This He did, not because of any particular beauty they possessed, but because of the covenantal promises made to their father, Abraham. You recall how that "by mighty hand, and outstretched arm" He brought them out of Egypt, "the house of bondage". Though God had used Pharaoh for a season to bring discipline to Israel, the time came when He was finished with him. Because of the severe suffering they had endured at the hand of Pharaoh, their cries reached heaven for deliverance. Plague after plague God brought upon the land, until finally Pharaoh reluctantly consented to their release. Things seemed to be going pretty good for them as they made their departure, until suddenly, they realized that Pharaoh had changed his mind! Now God had gotten them in a real mess; before them lay the Red Sea, impassible in the natural, and behind them their adversaries were fast approaching! They were caught in between! What a troubling and distressing situation this was.. GOD WAS ROILING THE WATERS! What would they do... would they turn and seek to save their own lives, or would they stand still, and simply trust God in their calamity? Again they were brought into a valley of decision. But thank God they made the right one! What an awesome and fearful sight it must have been for those Israelites, to see those calm waters part before them, and provide a way of escape! Because they chose to trust Him, the fiery cloud of God settled right behind the Israelites, separating them from the Egyptians; giving light for them to walk by, but leaving their adversaries in gross darkness! And once they had safely passed through,

GOD ROILED THE WATERS once again by entrapping their enemies in the midst! Talk about a great strategy... this was it! What seemed to be CERTAIN DEATH AND DESTRUCTION for them turned out to be in reality their means of SALVATION!

(Certainly we all can recall times in our lives when it seemed that all was going well, we were joyously walking in the enthusiasm of a recent victory, God having brought us out of some form of captivity, when suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, a catastrophic situation arose! It may have come in the form of a natural, physical, or financial problem; or maybe in the form of some other recurring enemy of the flesh; quite possibly even an individual or individuals, seeking to bring us harm. Just as suddenly, we were faced with a choice: either to trust the Lord entirely, or attempt to deliver ourselves. Sometimes the hardest thing in the world to do is simply to HOLD OUR PEACE, AND LET THE LORD FIGHT OUR BATTLES (especially when we think we can win)! But this is exactly why the Lord repeatedly roils the waters of our lives! When we learn to put our trust in Him, He not only opens an exit for us out of our present dilemma, and an entrance into a new and living way, but He also sets a trap for our adversaries! And believe it or not, He uses US as the bait! Hallelujah!)

In their time of trouble, God opened a "door of hope" to them, 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 did not take them long, however, to realize the place they had entered into was not so wonderful. In fact, it was a WILDERNESS! Imagine the scene, if you will... an entire NATION of men, women, and children, loaded down like ONE GIANT MOVING VAN, traveling through a hot, dry, barren desert wasteland! There was no way they could provide for themselves, no way to accommodate for their tremendous needs! They were brought into a place of absolute helplessness... and, boy, did it ever bring 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! Wasn't God getting a little carried away with all this?

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" (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 thunderings, 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".

(How utterly expressive this is of the natural man and the spiritual. By nature, whenever God visits us in "thick clouds and darkness", the flesh draws back... while the spirit 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 "he which is spiritual" obediently follows the bidding of the Lord, no matter how threatening the atmosphere may seem! He 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!

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)! There is truth to the fact that to be in "the presence of the Lamb, and His holy angels" oftentimes appears to be HELL to the NATURAL MAN, but HEAVEN to the SPIRITUAL MAN; for God knows how to bring about a SEGREGATION between the two, so that His glory might be unveiled to the one who earnestly longs for it!

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 newly-wed 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 (as a "marriage counselor"), when he finally descended from that holy meetingplace, 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! Israel's actions proclaimed that she was a so-called "liberated" woman... A CORPORATE FEMINIST (and you probably thought the E.R.A. was a modern movement)! 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 after 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-tribed 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. So 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, neither "the voice of the ~, nor of the Bride" would be heard in idolatrous Babylon. THIS WAS THE LAST CALL! Every ~ in Israel's past had brought them to this climatic point. And now they stood in the valley of decision once again. The choice was their's to make, and their's alone... what would they do?

As we said, this roiling was initially done in a very positive way... and yet it revealed the depths of their hearts! To read the list of individuals who decided to "follow on to know the Lord" recorded in Ezra 2, it would seem that the vast majority left Babylon behind, with all of it's confusing mixtures and prostititional practices. But the truth is, less than fifty thousand actually did... which constituted a mere fraction of the people! These were privileged to start from the foundation up, totally healed and forgiven of their former infidelity, having "old things past away, and all things become new" Though they had

much to endure for their brave decision (for it was certainly not without risk), and much trouble to contend with ere the temple was completed (seeing that the roiling become more turbulent as they progressing in the building), these were privileged to behold a "New Jerusalem", filled with the same glory their fathers had witnessed in days gone by! By this, God placed His "seal of approval" upon their efforts! Hallelujah!

### ROILED... IN GOD'S WASHPOT

We read in I Cor. 10:11, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world (age) are come". There is much learning we can gain from their experiences, with many parallel points to consider (which we shall, in greater detail. This message will provide a foundation for next month). And while this was certainly not the end of Israel's dealings, this portion serves as a mini-illustration for us to examine.

It is important that we understand the drawing and development of Israel up to this point in history to be A SERIES OF ROILINGS. Hers was not a single decision to become joined to the Lord (as maybe she thought), but the result of MANY DECISIONS. As God persistently roiled Israel, it was as if He repeatedly plunged her into His "washtub" (graciously providing a fresh "tub" of HOT WATER every time)! He continually gave her opportunities to separate herself more and more from the filth of the flesh, and to purify her heart by faith. (This brings back memories of "washday" on the farm. My older brother and I had to tote what seemed to be endless buckets of water to the old "wringer-washer" Mom had. We hated it! By the time we repeated this process through every cycle, we felt like WE had been through the wringer)! As long as Israel responded positively to the "agitator", He would cause all the negative, undesirable influences and attitudes to surface in her life, followed by a "rinse cycle". Over and over this process would be repeated, until finally THE WATER WOULD BE CLEAR! In this manner, God was CLEANSING HER FROM THE "FILTHY RAGS" OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS, firmly establishing the truth that SHE OF HER OWN SELF COULD DO NOTHING! It was when she ceased to give herself to Him that she was left wearing "garments.. spotted by the flesh". No matter how she tried, she was absolutely incapable of changing her dirty appearance (Israel never did do her "laundry" well; they were always soiled with SPOTS, WRINKLES, AND BLEMISHES)!

What a wonderful work of God this is! No matter how deep the stains of sin have set in; His Blood is able to cleanse us "white as snow"! It is a known fact that in the natural, if a woman loses her virginity, it is impossible for her to ever regain it again. But what is impossible with men is possible with God! Even after "the land" is greatly polluted, and we have gone "a whoring" after others "gods", our blessed Lord says, "If My people, which are called by My Name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My Face, and turn from their wicked ways; THEN WILL I HEAR from heaven, and FORGIVE their sin, and WILL HEAL THEIR LAND" (II Chron. 7:14)! He can and will restore us to A VIRGINAL STATE, if only we will turn to Him! Praise God for that!

We have come to understand that "the Lord HAS HIS WAY in the whirlwind and the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His Feet" (Nahum 1:3)! This should not distress us; for when storms and whirlwinds blow through our lives, and it seems that we are come to the end of ourselves, we have an assurance that GOD IS HAVING HIS WAY... He is "working ALL THINGS after the counsel of His Own Will"! HE IS STILL IN CONTROL, governing the course of our lives, purposely leading us directly into "the eye of the storm". We are told that in the center of a hurricane, all is peaceful and still; and so it is in the spiritual. For there is a heavenly place of rest to be found in the midst of great tribulation, scripturally referred to as "the SECRET PLACE OF THE MOST HIGH".. .a place where others outside the cloud simply do not understand! The dark clouds are merely "the dust of His Feet", giving evidence that GOD IS MOVING TOWARD US, IN US, AND FOR US! Hallelujah! Rejoice, O ye His saints! Our God is marching on!

to be continued...