

# PREPARATIONS OF THE BRIDE

## PART 2

### "THE VALLEY OF ACHOR - FOR A DOOR OF HOPE"

**In our last message ("All Things fit into the Pattern") we drew our subject matter from chapter 1 of the Book of Hosea. In it, we discovered how God chose a special place to bring correction and discipline to the adulterous house of Israel... the Valley of Jezreel. Here it is that He deals with the "house of Ahab", that is, the works of the flesh, in some rather severe ways (oftentimes through the destructive "ministry of Jehu"). We also found that even after times of obvious transgressions, when God's people turn to Him, He is able to incorporate their mistakes into His predestinated purpose and plan for their lives, and use them together with His perfections to bring them to ultimate completion. He sends forth "judgment unto victory", taking our seemingly irreversible failures, and causes them to serve His interests! It is a monument to His Greatness, the definition of true sovereignty! HE UNQUESTIONABLY RESIDES ON THE THRONE! The chapter comes to a close by saying, "Then shall come up out of the land: FOR GREAT SHALL BE THE DAY OF JEZREEL" (verse 11)!**

As we have previously stated, the book of Hosea speaks in the first place of the historical captivity and dispersing occurred barely 25 years after this word came forth), and the restoration and regathering together with the house of Judah prophetically promised to follow. But it is likewise true that there is a spiritual application to this promise, as well. THERE IS A SPECIAL AFFINITY, A SENSE OF ONENESS, OR "GATHERING TOGETHER", OF THOSE WHO HAVE SUFFERED SIMILARLY IN THE PLACE OF CHASTENING AND HARDSHIPS! It is here that they have learned to "appoint themselves ONE HEAD", "looking unto Jesus" as their Leader, that they might "come UP out of the land"! This is their common bond, their mutual understanding, that keeps them UP out of the "valley" of discouragement, depression, and despair; and this is what unites them with "Judah" (PRAISE)! If you have been to the "Valley of Jezreel", you will know the truth of this! God makes us ONE through TRIBULATION! He welds our hearts together in the fires of persecution and affliction!

Now this leads us into the next great principle unveiled in this prophecy. Our text is found this time in Hosea, chapter 2. It should be noted that this is but a continuation, an overlapping, of chapter 1 (remember, the interruption of chapter and verse was placed there by the translators, for the convenience of the reader.. it is not a part of the original). Here again, the Lord uses the allegory of an adulterous woman to describe the unfaithfulness of Israel.

Listen to His words...

"Plead with your mother, plead: for she is NOT My wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; LEST I STRIP HER NAKED, AND SET HER AS THE DAY THAT SHE WAS BORN, AND MAKE HER AS A WILDERNESS, AND SET HER AS A DRY LAND, AND SLAY HER WITH THIRST" (verses 2-3)!

This is quite a warning, isn't it? Not only did the Lord say that unless Israel repented, and put away her idolatrous ways (or, in the words of Berkeley's translation, "to clear her face of her marks of harlotry and remove her adulterous charms from between her breasts"), He would strip away her covering (her God-given protection), and all she had ever acquired from Him from the day of her conception; but also that HE WOULD MAKE HER AS A WILDERNESS...AND SET HER AS A DRY LAND! In verses 6-7 He says, "Therefore, behold, I WILL HEDGE UP THY WAY WITH THORNS, and MAKE A WALL, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them". In other words, she would suffer isolation, desolation, and discontentment because of her ways! He was saying that He would BESIEGE HER AS A CITY, cutting off not only the in-roads (where provisions were brought in through), but the outlets (where the garbage and refuse was carried out and disposed of), as well. He would take away the sustaining inflow of harvest blessings; the corn, wine, and oil... leaving her empty, void, and destitute of life. Her way would be "hedged up" by a wall of thorns... so that she would find no way out. And because of this "besieged" condition, she would quickly become A WILDERNESS.. A DRY AND BARREN LAND! She would waste away in her own filth and internal defilements! "Now will I show her in her shame to her lovers, and none shall come to take her again" (verse 10 from Berkeley's translation). He would see to it that if she would not willfully remove the whorish marks from her face, she would become so unattractive, no one else would want her!

"I will also cause her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. AND I WILL DESTROY HER VINES AND HER FIG TREES, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me: AND I WILL MAKE THEM A FOREST, AND THE BEASTS OF THE FIELD SHALL EAT THEM. And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot Me, saith the Lord" (verses 11-13). The Lord was saying that He would remove every reason for her to rejoice, by turning her once- fruitful vineyard into A FOREST... and releasing THE BEASTS OF THE FIELD to devour it! As a result, there would be no festivities, seeing that the Hebrew celebrations were directly related to the harvest! If there were no vineyards and fig trees, no corn, wine, or oil, there could be no harvests; and if there were no harvests, there could be no joy and gladness in the city! What a hopeless condition!

### THE MARKS OF HARLOTRY

In the natural, the spirit of harlotry was generally evidenced in a woman's countenance, and in her attire. It was easy to spot a prostitute by her appearance; by the way she excessively painted her face, and the way she seductively dressed herself, the message

she sought to convey was unmistakable. This is why the Lord admonished Israel to "clear her face of her marks of harlotry". He knew that as long as she adorned the countenance of an available woman, seeking to enhance her features in order to attract the attention of others than her Husband, she would not be true to Him. No matter what she told Him, or how she tried to convince Him that she was doing it all for Him, the intents of her heart were obvious; the IMAGE SHE PROJECTED told the story! It was a manifest token that she was NOT committed to a monogamous relationship; and she was NOT ready to settle down and become ONE with Him. The underlying truth was that she sought INDEPENDENCE from her Husband!

It is this whorish and unfaithful spirit of INDEPENDENCE that God hates. Looking back to Genesis, we see that original sin resulted from man's embracing this spirit, and rejecting God's covering Headship over him. Adam was not content to totally submit himself to divine decree. He desired to make judgments independently from God, deciding for himself what was good, and what was evil. With this rebellious mindset, he conceived the seed thoughts planted by "the wicked one", and brought forth sin (which ultimately ended in death)! It was for this cause that Adam was found naked, and driven (Heb. rt. "divorced") out of the midst of the garden (receiving, as it were, a "name" written in his forehead, "MYSTERY BABYLON")! It was because of this, that the earth lost its pristine glory, and, as a cursed wilderness, produced thorns, briars, and thistles!

Not only was Adam's outside environment effected, but inwardly his spirit became a "dry and barren land", as well. Gone was the refreshing breeze of God's Spirit and Presence, which controlled the internal "climate" of man's emotions, and brought forth the fruitful bounty of blessed provision; now it was replaced with the scorching heat of howling desert winds by day, the drastic extremes of bitter cold by night, and the biting blight of drought. Though his mind was wholly set on pursuing his "lovers" (the interests of his flesh), he found he could never quite find satisfaction; every oasis he pursued merely turned out to be a "mirage"...nothing more than a figment of his empty dreams and vain imaginations! His thirst was never quenched! He discovered that God had MADE A WALL around him, and his way was "hedged" about with THORNS; he received painful opposition every direction he turned! Because of this, Adam continually turned within himself, becoming more and more self-conscious (and all the while thinking less and less of God). Even though his posterity was rapidly increasing in the earth, he (as well as they) grew lonelier day by day. Their lives were isolated, restricted to wandering aimlessly in the "sands" of carnality ("DEATH VALLEY", if you will), seeking relief from this internal inferno; and never finding the way out.

### DESERT DEALINGS

We are grateful for the fact that some two thousand years ago, our Lord began a project to literally transform the desert wastelands of the hearts of men into blossoming rose gardens (Isa. 35:1)! This plan was initiated by the outpouring of His Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, when He came as "a rushing mighty WIND"; filling those who had come

together "in ONE KIND, and ONE ACCORD" (needless to say, He created a "DESERT STORM")! As they became absolutely submissive to His will, they experienced A UNION WITH HIM like they never had before; His Presence within them restored the refreshment previously lost, and began a redemption process from the curse of the law! God provided a true "oasis" in the wilderness!

Those of us who have been filled with His Spirit can likewise attest to the fact that our union with Him came as a result of our submission to Him. This was the only condition He would join Himself to us! He would not force Himself upon us; we had to come into agreement with God. And what a glorious day it was, when finally we said "YES" to Him! It was then that His Presence swept across OUR LAND, renewing us by the power of His Spirit, and restoring our spirits to that fruitful state which He originally intended them to be.

However, through the process of time we discovered that although God was working in us mightily, bringing us into a conformity to His will, and progressively subduing every thought unto obedience to Him, we still have occasional tendencies to want things OUR WAY. It's a sad but true indictment that the spirit of selfishness and insubordination can still raise its ugly head, even after our initial conversion experience! We rejoice when we successfully crucify these inclinations (with their diverse expressions), and "walk in the Spirit"; but sometimes, rather than deal with them, we actually justify them... thereby "fulfilling the lust of the flesh"! Isn't this the truth? As we stubbornly seek independence from God (consciously or otherwise), the image we project reveals the condition of our hearts. God calls it bearing "the MARKS OF HARLOTRY"! He is longsuffering with us, pleading with us to remove from our faces this image of INDIVIDUALITY, this attitude of UNACCOUNTABILITY. But after we have repeatedly refused to receive correction from His VOICE (regardless of however He chooses to speak), He then disciplines us with His HAND. Little by little, we find ourselves "divorced" from God's

presence, separated from walking with Him, and driven out into a "waste howling wilderness" once again! We are stripped naked of our heavenly covering, as God actually "MAKES" US AN INTERNAL WILDERNESS, and "SETS" US AS A DRY LAND! Our spirits become "BESIEGED" by God, cut off from the mutual exchange with the Spirit, and having no association with the heavenlies! The heavens become as brass to us; and we discover our way to be HEDGED UP WITH THORNS, an impenetrable WALL OF OPPRESSION, virtually a "line-up" of buffeting "messengers of satan" (II Cor. 12:7-9) sent to trouble our flesh, who leave us irritated, confused, and bewildered!

It gets worse. The longer we go without the protective covering of God, the more we become prey for "the beasts of the field, the fowls of heaven, and the creeping things of the ground"! What do these signify? Why, the "beastly" forces bound up in the Adamic nature (deemed "psychological quirks" by the so-called "professionals"), which are released to literally consume our fruitful place! They represent the foul spirits of Babylon, those "unclean and hateful birds" which fly in the open firmament of OUR "heavens taking from us our peace of mind. And they represent "serpents and scorpions", the demonic powers of the underworld, creeping and crawling through the "sand" of our

carnal, barren, wasteland; feeding upon the "dust" of our earthbound existence! What nightmarish thoughts these are!

Have you ever experienced this? I must confess that while this is a very graphic and sobering depiction of spiritual separation, most of us have, at one time or another, to one degree or another. There is certainly nothing pleasant about being cut off from fellowship with God. But it is true that when we ignore His persistent dealings, walk in our own ways, and turn our faces from Him, He has no other recourse than to give us over to our own devices. He gives us what we so desperately want; and in doing so He lets us experience what life is like without His manifest Presence! He withdraws from our sight, allows us to pursue our own self-serving interests, and gives us a taste of INDEPENDENCE. He removes all the restraining convictions of His Presence! But it is not long before we begin to languish away in this state of dissolution, perishing for a lack of heavenly contact! He makes us miserable with ourselves!

It is during these times that God allows attitudes, feelings, and attractions to manifest through us that we never knew were there. Many people have believed that once they came to Christ, all the "old things" immediately "passed away", never to trouble them again. The truth is, as long as we abide "IN CHRIST", we are sheltered from the previous mannerisms and manifestations we once walked in. As soon as we step out of fellowship with Him, however, we are immediately susceptible to the works of the flesh again, with all of it's vile expressions. You see, bound up in the Adamic nature is the potential to perform the most selfish and insensitive acts known to mankind. Sometimes we recoil in shock at the heinous and horrible crimes committed by men and women alike... not realizing that this same potential exists, without exception, in every human being! Paul's testimony attests to this fact: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth NO GOOD THING..." (Rom. 7:18)! We who are born again must never forget that until we are fully redeemed, perfected, and transformed, we still have TWO NATURES in our "wombs"! And both of these natures have programmed within them a "predestination", a predetermined destiny to victory or failure. The one nature has the potential of manifesting the very life of CHRIST, overcoming every obstacle brought before it, and finding it's enjoyment only IN HIM; the other is destined to express the life of ANTI-CHRIST, ever seeking to gratify the lustful propensities, but never finding fulfillment! It is truly "a bottomless pit"! As we have said, as long as we walk with God in harmony with His will, we are protected by His Presence, covered in "the Blood" of the Covenant. But when we turn our hearts away after other "lovers", He releases "the beasts" in our field! He shows us exactly what His Presence has been holding back, or "hindering" within us (II Thess. 2:7)!

While it seems sometimes that God has utterly forsaken us in our "dry places", the truth of the matter is that He is still controlling the situation, BUT FROM BEHIND THE SCENES! You see, He knows just how to use this wilderness setting to serve His purpose, and to actually make the end better than the beginning! You may wonder, "how could this possibly be"?

#### GOD'S PROPOSAL

"Therefore, behold, I WILL ALLURE HER, AND BRING HER INTO THE WILDERNESS, AND SPEAK COMFORTABLY UNTO HER..." (verse 14)!

Just consider the weight of these words! Even though we are responsible for our troubled conditions, God is saying that He will MEET US IN THE WILDERNESS... in the "wilderness" we have become! He will allure us, and speak comfortably to us! In essence, HE BRINGS US TO THE WILDERNESS SO THAT HE CAN SPEAK TO OUR HEARTS! This way He can have our undivided attention, and enunciate His feelings to us! Just when it seems we can bear no more of the pressure, the pain, and persecution; when all of our internal ugliness has been exposed, and we can no longer cope with the multiplied problems and complications we have created; when we come to the end of our strength, to the point that we "despair even of life", HE APPEARS in all of His glory and majestic splendor... "mighty to save"! And how does He plan on doing this? By making us a PROPOSAL we cannot afford to refuse!

Verse 15 says: "...And I will give her her vineyards from thence (that is, from "the wilderness"), 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 consider these words, let us pay special attention to the reference to "the Valley of Achor". There is a message here that we mustn't miss!

To understand this reference, we should get the background. As you recall, Moses had led the people out of the land of Egypt by divine fiat. He had brought them through the wilderness to the foot of Mt. Sinai, where they received the Law and Commandments. From there they pressed onward, finally to the brink of Jordan River. They had learned much during their desert journeys, and they had Moses to thank for speaking the Word of the Lord to them. But Moses had brought them as far as he was ordained to. Now it was time for Joshua to assume leadership, and lead them into the fullness of their inheritance.

After they had crossed over into the land, the first challenge set before them was a city named "Jericho". Jericho in Hebrew means, "the city of palms"; well named, since it was literally an oasis in the desert! It was built alongside the Jordan, beautifully situated and strategically positioned at their entrance into Canaan. In the natural, with its massive walls and fortified gates, it would have seemed impenetrable. But with Joshua in command, giving the directions, victory was sure! There was one stipulation, however; once the city was secured, the people were strictly forbidden to take anything to themselves "of the accursed thing" (Josh. 6:18)! Everything was to be burned with fire, utterly consumed, that they might reestablish the land in righteousness. All things were to become NEW!

Soon afterward, they discovered that something was definitely wrong. The next place their conquest led them to was a small city by the name of Ai. Ai should not have been a difficult obstacle for them to overcome, not nearly the challenge Jericho had been. But as they attempted to subdue the men of Ai, they themselves were smitten in battle, and put to flight! Josh. 7:5 says, "...wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as

water"! They were terrified of this handful of men, because they realized that God was not fighting with them now!

As Joshua inquired of the Lord for understanding, God spake thus to him: "ISRAEL HATH SINNED, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them: FOR THEY HAVE TAKEN OF THE ACCURSED THING, and have also stolen, and disassembled also, AND THEY HAVE PUT IT EVEN AMONG THEIR OWN STUFF. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you anymore, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. UP, SANCTIFY THE PEOPLE, and say, Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow: for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, THERE IS AN ACCURSED THING IN THE MIDST OF THEE, O ISRAEL: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you" (Josh. 7:11-13)!

Early the next morning, Joshua brought all the people before the Lord, according to their tribes; and as the Lord singled out the tribe, they brought forth families; and as the Lord separated the family, individual households were brought; and finally, man by man was brought. After this diligent search was made, Achan (whose name in Hebrew means, "troublesome") was left alone. When Joshua pressed upon him to make confession for his sin, Achan said, "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils A GOODLY BABYLONISH GARMENT, AND TWO HUNDRED SHEKELS OF SILVER, AND A WEDGE OF GOLD OF FIFTY SHEKELS WEIGHT, THEN I COVETED THEM, AND TOOK THEM; AND BEHOLD, THEY ARE HID IN THE EARTH IN THE MIDST OF MY TENT, AND THE SILVER UNDER IT" (7:20-21)! Sure enough, when Joshua sent messengers to his tent, they found all things even as he had said.

As a result, Joshua took Achan, and all that was in his house... man, beast, and every possession, along with the stolen items, and brought it to a valley. Here they stoned him with stones, and afterward burned them with fire. Then they raised over him a heap of stones to mark the place where God had turned from the fierceness of His anger! This place was therefore called, THE VALLEY OF ACHOR ("trouble")!

It is obvious that this act of self-judgment pleased the Lord; for from this point on, the people resumed their triumph over their adversaries! They went forth "conquering, and to conquer"! What seemed to be their ultimate defeat turned out to be a gateway, or beginning to newfound victories! They went on to possess the land! Hallelujah!

#### NOW, THE REST OF THE STORY

As we take this whole scenario into account, we see THREE PROMINENT PERSONALITIES: MOSES, JOSHUA, and ACHAN. These represent respectively THE LAW, THE SPIRIT, AND THE FLESH! We know that "the LAW was our schoolmaster TO BRING US UNTO CHRIST, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (Gal. 3:24-25). And, as the writer of

Hebrews said, "For the LAW made nothing perfect, but THE BRINGING IN OF A BETTER HOPE DID; by the which we draw nigh unto God" (Heb. 7:19). "Moses" served his purpose, by bringing us to the leadership of "Joshua". But Joshua's ministry was to take us from there, and lead us on unto PERFECTION! Praise God!

Not only were we brought unto Christ, but more importantly, CHRIST WAS BROUGHT IN US! He became our "better hope", by which we draw nigh unto God! As our heavenly Joshua entered into OUR LAND, He did so with the intents of subduing it, of bringing it unto subjection to Him. He united with our spirit, leading us from faith to faith, from victory to victory, from glory to glory! We learned what it was to conquer otherwise impossible strongholds of our adversaries, simply by trusting in His guidance! "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord" (Zech. 4:6)!

There is another man in "the camp", however, who has the potential of creating great trouble for us, and interfering with our progressive victory: his name is ACHAN! "The FLESH lusteth against the SPIRIT", seeking to draw attention to himself by desiring the very things that are forbidden and accursed of the Lord! Any time we begin to lose ground to petty problems, suffering defeat in our ordinarily routine trials, in the areas where we would normally be triumphant, it's a good sign that there is an underlying problem, a secret sin beneath the surface. And we can generally begin our search for "SIN IN THE CAMP" at his house!

Of a truth, "Achan" is a man who harbors secrets! He has things buried in "the EARTH of his TENT" that might surprise us: a goodly "Babylonish garment", two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold! Just what he intended on doing with these, we do not know. He may have never exposed them, or displayed them openly. But the very fact that he coveted them, and stole them away into his secret chambers (possibly to take them out and admire them in the privacy of his tent from time to time, fantasizing how they might bring him great wealth and power), brought great hardship upon the whole house of Israel! He may have thought that it was his private "little secret"; that no one else would be involved. But an entire NATION was effected by his fatal attraction!

Beloved, God will not permit our "old man" to hide anything in "the earth of our tents"! It may remain buried from sight for a long time, and we may grow accustomed to living with it, but we can be sure that eventually our sin will find us out (Num. 32:23)! He will reveal our Babylonian "garments"

May I inject here that there are many things Achan has buried in our "earthen vessels" over a period of time, things which would not necessarily be considered "sin" (at least, by their appearance). They may be certain "accursed" attitudes or dispositions we have developed through past experiences, or improper perspectives that have evolved because of adverse situations in our past. They may be things we have only recently contracted, or things carried around in us from our childhood, which have effected our adult behavior. Whatever they may be, if they are hindering us in our spiritual progression, robbing us of our joy and peace in the Spirit, and drawing attention to the flesh, God wants us to judge ourselves, lest we be judged! He wants us to deal with Achan's secrets!



There is a misconception among certain of God's people these days, an opinion I beg to differ with. That is, that the answer to the "Achan" problem is "Christian psychology... so called, "inner healing" therapy. Allow me to say in no uncertain terms, in as clear a way as I possibly can: ACHAN IS UNREFORMABLE! He cannot be redeemed! He is an unreconcilable enemy to God! Paul put it this way: "THE CARNAL MIND IS ENMITY AGAINST GOD: for it is NOT SUBJECT to the law of God, NEITHER INDEED CAN BE" (Rom. 8:7)! No amount of counseling sessions or "psychoanalysis" will change Achan's ways; for his ways have always been, and ever will be the ways of DEATH (Rom. 8:6)! Thus saith the Word! The answer is not in analyzing Achan's "psyche", delving into the way he thinks, or studying the "cesspool" of the carnal mind; it's in FORGETTING THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE BEHIND!

God has provided the solution for the problem with "Achan"... STONE HIM WITH STONES, AND BURN HIM WITH FIRE! Utterly destroy him, and all that is within his "house", lest he escape to cause mischief again! And how do we go about doing this? Literally STONE HIM to death with God's Word... then "bury" him under it! Give him no rest, until his name and posterity be no more remembered in our earth! Take the promises of God's Word, and meditate upon them day and night... until Achan's identity is forgotten, until our sinful self-consciousness is subdued, and only one man is visible: THE NEW CREATION MAN! By this, the "Valley of Achor" is no longer a place of despair and defeat, but becomes "A DOOR OF HOPE"! What is this HOPE that is opened up to us? Why, it is the consciousness of "CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY" (Col. 1:27)! He is "the Door" through which we find HOPE! As we acknowledge His indwelling Presence, hope springs up within us, and we are able to once again walk in victory! All praise be unto Him!

#### A WEDDING IN THE WILDERNESS

Turning back to where we left off in Hosea 2, we read, "And it shall be in that day, saith the Lord, that THOU SHALT CALL ME ISHI, and shalt call Me no more BAALI. For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name" (verses 16-17). In other words, when the Lord allures us into the wilderness, when He speaks comfortably unto us, and makes his proposal unto us, HE OFFERS US A CHANGE IN RELATIONSHIP. The name "ISHI" means, "MY HUSBAND", while the name "BAALI" means, "MY LORD" (referring to the Babylonian deities, or "false images" Israel had worshipped). THIS IS THE MEANS BY WHICH HE BRINGS US OUT OF THE WILDERNESS! As we turn unto the Lord, repenting of our self-centered desire for SINGLENES, our longing for INDEPENDENCE, our bearing the "marks" of spiritual harlotry, He meets with us in our wilderness condition, and OFFERS TO BECOME "ONE" WITH US AGAIN! Notice Paul's words in I Cor. 6:16-17... "What? Know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is ONE BODY? For two, saith He, shall be ONE FLESH. But He that is JOINED to the Lord is ONE SPIRIT"! What a tremendous thought! And what an unmerited opportunity! It is not as if we were worthy of a relationship with Him, for "all our righteousness is as filthy rags"! But the wonder of it all is that even with our shortcomings, our failures, and our imperfections, He still desires to be united with us, IF ONLY WE WILL ACCEPT

THIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM! Think about it: "...He that is joined to the Lord IS ONE SPIRIT"! To become ONE SPIRIT with Him means that not only will He take upon Himself our weaknesses, but also that we take upon us His strengths! "And in that day WILL I MAKE A COVENANT FOR THEM WITH THE BEASTS OF THE FIELD, AND WITH THE FOWL OF HEAVEN, AND WITH THE CREEPING THINGS OF THE GROUND: AND I WILL BREAK THE BOW AND THE SWORD AND THE BATTLE OUT OF THE EARTH, AND WILL MAKE THEM TO LIE DOWN SAFELY" (verse 18)! When we accept His marriage proposal, then He makes a "covenant" FOR US, in our stead... with the BEASTS, the FOWL, and the CREEPING THINGS in our earth! He alone is able to subdue these things, settle the wearisome activities raging within us, and bring peace to our troubled souls! He removes the warfare within, by "breaking the bow and the sword and the battle" out of our earth (our dependency on our own human strength and stamina), and gives us rest round about from our enemies!

As we said, becoming ONE IN SPIRIT with Him means receiving His STRENGTH, as well. "And I will betroth thee unto Me FOREVER: yea, I will betroth thee unto Me IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, and IN JUDGMENT, and IN LOVINGKINDNESS, and IN MERCIES. I will even betroth thee unto Me IN FAITHFULNESS: and THOU SHALT KNOW THE LORD" (verses 19-20)! As we identify with Him in these five attributes, accepting His Name (nature) in holy matrimony, THEN WE SHALL KNOW THE LORD! This "knowing" is more than just a knowledge about the Lord, more than a mere acquaintance with His ways; but speaks of an intimacy, a coming together, a penetration of His Life into our's... so that there is never again a division, or separation from Him! He is offering us an eternal bond, or union, with Him!

Can we not see that Christ is even now preparing Himself a Bride in the end of this age, a people who are "coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her Beloved" (Song 8:5)? Then we should not look upon our present trials, hardships, and afflictions, as if the Lord is trying to KILL us with them; but, rather, that He is trying to SAVE us through them! What may seem to be JUDGMENT to the natural mind is actually an opportunity for DELIVERANCE to the spirit! He is delivering us from the spirit of harlotry, of unfaithfulness, of independence, which has plagued man from time immemorial; teaching us that we can no longer "lean upon the arm of flesh", or "to our own understanding". If we come up from the wilderness at all, it will be because we have learned to depend upon Him completely, without reservation! He is calling us out of the whole whorish realm of Babylon before He pours out His judgment on that rebellious system... by severing the connection with it in our hearts. When once we have come out of the "Babylon" within, when we are no longer struggling with an "identity crisis", trying to find out who we are, the external expression of Babylon in this world will have no hold on us! When it all goes up in smoke, We will have boldness in the day of judgment: because "AS HE IS, SO ARE WE IN THIS WORLD" (I John 4:17)! The only thing that will matter then is who we are IN HIM!

In closing, we will read the remaining verses in chapter 2 from the New English Bible: "At that time I will give answer, says the Lord, I will answer for the heavens and they

will answer to the earth, and the earth will answer for the corn, the new wine, and the oil, and they will answer for Jezreel. ISRAEL SHALL BE MY NEW SOWING IN THE LAND, and I will show love to Lo-ruhamah and say to Lo-ammi, 'You are My people', and he will say, 'Thou art my God'" (verses 21-23)! Take heart, O ye saints of the Most High... as you respond to Him, though your heavens have been as brass, He will cause the heavens to respond to you; restoring again the blessed fruitfulness of His Spirit! If you have humbly submitted yourself to His dealings in "the Valley of Jezreel", or in "the Valley of Achor", He has appointed you to become HIS NEW SOWING in the land! Hallelujah! He is not through with us yet!

to be continued...