

Choosing the Culture of Zion

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Contents

CHAPTER ONE

Preachers of righteousness in Sodom	3
Lot's separation from Abram	4
The fruit of Lot's ministry	5
A brand plucked from the fire	7
The prophet Isaiah	8
A very small remnant	9
The need for obedience from the heart	11
Come, let us reason together	11
Commissioned a second time	13
The polarisation of the word	14
The judgement of the Assyrians	15
Three phases of tribulation	16
Judgement and salvation in the day of the Lord	17
The final ministry of Moses and Elijah	19

CHAPTER TWO

Look at the fig tree	21
The meaning of the fig tree	22
Two harvests of figs	23
The kingdom of God is near	25
The fruit of the fig tree	26
The history of the fig tree	27
The barren fig tree in the vineyard	28
The withered fig tree	29
The new fig tree	30
The house of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus	32
The call to Nathanael	33

CHAPTER THREE

The end of the age	35
False messengers	36
The prophetic word to the nations	37
Wars - the second seal	39
The destruction of the weapons and rearmament for Armageddon	40
Famines - the third seal	41
The fall of the economy of Babylon	43

Pestilences - the fourth seal	44
Earthquakes - the sixth seal	44
Persecution - the fifth seal	45
Testimony - the first seal	46
CHAPTER FOUR	
The opening of the sixth seal	49
The judgement of Gog and Magog	50
The sun will be darkened	51
The sign of the Son of Man	54
The glorified Son of Man	55
The glorified bride of Christ	57
CHAPTER FIVE	
The 2300 year prophecy	61
Daniel's vision	62
Some of the host of heaven will fall	64
Satan regained access to the heavenly places	65
Some of the stars will fall	66
The continual offering will be removed	68
The place of the sanctuary will be cast down	70
Truth will be flung to the ground	71
The vision pertains to the time of the end	73
Antiochus Epiphanes was a type	74
Antichrist will exalt himself	75
CHAPTER SIX	
The great falling away	77
A synagogue of Satan	78
The eight declarations of woe	79
The apostasy	82
Multiple phases of false prophets	83
The summary in Daniel Chapter 12	85
Two distinct 3 ½ year periods	87
CHART	
The time of the end	89

Chapter One

Preachers of righteousness in Sodom

Jesus described the time when the Father takes His seat to judge the world and to establish His kingdom on the earth, by saying, 'As it was in *the days of Noah*, so it will be in the days of the Son of Man: they ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

Likewise as it was in *the days of Lot*: they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.' Luk 17:26-29. Notably, in relation to this judgement, Jesus specifically instructed us to 'remember Lot's wife'. Luk 17:32.

The apostle Peter also described the sudden and unexpected judgement of God in the days of Noah and the days of Lot. He declared that God 'did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, *a preacher of righteousness*, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered *righteous Lot*, who was

oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)'. 2Pe 2:5-8.

Lot's separation from Abram

In this season, the Lord is drawing our attention to the lesson of Lot, who was Abraham's nephew. When Abram came out of Egypt and returned to the promised land, he was a wealthy man. He was rich in livestock, silver, and in gold. Lot also had flocks and herds because of his connection to Abram. The Scriptures recorded that the land was not able to support them both, so that strife developed between Abram's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen. Gen 13:6-7. Evidently, Lot was not content to abide within his own limit and to serve as a member of Abram's extended household. He continued to grow his own herds, in competition with Abram, until it became untenable for them to dwell together.

Recognising the need for separation, Abram gave Lot the first choice in relation to the land. In response to this, 'Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar'. Gen 13:10. Lot was looking for wealth and prosperity in the land of Caanan, which was the promised land. He appraised the land from the perspective of his own projection, which was a veil upon his eyes. We note that the meaning of Lot's name is 'veiled'. Lot chose the plain of Jordan for himself, which included five cities with their kings. Gen 13:11.

Lot began to live in Sodom, which was already 'exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord'. Gen 13:12-13. Perhaps he viewed the city of Sodom as a great place for business and evangelism. Lot went among these people with the knowledge of *El-Shaddai* that he had learned from Abraham. He became a preacher of righteousness among them. However, not long after he arrived in Sodom, the city became engulfed in a war between four kings from Assyria and the five kings from the five cities in the Jordan plain. Gen 14:1-2. The four kings from Assyria defeated the five kings from the plain. When they plundered the cities, Lot was also captured, along with all his goods. Gen 14:11-12.

After the Assyrian kings had begun the journey back to their homeland, Abram heard that Lot had been captured. He immediately armed his 318 servants and pursued the Assyrian kings. Gen 14:14. Abram overcame the four kings, who had already defeated the five kings, by the strength of

the Lord *El-Shaddai*. He rescued Lot and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. All the people met Christ, as Melchizedek, when He provided an *agape* meal for Abram in the valley of Kidron, which is near the mountains of Moriah. Gen 14:17-24. The power of the gospel that Lot had preached to the people was demonstrated to them by their miraculous deliverance through the ministry of Abram.

Abram refused to take any rulership over the people whom he had delivered and were now his captives. Nor did he keep any of the goods that belonged to the king of Sodom. Abram remained sanctified to his call in the promised land, looking for the coming of the heavenly city, which God had promised to him. Heb 11:9-10. Despite their miraculous deliverance, the people did not desire to adopt the culture and righteousness of Abram. The people returned to their cities. Lot chose again, for a second time, to live with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. There is no indication that Lot was married at this time; it is likely that he married his wife after he returned to Sodom.

The fruit of Lot's ministry

Lot continued to minister among this people as a preacher of righteousness. He proclaimed the word and righteousness of *El-Shaddai*. However, his ministry was fruitless. Lot did not belong to the Elijah ministry. He did not perform any miracles. We know this because Jesus said, 'And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgement than for you.' Mat 11:23-24. This raises the questions: Why was Lot's ministry not accompanied by signs and wonders? Why didn't God send Abram to Sodom to perform miracles?

The word that was preached by Lot did not bring salvation. However, Lot's message was sufficient to bring the entire city under the judgement of eternal fire. As a preacher of righteousness, his ministry resulted in judgement. The city of Sodom rejected the word of Lot, and they became the most wicked and depraved of all the people dwelling on the earth at that time. God determined to bring them down into hell by destroying them with eternal fire. Jud 1:7. We recall that God judged the world in the days of Noah with a world-wide flood. He then promised Noah that He would not judge the world with a flood again. The world is now reserved for judgement by fire. 2Pe 3:6-7.

After the Lord spoke to Abraham about the birth of Isaac as the promised seed, he revealed that He was going to judge Sodom and Gomorrah. Gen 18:17-21. Abraham immediately began to intercede for any of the righteous in the city. The Lord agreed to spare the city if there were ten righteous people in it. Gen 18:22-33. The intercessory prayer of Abraham demonstrated that he was functioning in the mode of the Elijah ministry. In relation to the Elijah ministry, James said, 'The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.' Jas 5:16. We know that the Lord did not find ten righteous people in the city. However, the two angels did go looking for Lot and his family on account of Abraham's prayer.

When the angels reached the city, they found Lot sitting in the gate of Sodom. Gen 19:1. The gate of the city was the place of his ministry as a preacher of righteousness. Lot bowed himself to the ground before the angels, and then compelled them to stay in his house because it was not safe for them to stay in the open square. After the evening meal, the men of the city surrounded Lot's house and demanded that he hand the two men over to them. Gen 19:4-5. This group of homosexual men came from every quarter of the city, and it included both old and young men. The entire city had been overtaken by this sin.

Lot was a preacher of righteousness, but he did not have a remnant of the Spirit in his marriage or a worthy house. We know that Lot's two daughters were both married by this time. However, the fact that neither of them had consummated their marriage indicates that they had married homosexual men. Lot may have believed that his gospel would bring salvation to the city, but his own sanctification had been severely compromised by the culture of the city. Notably, when Lot went outside his door to plead with the men of the city to abstain from their wickedness, he called them 'my brothers'. Gen 19:7. The crowd probably included men who were part of his own wife's extended family and the extended families of his own sons-in-law.

The untenable nature of Lot's own compromised position was demonstrated when he tried to make a distinction between 'the lesser of two evils' by offering his two daughters to the men. Gen 19:8. He was so deceived by the self-righteous veil over his eyes that he viewed this despicable action to be the only honourable alternative in the situation. The outcome of Lot's best efforts to appease the crowd, with a trading approach, only resulted in the men turning on him. Gen 19:9. The men resented Lot's self-righteous judgement upon them as soon as the pressure of the situation exposed his own hypocrisy. Mercifully, the two

angels intervened by pulling Lot inside the house and by striking all the men outside the house with blindness. Gen 19:10-11.

A brand plucked from the fire

The angels commanded Lot to speak to his immediate family before they destroyed the city. In obedience, Lot went outside the house to warn his sons-in-law, but they assumed that he was only joking. Gen 19:14. We are reminded that it is common for any messenger who proclaims the judgement of God, and the need for sanctification as families, to be treated with derision. This will particularly be the case as we approach the time of the end, which Jesus likened to the days of Noah and the days of Lot. The apostle Peter declared ‘that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation”.’ 2Pe 3:3-4.

It appears that Lot had some trouble accepting the finality of the decision that had been made by his sons-in-law. However, while he lingered, the two angels grabbed his hand, the hand of his wife, and the hands of his two daughters and, mercifully, dragged them out of the city before its sudden judgement. Gen 19:16. Once they were outside the city, the angels commanded them, ‘Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed.’ Gen 19:17. Even though Lot had been a preacher of righteousness, his works had been tested by fire and he had suffered great loss. Because of Abraham’s intercessory prayer, he had been plucked, like a brand, from the fire of God’s judgement. Jud 1:23.

The fire of God’s judgement revealed that Lot had built his house with wood, hay, and stubble. He suffered the loss of his projection in relation to his business, his ministry, and his extended family. He had been saved through fire. 1Co 3:15. However, his ongoing salvation was dependent upon his willingness to be reconciled to Abraham, who had rescued him from the hand of the Assyrians and delivered him from the judgement of Sodom through his intercessory prayer. However, Lot was unwilling to return to Abraham to become a servant among the Lord’s covenant people. Motivated by fear, he pleaded with the angels to let him turn aside to the little city of Zoar. Gen 19:19-20.

Lot’s approach of seeking a concession from the Lord’s messengers did not result in the deliverance of his household. He had no capacity to call his wife to faith and obedience in relation to the sanctification of

his family. Lot's wife was reluctantly following him, but she was not walking with him. She was walking behind him. As soon as the fire and brimstone began to fall from heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot's wife turned back toward Sodom. Gen 19:26. Her heart was still in Sodom because her treasure was in her extended family who had chosen to remain in the city. Mat 6:21. God delivered her to the longing of her own heart, and she became a pillar of salt. This means that she became a memorial of God's judgement to all generations. Jesus said, 'Remember Lot's wife'. Luk 17:32.

Following the death of his wife, Lot did not remain in Zoar. It is likely that this little city was just as debauched as the other cities in the plain. Lot fled to the mountains, but he was still unwilling to humble himself and return to Abraham. Choosing to live in a cave with his two daughters, his independence kept his daughters in bondage to the family stronghold. Gen 19:30. This resulted in incest when the daughters decided to intoxicate their father for the sake of preserving the family lineage. Gen 19:31-38. The descendants of Lot's daughters became the Moabites and the Ammonites. It is notable that the Moabites and the Ammonites became a repetitive stumbling block to the nation of Israel and their kings.

For example, the daughters of Moab became a stumbling block for the entire nation of Israel before they entered the promised land. Rev 2:14. The immorality between the men of Israel and the daughters of Moab caused a plague to break out in the camp of the Israelites, which killed 24,000 people, before Phineas took action to recover the sanctification of the nation. Num 25. As another example, the fruit of the marriage between King Solomon and Naamah, who was an Ammonite woman, was King Rehoboam. 1Ki 14:21. When he refused to receive counsel from the elders of Israel, it precipitated the split between the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. 1Ki 12.

The prophet Isaiah

The prophet Isaiah began his ministry in the southern kingdom of Judah before the death of King Uzziah, which happened around 740BC. Isaiah began his ministry by saying, 'Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me." ' Isa 1:2. The Lord was referring to the entire nation of Israel as His children. They were His covenant people. He had delivered them from the nation of Egypt, led them through

the wilderness, and then given them the promised land as their inheritance. He had nourished them and provided for all their needs. And yet, they had all rebelled against Him and spurned His fatherhood toward them.

The Father chastens the children whom He loves. However, in relation to the nation of Israel, He asked, 'Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints.' Isa 1:5. The Lord had repeatedly chastened the nation so that they would not be condemned along with the world. However, the nation had not turned in response to the Lord's chastening. Rather, the people had become more rebellious. In this regard, we are reminded of the words of the wise man, 'Rebuke is more effective for a wise man than a hundred blows on a fool'. Pro 17:10. Pro 27:22.

When Isaiah said, 'the whole head is sick', he was referring to a complete lack of headship in the nation and in each family. The elders of the nation were not submitted to the headship of the Father by obeying the word that was proclaimed to them by His messengers. This meant that there was no godly leadership in the nation. Furthermore, the lack of headship in each marriage meant that the agenda in each family was determined by the women and the children. Isa 3:12. Isaiah described the nation as being sick from the sole of the foot to the head, with open, putrefying sores. Isa 1:6. Significantly, there was no anointing oil to heal the sickness because there was no Elijah ministry in the nation at that time.

The spiritual condition of the entire nation of Israel had become like Sodom and Gomorrah. Isaiah described the nation by saying, 'Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; strangers devour your land in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a hut in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Unless the Lord of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah.' Isa 1:7-9. The word of righteousness that was proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah was enough to invoke the fire of God upon the nation so that it would become a smoking furnace, like Sodom and Gomorrah.

A very small remnant

However, the Lord did not make the whole land a smoking furnace like Sodom and Gomorrah because there was *a very small remnant* that was

faithful to the Lord among the sinful nation. We are reminded that, when Abraham interceded for Sodom, the Lord agreed to spare the city if He found as few as ten righteous people in the city. Gen 18:32. During the ministry of Elijah among the northern tribes of Israel, there was a small remnant of 7 000 people who had not bowed the knee to Baal. 1Ki 19:18. We do not know how many believers comprised the *very small remnant* in the southern tribes of Judah during the ministry of Isaiah. However, it was this very small remnant that preserved the entire nation at that time.

Isaiah described the remnant as a small booth, or tent, in a vineyard. He later identified that the house of Israel was the vineyard that the Lord had lovingly established on a fruitful hill. Isa 5:1. He had prepared the ground and planted the men of Judah as a chosen vine in the middle of the vineyard. He expected the vine to bring forth good grapes, but it only brought forth wild grapes. The Lord declared, 'Please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.' Isa 5:5. The northern tribes of Israel, who belonged to the Lord's vineyard, were conquered by the Assyrians approximately twenty years after the beginning of Isaiah's ministry.

The invading armies from Assyria, who conquered the northern tribes of Israel, were likened to the waters of a river that had broken its banks. Having already carried away the northern tribes in a flood, the water also overflowed and passed through the entire region of Judah. The city of Jerusalem was the head of the nation. The water reached right 'up to the neck' when the Assyrian army surrounded the city. Isa 8:8. Foreshadowing this event, the prophet Isaiah also described the believing remnant as a 'hut in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city'. Isa 1:8. The 'garden of cucumbers' was a peculiar analogy that described all of the soldiers who belonged to the Assyrian armies.

Isaiah was a preacher of righteousness in a nation that had become like Sodom and Gomorrah. He proclaimed, 'Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah.' Isa 1:10. It is remarkable that Isaiah addressed the leaders of the nation as *the rulers of Sodom* and the rest of the people as *the people of Gomorrah*. The entire nation had a distorted view of the love of God. The leaders were promoting, and the people were embracing, an unclean and unsanctified culture. In relation to the context of their ministry, we note the similarity between Isaiah and Lot, who was also a preacher of righteousness in Sodom. However, unlike Lot, the prophet Isaiah did not

compromise his own sanctification. Furthermore, as we have already considered, he had a faithful remnant with him that was preserving the nation.

The need for obedience from the heart

The prophet Isaiah rebuked the people for their offerings, their meetings, and their prayers. He said concerning their offerings, 'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me? ... I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts?' Isa 1:11-12. Unlike in the days of Malachi, the people were not bringing blind, lame, and sick offerings and expecting the Lord to accept them. In the days of Isaiah, the people were still bringing the first and best to the Lord. Nevertheless, the Lord said that the people were trampling His courts.

The people were trampling the Lord's courts because they were complying with the exactness of God's commandments, but they were not obedient from the heart. The word of the Lord revealed the thoughts and motivations that belonged to their hearts. Heb 4:12. The people were drawing near to the Lord with their lips, and in their religious service, but their hearts were far from Him. Isa 29:13. In contrast to this, the apostle Paul said to the Romans, 'God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you *obeyed from the heart* that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.' Rom 6:17. Obedience from the heart is not motivated by an external commandment. It is motivated by the love of God in a regenerated heart.

The Lord identified that the offerings, meetings, and prayers of the people had no integrity because their hearts needed to be cleansed and regenerated. He said to the people, 'Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away your evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil.' Isa 1:16. He was instructing the people to deal with the condition of their hearts. Of course, it was not possible for the people to wash their own hearts. It is only possible to become obedient from the heart when the Lord gives us a new heart of flesh through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. Eze 36:25-26.

Come, let us reason together

The Lord continued by saying that He would cleanse and regenerate the people. He said, 'Come now, and let us reason together ... Though your

sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' Isa 1:18. This is an amazing statement! The Lord was effectively saying to the people, 'You cannot regenerate your heart, but *I can* do it. And more than this, *I will* do it – you will be made righteous!' God has accomplished the work of regeneration for every person through the seven wounding events that Christ experienced from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. However, this brings us to an important point in relation to God's cleansing initiative toward His people.

We know that there are two sides to the cross – salvation and judgement. The offering of Christ has given us *a choice* between two alternatives. When the gospel of God is proclaimed to us, we can choose to receive the word and lay hold of the mercy of God that has been offered to us in Christ's offering. In the fellowship of Christ's seven wounding events, our heart is being regenerated, and we are learning the obedience that Christ has already learned for us. Alternatively, if we choose to reject the word, we come under the judgement of God that has already been invoked upon us by Christ's offering. In either case, the righteousness of God is revealed. The cross is the full revelation of the righteousness of God in relation to salvation and judgement. Rom 3:21.

The Lord summarised the choice between the two alternatives that He was giving to the people by saying, 'If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword.' Isa 1:19-20. If a person is eating 'the good of the land', it means that they are participating in the Father's *agape* meal in the fellowship of the body of Christ. If a person is 'devoured by the sword', it means that they have been condemned along with the world because they have refused to humble themselves under the chastening hand of God. The simple point is that God will make His people righteous by purifying the repentant *and* by destroying the rebellious. Notably, the prophet Isaiah then added, 'For the mouth of the Lord has spoken'. Isa 1:20.

Isaiah lamented that the faithful city had become a harlot which was full of idolatry and trading. Isa 1:21. The Lord further declared that He would cleanse His people by saying, 'I will rid Myself of My adversaries, and take vengeance on My enemies. I will turn My hand against you, and thoroughly purge away your dross, and take away your alloy. I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counsellors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called *the city of righteousness*,

the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and her penitents [lit. repentant ones] with righteousness. The destruction of transgressors and of sinners shall be together, and those who forsake the Lord shall be consumed.' Isa 1:24-28. We can be assured that the Lord will accomplish this work. His people will be made righteous!

Commissioned a second time

Significantly, the first step in the Lord's cleansing initiative toward His people was to commission the prophet Isaiah 'a second time' to become part of the Elijah ministry among the nation. In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah testified that he saw the Lord of hosts seated upon His throne in the heavenly temple. Isa 6:1. He heard the seraphim, who belong to the angelic administration, proclaim, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory'. Isa 6:3. In the light of the glory of Yahweh *Elohim's* sanctification, Isaiah was illuminated to see his own iniquity and uncleanness as a messenger.

Isaiah had already been a preacher of righteousness among the people for some years. However, when he *saw the Lord*, he responded by saying, 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.' Isa 6:5. In this prophetic vision, the prophet Isaiah met the Lord in the same way that Peter met the Lord eye to eye in the court of Caiaphas. After Isaiah confessed his own uncleanness, one of the seraphim, using tongs, took a burning coal from the true altar of incense and touched the lips of Isaiah. Isa 6:6-7.

The burning coal from the altar removed the deceit from Isaiah's lips and aligned him with the sanctification of his name. He was sanctified to be a messenger who would proclaim the holiness of Yahweh *Elohim* to the nation as part of the Elijah ministry. Notably, in this interaction, the prophet Isaiah was connected to the true altar of incense. The intercessory and imprecatory prayer that belongs to the true altar of incense is part of the Elijah ministry. We are reminded that Abraham exemplified the Elijah ministry when he interceded before the Lord for the city of Sodom. Speaking about this ministry, James said, 'The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.' Jas 5:16.

In relation to the work of the Elijah ministry, the Lord asked, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Isaiah immediately replied, 'Here am I, send me.' Isa 6:8. Isaiah responded in this way because of the faith that he had received from the Lord in relation to the sanctification of his own

name and calling to be a messenger. After meeting Christ eye to eye in the court of Caiaphas, we know that Peter was recommissioned, as part of the Elijah ministry, by Jesus on the shore of Galilee. Joh 21:15-19. In a similar way, after the prophet Isaiah had met the Lord in this prophetic vision, he was also recommissioned as a messenger who belonged to the Elijah ministry.

The polarisation of the word

The first mandate that belongs to the Elijah ministry is to proclaim the judgement of God upon all flesh, and to call all men to repent and come to Christ. Isa 40:6-8. The gospel that is proclaimed by the Elijah ministry is the power for salvation to all those who believe and join the fellowship of Christ's offering. Rom 1:16. In the fellowship of Christ's seven wounding events, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. The same gospel also declares the fearful expectation of judgement for those who draw back from Christ in unbelief. Every time the gospel of God is proclaimed, it is polarising those who hear it, toward one of these two outcomes.

The key point is that if we do not respond to the word, with repentance and faith, the *continual hearing* of the word will only harden our heart and invoke spiritual blindness upon us. The word itself will cause us to stumble backwards into judgement. Notably, the Lord gave this polarising mandate to the prophet Isaiah as part of the Elijah ministry. The Lord said to him, 'Go, and tell this people: "Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull, and their eyes heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed".' Isa 6:9-10.

We know that Jesus exercised this same polarising mandate when He proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom of God during His earthly ministry. When the disciples asked Jesus why He spoke to the multitudes in parables, He quoted from the mandate that He had given to the prophet Isaiah. He identified that the response of the Jewish people in His day was an ongoing fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah. Mat 13:10-15. However, this does not mean that Christ was simply continuing the ministry of Isaiah. Christ is *the source* of the Elijah ministry. He gave the prophet Isaiah a participation in His own prophetic ministry over 700 years before His incarnation. In this regard, Isaiah became a type of Christ.

The outcome of the Elijah ministry includes the judgement of the unrepentant among the Lord's people, the judgement of the nations, and the preservation of a godly remnant. Isaiah asked the Lord to tell him how long he would need to exercise this polarising mandate. The Lord responded, 'Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, the houses are without a man, the land is utterly desolate ... yet a tenth will be in it, and will return and be for consuming, as a terebinth tree or as an oak, whose stump remains when it is cut down. So *the holy seed shall be its stump*.' Isa 6:11-13. After he had been recommissioned for a second time, we see the first example of the preservation of a remnant during the lifetime of Isaiah.

The judgement of the Assyrians

Isaiah was recommissioned approximately twenty years before the northern tribes of Israel were conquered by the Assyrians and then scattered among the nations. We are reminded that Abram defeated the four Assyrian kings when he rescued Lot. However, by the time of Isaiah, Assyria had become a large and powerful empire. It was the second world kingdom. The Lord judged the ten northern tribes at the hands of the Assyrians because they had refused to turn from the idolatry that began in the days of Jeroboam. The Lord referred to the Assyrians as 'the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation'. Isa 10:5. He also likened the Assyrians to a battle axe in His hand. Isa 10:15.

The judgement of the northern tribes of Israel was fulfilled according to the word of Isaiah. Significantly, Isaiah also prophesied that the Lord would sovereignly judge the Assyrians once they had finished their work as an instrument of judgement in the Lord's hand. Isaiah declared, 'Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Lord has performed all His work on Zion and on Jerusalem, that He will say, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks".' Isa 10:12. Approximately twenty years after the conquest of the northern tribes of Israel, the Assyrians swept into the land of Judah and surrounded the city of Jerusalem.

The prophet Isaiah declared that the Lord would sovereignly defend and save the city. His word was fulfilled when the angel of the Lord went out and killed 185 000 Assyrian soldiers in one night. When the Assyrian king saw all the corpses in the morning, he immediately departed with the remainder of his army and returned to his homeland. 2Ki 19:35-36. Isa 37:36-37. In this way, God sovereignly judged the second world

kingdom and miraculously delivered the believing remnant in Jerusalem. Isaiah declared, 'For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and those who escape from Mount Zion. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.' 2Ki 19:31. Isa 37:32.

Three phases of tribulation

The Assyrians did not conquer the city of Jerusalem. However, Isaiah prophesied to King Hezekiah that the Babylonians would plunder the city and carry away some of his sons into exile. Isa 39:6-7. The word of Isaiah was fulfilled about 100 years later. The sieges of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, under the leadership of King Nebuchadnezzar, was a period of great tribulation for the Jewish nation. Significantly, many years before the final destruction of the city and the temple, the prophet Jeremiah proclaimed the way of escape for the believing remnant. He instructed them to submit themselves to the judgement of God by being taken into exile by the Babylonians.

The believing remnant obeyed the word of Jeremiah and they were preserved in exile. We know that Daniel was among the first group of exiles, and Ezekiel was among the second group of exiles who went to Babylon. Jeremiah declared, 'Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death. He who remains in the city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but he who goes and defects to the Chaldeans who besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be as a prize to him.' Jer 21:8-9. For the remnant who responded to the Lord's word with repentance and faith, the exile in Babylon became a refining and purifying process for them.

The siege and conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians was the *first example* of a great tribulation that was God's judgement upon the city. The *second example* of a great tribulation was the siege and conquest of Jerusalem by the Romans, under the leadership of Prince Titus in AD70. This was a period of unprecedented tribulation that had not been experienced before by the inhabitants of any city in the world. Historical records suggest that well over one million people died within the walls of Jerusalem at that time. Again, many years before the final destruction of the city and the temple, the Lord had already provided the way of escape for the believing remnant in the early church.

In obedience to the word of Christ, the believing remnant in the Jerusalem church left the city before its destruction. Mat 24:16. This means that they were not judged along with the city. Some of the

remnant from the Jerusalem church would have joined the lampstand churches that the apostle Paul had already established among the Gentiles. 1Pe 1:1. Many of the remnant followed the apostle Peter all the way down to Babylon. We know this because the apostle Peter wrote his letters from Babylon. 1Pe 5:13. The believers in Babylon comprised an 'elect lady' in that city. They did not belong to the natural Jerusalem; they were citizens of *the heavenly Jerusalem* who had been scattered among the nations.

This brings us to an important point. The prophet Isaiah said that 'the faithful city has become a harlot'. Isa 1:21. This statement was certainly applicable in relation to the natural Jerusalem in the days of Isaiah. It has also been applicable in relation to all of *the unclean daughters of Zion* who have come out of the heavenly Jerusalem during the church age. In each generation, there has been a small remnant of believers in Christ's lampstand churches who have continued in the word of present truth and maintained the sanctified culture of Zion. However, at the same time, there have been many believers, congregations, and whole church denominations who have rejected the word of Christ and turned aside to harlotry as part of the unclean daughters of Zion.

Like the prophet Isaiah and the remnant in his day, the faithful remnant in each generation of the church has also been like a small booth in the middle of a wicked vineyard. Isa 1:8. When the Father takes His seat, it will initiate the day of His judgement upon the unclean daughters of Zion, as well as the beginning of His judgement upon the entire world. During the opening of the seals, the unclean daughters of Zion, along with the world, will be delivered to the judgement of the sword, famine, and pestilence. The opening of the seals will be the *third example* of great tribulation as the expression of God's judgement upon all those who profane His name among the nations.

Judgement and salvation in the day of the Lord

The prophet Isaiah declared, 'Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with outstretched necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, making a jingling with their feet, therefore the Lord will strike with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will uncover their secret parts. *In that day* the Lord will take away their finery ... Her gates shall lament and mourn, and she being desolate shall sit on the ground.' Isa 3:16-18,26. Isaiah continued, '*In that day* seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, "We will eat our own food and

CHOOSING THE CULTURE OF ZION

wear our own apparel; only let us be called by your name”.’ Isa 4:1. The unclean daughters of Zion are the foolish virgins who have not prepared themselves for the day of the Lord by purchasing a double portion of oil in their households. Mat 25:1-3.

Notably, the way of escape for the faithful remnant in our day is to respond to the gospel of God, which is proclaimed by the Elijah ministry, and become worthy houses. The wise virgins will have purchased a double portion of oil in their households. When the Father takes His seat, the day of His judgement will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Luk 21:35. With this judgement in view, Jesus has encouraged us to respond to the word and focus our prayer toward becoming worthy houses. He said, ‘Watch therefore, and pray always that *you may be counted worthy* to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.’ Luk 21:36.

Isaiah declared that, in the same day of God’s judgement, the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious. Isa 4:2. Led by one world-wide presbytery around the Father’s throne, the believing remnant from every nation will become one glorious lampstand that manifests the light of the sevenfold Spirit of God to the world. Rev 4:4-5. The one lampstand that stands before the throne of the Father will include the wise virgins from all of Christ’s lampstand churches in every nation. The wise virgins comprise the 144 000 who have not been defiled by the unclean daughters of Zion or by the administration of Babylon in the world. Rev 14:4. The 144 000 belong to the bride of Christ who will bring forth the great multitude from every nation.

During the opening of the seals, the church will be hated by all nations. Mat 24:9. The persecution of the church will reach a climax when the fifth seal is opened. We recall that when Christ opened the fifth seal, the apostle John saw a great company of martyrs under the altar in the true temple. Rev 6:9-11. When the sixth seal is opened, the Lord will bring to an end the season of great persecution upon the church and the season of great tribulation upon the world. Jesus said, concerning the tribulation that belongs to the opening of the seals, ‘Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.’ Mat 24:22.

When we consider the first five chapters of the book of Isaiah, we note that they include several summaries that describe the Lord’s cleansing initiative toward His people. Furthermore, we observe that each summary includes, or concludes with, the events that belong to the opening of the

sixth seal. For example, we read in Chapter 2 that 'Men will go into caves of the rocks and into holes of the ground before the terror of the Lord and the splendour of His majesty, when He arises to make the earth tremble'. Isa 2:19. This statement is a direct parallel to the book of Revelation, where we read, 'The kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains'. Rev 6:15.

We have considered that Zion is presently like a small booth in the middle of a wicked vineyard. However, after the Father has taken His seat, Zion will be established above all the nations and grow into a great mountain that fills the whole earth. Speaking about the opening of the sixth seal, the prophet Isaiah declared, 'Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.' Isa 2:2-3.

The final ministry of Moses and Elijah

Following the opening of the sixth seal, for a period of seven years, the main agenda in the world will be the Father's *agape* meal. Speaking about that time, Isaiah prophesied that 'the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea'. Isa 11:9. Hab 2:14. However, during this same period of time, there will be messengers who will fall into the sin of presumption by beginning to exalt themselves above the fellowship of the presbytery. Antichrist will be a great messenger who will fall into this sin of presumption as the leader of the great falling away. 2Th 2:3-4.

The great falling away will be manifest during the blowing of the seven trumpets. Rev 8:10-11. The seven trumpets herald the final cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. When the seventh trumpet is blown, Michael will cast Satan out of heaven to the earth. Rev 12:7-9. The heavenly temple will then be measured and the door to the temple will be closed. Rev 11:1. The outer court of the true temple and the city will be handed over to the Gentiles to be trampled for a period of 3 ½ years. Rev 11:2. Remembering that the mountain of the Lord's house will fill the whole

CHOOSING THE CULTURE OF ZION

earth in the time of the end, the outer court of the true temple will be in all nations.

It is likely that the outer court of the true temple will be trampled for 3½ years in the same way that the courts of the Lord were trampled by the people in the days of Isaiah. Isa 1:12. This trampling may include a lot of religious activity, but there will be no obedience from the heart. There may be a form of godliness among the nations, but there will be no life or power. 2Ti 3:5. All religious activity will be an expression of the Jerusalem from beneath, as a city in bondage with her children. Gal 4:25. During this period, the fallen stars, who have come out of the church, will become like the rulers of Sodom, and the people will once more become like Gomorrah.

Moses and Elijah, supported by the 144 000, will minister for 3½ years as the final preachers of righteousness in Sodom and Egypt. Rev 11:3-13. The fruit of their ministry will be a final harvest of martyrs and the final judgement of the world. The final harvest of martyrs will be the last 'brands plucked from the fire' before the entire world becomes a smoking furnace. When Moses and Elijah are finally killed by Antichrist and Abaddon, 'their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified'. Rev 11:8. Following their resurrection to mortality after 3½ days, the Lord will pour out the fullness of His wrath upon Antichrist and his kingdom. Rev 15:1.

Chapter Two

Look at the fig tree

On the Mount of Olives, Jesus described 'the beginning of birth pains' and the events that belong to the opening of the seals in the time of the end. Jesus then said, 'Now learn this parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things, know that it is near - at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.' Mat 24:32-35.

When Jesus said this, He identified that there will be a generation who will witness the beginning of birth pains and then all of the events that belong to the time of the end. This generation will be alive and remain for the physical second coming of Christ. 1Th 4:15. Because Jesus made such a definitive statement about the timing and length of the end of the age, there has been a lot of interest, consideration, and debate about this passage. A lot of this debate has focused on the length of a generation and the meaning of the fig tree.

Some commentators place very little significance on the meaning of the fig tree. It is suggested that Jesus only used the fig tree as an example from nature, to illustrate the point that there will be observable signs in

the heavens and on Earth before the end of the age. This view simply likens 'the green leaves on the fig tree' to be all of the events that Jesus said would happen before His physical second coming. This view proposes that Jesus could have used any tree, or any illustration, to make the same point.

In contrast to this view, other commentators place great significance on the meaning of the fig tree. Many have said that the fig tree is the symbol of the Jewish nation. They often liken 'the fig tree putting forth its green leaves' to the formation of the Jewish state in 1948. The creation of a Jewish state in 1948, which happened soon after the United Nations was established in 1945, was an integral part of the formation of the seventh world kingdom. However, this event was not the fig tree 'putting forth its leaves'. The fig tree is the true Israel of God. One of the key points in this chapter is that worthy houses are the fruit that belongs to the fig tree.

The meaning of the fig tree

The apostle Peter declared, 'You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light who once were not a people, but you are now the *people of God*, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.' 1Pe 2:9-10. The Scriptures use four different plants or trees to describe *the people of God* from different perspectives, or with different emphases - the vine, the almond tree, the olive tree, and the fig tree.

The vine describes the body of Christ. Jesus Christ is the Vine, and the individual members of His body are the branches of the Vine. Jesus said to His disciples, 'I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.' Joh 15:5. When we abide in the fellowship of Christ's offering, His resurrection life enables us to do the works that He has already accomplished for us each day. The fruit that we produce belongs to Christ. It is the fruit of His life in us. The Father then harvests that fruit and builds it into the glory of our heavenly body.

The almond tree describes *a lampstand church*. We recall that the golden lampstand in the tabernacle of Moses was fashioned like an almond tree blossoming in the Spring. Exo 25:31-40. The fruit of the almond tree is the light of the sevenfold Spirit of God. Jesus Christ is presently seated at the right hand of God and walking among His lampstand churches through the presbyteries that He holds in His right hand. In the time of

the end, there will be one world-wide presbytery around the throne of the Father, and the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed to all nations by one lampstand administration before the Father's throne. Rev 4:4-5.

The olive tree describes *the kingdom of God*. It consists of the sons of God who have been born to see the kingdom and are entering the kingdom of God by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. Joh 3:3-5. Tit 3:5. Jesus Christ is 'the rich root of the olive tree'. Rom 11:17. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul described the Jews as 'the natural branches' of the olive tree who had been broken off because of their unbelief. Rom 11:20-21. Equally, he described the Gentiles as the branches of 'a wild olive tree' who had been grafted into the cultivated olive tree, by faith. Notably, Paul prophesied that there will be a harvest of sons of God from the Jewish nation who will come into the kingdom of God in the time of the end, along with the great harvest from all nations. Rom 11:25.

The fig tree describes *the true Israel of God*. Prior to the offering of Christ, the fig tree was used as a symbol of the nation of Israel as the natural descendants of Abraham. However, the offering of Christ established a new fig tree. The new fig tree is the house of Jacob that has 'come forth from the loins of Judah'. Isa 48:1. It has been called by God to become a *holy nation* that has been sanctified from all other tribes and nations. Significantly, the fig tree comprises all the worthy houses who have received the blessing of peace from Christ and His messengers. The prophet Micah declared, concerning all worthy houses in the time of the end, 'Everyone shall sit under his vine and *under his fig tree*, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.' Mic 4:4.

Two harvests of figs

We read in the Gospel of Luke that Jesus said, 'Look at the fig tree, and all the trees.' Luk 21:29. The phrase 'all the trees' simply refers to all of the nations. In this regard, all of the trees in the garden of Eden were types of 'the nations' that would grow and mature in their appointed seasons. For example, the nation of Assyria was likened to a great cedar tree in the garden of God. Eze 31:8. The 'beginning of birth pains' is an observable sign that indicates we are approaching the time of the end. When we consider 'all of the trees', we certainly observe the increasing anxiety, distress, and division among the nations of the world. The escalating

conflict in the Middle East is also part of the beginning of birth pains in relation to 'all the trees'.

Jesus did draw our attention to 'all of the trees'. However, it is important to note that He instructed us to *first* look at the fig tree. Our primary focus is the fig tree. Specifically, when we see the true Israel of God 'put forth its leaves', we know that Summer is near. Mat 24:32. Summer is the season of harvest. Significantly, most fig trees in the land of Israel produce two distinct harvests of figs each year. These two harvests that belong to the fig tree are clearly identified in the Scriptures. The Hebrew word *bikkurah* is used to describe the 'first ripe figs'. For example, the Lord declared, through the prophet Hosea, 'I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstfruits [Heb. *bikkurah*] on the fig tree in its first season.' Hos 9:10.

From a horticultural perspective, the 'first ripe figs', or the 'early figs', grew on the wood from the previous season, and began to grow before the fig tree put forth its new leaves in the Spring. Many of the early figs would not ripen properly and would easily fall to the ground. However, the early figs that continued to grow to maturity would produce a harvest in the late Spring or early Summer. The early harvest was often very small in quantity, but the quality of the fruit was greatly esteemed. The second batch of figs would begin to grow on the new wood in the springtime, but they would not ripen until the end of Summer or in early Autumn. This was *the main harvest* time of figs from a fig tree. It was much larger in quantity than the harvest of the early figs.

With this in view, when the fig tree 'puts forth its leaves', we know that we are approaching two harvests of figs - the early figs that ripen at the beginning of Summer and the main harvest of figs at the end of Summer. The book of Revelation clearly identifies both of these harvests that belong to the true Israel of God. The *early figs* are the 144 000, who will be sealed after the Father has taken His seat and before Christ begins to open the scroll with the seven seals. Rev 7:1-3. The 144 000 are the firstfruits of the fig tree in the time of the end. Rev 14:3. The *main harvest* will be the great multitude, from every tribe, nation, people, and tongue, who come into the true Israel of God during the opening of the seals. Rev 7:9. This main harvest will include one third of the people of the Jewish nation. Zec 13:8-9.

Further to this, the Scriptures also refer to 'unripe', 'untimely', or 'late' figs. An *unripe fig* can refer to an early fig that has been prematurely shaken from the tree so that it cannot come to maturity as part of the

early harvest. An unripe fig can also refer to a fig that should have been part of the main harvest, but did not ripen properly. In this case, an unripe fig could also be called 'a late fig'. A late fig that failed to ripen would often remain on the tree, even after the fig tree had lost its leaves in Winter. Such a fig had missed the season for its maturity. We read in the book of Revelation that, when the sixth seal is opened, the stars of heaven will begin to fall to the earth 'as a fig tree drops *its late figs* when it is shaken by a mighty wind'. Rev 6:13.

The kingdom of God is near

Jesus said, concerning the leaves on the fig tree, 'When you see all these things, know that it is near - at the doors!' Mat 24:33. When we read the companion verse in the Gospel of Luke, we know that 'it' specifically refers to 'the kingdom of God'. Jesus said, 'When you see these things happening, know that the *kingdom of God* is near.' Luk 21:31. In the first case, when the fig tree puts forth its leaves, it signifies that we are fast approaching the time when the Father will take His seat to initiate all of the events that belong to the time of the end. The Father will take His seat to judge the world and establish His kingdom on Earth. Mat 6:10. In the time of the end, the mountain of the Lord's house will be established above all of the nations, and it will fill the whole world. Dan 2:35. Isa 2:2.

This brings us to the obvious question: what does it look like when the fig tree puts forth its leaves? To answer this question, it is helpful to note that Jesus concluded His comments on the fig tree by saying, 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.' Mat 24:35. When Jesus made this statement, He summarised all of the content that belongs to the Elijah ministry. The central message of the Elijah ministry is, 'The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of God stands forever.' Isa 40:8. Jesus declared that the entire heavens and earth will pass away. Notably, He did this as *the source of the Elijah ministry*. As the One proclaiming the word of God that stands forever, He declared, 'My words will by no means pass away.'

When Jesus said, 'Heaven and earth will pass away', He was referring to the judgement that belongs to the great and terrible day of the Lord. Mal 4:1,5. Joe 2:11. The day of the Lord will commence when the Father takes His seat, and it will extend all the way to the dissolution of the present heavens and Earth at the end of the Millenium. The apostle Peter said, 'The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night [when the Father takes His seat], in which the heavens will pass away with a

great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?' 2Pe 3:10-11.

The Lord has promised to restore the Elijah ministry 'before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord' so that we know how to live in holy conduct and godliness. The Lord declared, through the prophet Malachi, 'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse'. Mal 4:5-6. The Elijah ministry has been given the authority to seek and to find worthy households. Messengers, who belong to the Elijah ministry, bring the gospel of peace to a house, and then minister the peace of God to those who receive this ministry.

When the Lord restores the Elijah ministry, it signifies that the kingdom of God is drawing near to each household in the church *before* the Father takes His seat in order to establish His kingdom in the world. Jesus declared that the kingdom of God is 'at the doors' because it is at the door of every household! Mar 13:29. Mat 24:33. When Jesus sent the seventy-two disciples to look for worthy houses, He instructed them to say to each house who received their ministry, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'. Luk 10:9. Equally, He instructed them to say to each city who rejected their ministry, 'The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near to you. But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city.' Luk 10:10-12.

The fruit of the fig tree

In relation to the restoration of the Elijah ministry, Jesus said to the presbytery and church in Laodicea, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.' Rev 3:20. As we approach the time of the end, the fruit of the restoration of the Elijah ministry in the church will be the restoration of *agape* fellowship in worthy houses. This is the blessing of peace that rests upon a worthy house who receives the ministry of Christ and His messengers. This brings us to the key point in relation to the fig tree. The restoration of *agape* fellowship in worthy houses, and then genuine house to house fellowship in extended families and church congregations, is the fig tree putting forth its green leaves.

Jesus continued to say, concerning this restoration, 'Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away until all these things take place.' Mat 24:34. We know that there is a generation who will witness the beginning of birth pains and still be alive and remaining when Jesus Christ physically returns. However, in relation to the fig tree putting forth its green leaves, Jesus was not referring to a generation of *spectators* who merely observe events happening in the world. He was referring to a generation of *participants* who belong to the fig tree putting forth its leaves. This generation of worthy houses becomes the firstfruits of the true Israel of God, with the evangelistic mandate to gather the great multitude from every nation.

The history of the fig tree

The Lord declared, through the prophet Hosea, 'I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season. But they went to Baal Peor and separated themselves to that shame; they became an abomination like the thing they loved.' Hos 9:10. The Hebrew word that is translated 'firstfruits' in this verse denotes the figs that belong to the early harvest. The lessons that were learned by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in relation to their own households, brought forth the first harvest of figs on the fig tree, in its first season. Isa 51:2.

In the days of the prophet Jeremiah, the Jewish nation was also described by the Lord as 'a fig tree'. The tribulation that was experienced by the Jewish nation in those days was a season of harvest. The judgement of God upon the nation had a polarising impact upon every household. After King Nebuchadnezzar had carried away many Jewish households to Babylon, the Lord showed the prophet Jeremiah, in a vision, 'two baskets of figs'. Jer 24:1. One basket contained very good figs, like the figs that ripen first. The other basket contained very bad figs, which could not be eaten. Jer 24:2.

The 'good figs' represented the remnant who had received the word of Jeremiah, and then humbled themselves under the judgement of God at the hands of the Babylonians. The Lord said concerning the good figs, 'I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land; I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart.' Jer 24:6-7. Foreshadowing the

ministry of the New Covenant, the Lord promised to set His eyes upon them for good and to give them a new heart by regeneration.

The 'bad figs' represented the people who had rejected the word of Jeremiah, and who had determined to stay in Judea or to look for refuge in Egypt. The Lord said concerning the bad figs, 'I will deliver them to trouble into all the kingdoms of the earth, for their harm, to be a reproach and a byword, a taunt and a curse, in all places which I shall drive them. And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence among them, till they are consumed from the land that I gave to them and their fathers.' Jer 24:9-10. The judgement upon the 'bad figs' in the days of Jeremiah, is a type of the judgement of God upon the unclean daughters of Zion during the opening of the seals in the time of the end.

The barren fig tree in the vineyard

Following their exile in Babylon, the Lord did replant the Jewish remnant as a fig tree in their own land. However, by the time that Jesus came, He used a parable to liken the Jewish nation to *a barren fig tree* in a vineyard. The owner of the vineyard looked for fruit on the fig tree, but he found nothing. He said to the keeper of the vineyard, 'Look, *for three years* I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' Luk 13:7. The keeper of the vineyard replied, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilise it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.' Luk 13:8-9.

In this parable, the owner of the vineyard represents the Father, and the keeper of the vineyard represents Christ. The Father was looking for the fruit of repentance from the Jewish nation as the natural fig tree. When John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah, he said to the Jewish leaders, 'Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father". For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.' Mat 3:7-10.

The opportunity for the Jewish nation to repent, began with the preaching of John the Baptist and continued during the earthly ministry of Jesus. It is likely that Jesus proclaimed the parable of the barren fig tree in the vineyard during the final year of His ministry. The purpose of the parable was to highlight to the Jewish nation that they needed to

produce the fruit of repentance, and that this was the final season of their visitation. In the week before His crucifixion, Jesus wept when He approached the city of Jerusalem. Luk 19:41. He wept and lamented because the entire nation had missed the season of their visitation.

When Jesus approached Jerusalem, riding on a colt in order to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah, He said concerning the Jews, 'If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.' Luk 19:42. He then prophesied of the coming judgement of God upon them, by saying, 'For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, *and your children within you*, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.' Luk 19:43-44.

The withered fig tree

The following day, Jesus walked with His disciples along the road from Bethany to the city of Jerusalem. Mark recorded that Jesus saw a fig tree with leaves. Mar 11:13. We know that this event happened in Spring because it was the final week before the Passover. Mark noted that it was not the season for figs. As we have considered, the season for figs is Summer. The harvest of the early figs happens at the beginning of Summer, and the main harvest of figs happens at the end of Summer. When a fig tree puts forth its leaves in Spring, it is reasonable to expect that the early figs will already be growing on the tree if there is going to be a harvest at the beginning of Summer.

When Jesus saw the leaves on the fig tree, He immediately went to look at the tree to see if He could find any early figs. When Jesus found no fruit, despite all of the leaves, He said to the tree, 'Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.' Mar 11:14. The disciples heard Jesus speak to the tree. The next morning, the disciples noticed that the fig tree had completely withered away. It had dried up from the roots. Mar 11:20-21. This is an interesting account. The tree was a living symbol of the Jewish nation. When the fig tree dried up from its roots, it signified the judgement of God that had been pronounced upon the Jewish nation as the natural fig tree.

There were two problems with the fig tree. The first was its lack of fruit. However, the second was its green leaves. The green leaves of the fig tree should have been accompanied by fruit. For a tree that has no fruit,

the green leaves are nothing more than a pretentious projection. The leaves are a deception. Jesus addressed the issue of having 'leaves but no fruit' when, in the temple, He directly confronted the scribes and Pharisees about their hypocrisy. Jesus repeatedly said, 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.' Mat 23:13. When Jesus said, 'Woe to you', it was the announcement of God's judgement upon the leaders of the nation.

More broadly, we could liken any household that maintains its own religious projection to be a fig tree that has green leaves and no fruit. We are reminded that, in the beginning, when Adam and Eve fell from fellowship with Yahweh, they immediately covered themselves with fig leaves. They sewed fig leaves together in a misguided attempt to cover the shame of their nakedness. Gen 3:7. The fig leaves represented the image, or projection, that they had created as a couple for their own marriage and household. Adam and Eve pretended that they belonged to 'a fig tree', but they did not have a worthy house! Of course, the fig leaves that they used had no capacity to hide the fallen relational dynamics in their marriage when the Lord came looking for fellowship.

In this present season, it is important that we allow the Lord to expose the fallen relational dynamics in our house, rather than trying to maintain a good religious image, and be like a fig tree with green leaves and no fruit. However, more importantly, we need to appreciate that the Lord is looking for fruit. The Lord is looking for houses who are becoming a context for fellowship because they are obedient to the word and committed to godly, sanctified living. The Lord has been restoring the Elijah ministry among us because He is looking for worthy houses as the beginning of a genuine house to house fellowship. We learn from the account of the withered fig tree that if we do not bring forth fruit in the season of our visitation, we will come under the judgement of God.

The new fig tree

We have considered the judgement upon the Jewish nation as the natural fig tree. However, it is important to recognise that, during His earthly ministry, Jesus also prepared the ground for a *new fig tree*. The new fig tree comprised worthy houses. When Jesus sent the twelve disciples to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, He commanded them to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God. Mat 10:6-7. As disciples of Christ, the twelve men were sent as messengers with a clear mandate for their

public ministry. Mat 10:8. However, in addition to their public ministry, Jesus also gave the twelve disciples the mandate to look for worthy houses.

Jesus said to the twelve disciples, 'Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. And when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.'

Mat 10:11-13. A worthy house does not proclaim its own worthiness. When the twelve disciples preached in a town or city, a potential worthy house would have become apparent because of its humble and repentant response to the word. Jesus instructed the disciples to then go and stay in that house for a season of fellowship.

The *greeting* of the messengers was an invitation for a season of fellowship with the house. The peace that belonged to the messengers was the fruit of their relational connection to Christ, having been personally disciplined by Him. The blessing of peace that came to the house was the fruit of a season of fellowship between the disciple-messengers of Christ and the household that had responded to their invitation and embraced their initiative toward them.

During the final year of His ministry, Jesus progressively set His face toward Jerusalem and His offering journey. Luk 9:51. Knowing that His offering and ascension to the right hand of the Father was approaching, Jesus focused His attention toward establishing a network of worthy houses who had been equipped for the work of caring for the early church after the Day of Pentecost. Jesus sent the seventy-two disciples to go before His face into every city and village where He was going to come. Luk 10:1.

Unlike the twelve disciples, the seventy-two disciples did not have a public ministry. Jesus told them not to greet anyone along the way. Luk 10:4. However, He did tell them to greet each house that they entered, by saying, 'Peace be to this house'. Luk 10:5. The seventy-two disciples were looking to find sons of peace. In the first case, they were looking for those who had already received the word that had been publicly proclaimed by Christ or the twelve disciples. A son of peace was already committed to the fellowship of the word. However, they still needed to be taught, or disciplined, in a fellowship with the Lord's messengers, before they could become a labourer in the Lord's harvest.

Christ is the Lord of the harvest. Luk 10:2. Joh 4:38. Mat 13:41. He is the great Shepherd of the sheep. The seventy-two disciples prepared the way for Him to come as *the Lord* of each worthy house. When Jesus asked the twelve disciples and the seventy-two disciples to pray for labourers to be sent into the harvest, He was referring to the unique work and labour that belongs to sons of peace in worthy houses. The labour that belongs to a worthy house includes the work of evangelism. Notably, it also includes the work of caring for the community of the church in a house to house fellowship.

The house of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus

The house of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus became the exemplar of a worthy house that belonged to the new fig tree. This house was in the town of Bethany, which was located on the south-eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. The name 'Bethany' means 'house of affliction' and 'house of figs'. Both of these meanings are appropriate. The house of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus did experience suffering, grief, and reproach for Christ's sake. However, as they each received His ministry toward them, they were equipped to care for Him as a worthy, firstfruits house.

Martha, Mary, and Lazarus demonstrated the attributes that belong to a worthy house. We know that Jesus addressed Martha concerning her anxiety when He first visited their house. Luk 10:38-42. However, after she was adjusted by Christ in this matter, Martha exemplified the culture of devotion to serving, caring, and hospitality. Mary exemplified the culture of devotion to the word of Christ and evangelism. It is notable that Bethany was called 'the town of Mary'. Joh 11:1. She evidently had a significant impact on the entire town. Lazarus obtained a unique testimony of resurrection life in His mortal body. He also learned to suffer persecution for Christ's sake. Joh 12:10.

It is significant that Jesus stayed in their home during the week before His crucifixion. Six days before His crucifixion, it was Mary who anointed the feet of Jesus for His offering journey, all the way to the cross, and then for His burial. Joh 12:7. The apostle John recorded that when Mary anointed the feet of Jesus, the entire house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Joh 12:2-3. Two days before His crucifixion, a woman anointed the head of Jesus in the house of Simon, the leper. Mar 14:3. The house of Simon was another worthy house in the town of Bethany that belonged to the new fig tree. In contrast to this, Jesus did not enter or stay in the

town of Bethphage, which was also located on the Mount of Olives. The name 'Bethphage' means 'house of unripe figs'.

The call to Nathanael

Having been called by Jesus to become a disciple, Philip went and found Nathanael. He boldly told Nathanael that they had found the Christ. Joh 1:45. He explained that it was Jesus of Nazareth. When Nathanael heard this, he cynically remarked, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Joh 1:46. Interestingly, when Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, He declared, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!'. Joh 1:47. When Jesus said, 'An Israelite indeed', it meant a 'true Israelite', someone who belongs to the 'true Israel of God'. Of course, Nathanael did not belong to the true Israel of God when he was first called to become a disciple. Rather, Jesus proclaimed the predestination that belonged to his name.

We are reminded that, from the beginning, Jesus also called Peter by his name. Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas.' Joh 1:42. The name 'Cephas' means 'a stone or rock'. Peter was predestined to be part of the living foundation of the church as the bride city. Mat 16:18. Rev 21:14. However, we know that he was not able to possess this name until he had been delivered from the deception of his own self-righteous image, in the court of Caiaphas, by meeting Christ eye to eye. After the resurrection of Christ, Peter was able to receive from Christ, on the shore of Galilee, the mandate that belonged to his name. Joh 21:15-19.

In the same way, Nathanael needed to be delivered from his own deceit, by meeting Christ eye to eye, before he could become an Israelite 'in whom is no deceit'. This is true for all of us who belong to the house of Jacob that has come forth from the loins of Judah, through the offering of Christ. Isa 48:1. Like Peter and Jacob, we need to be converted before we can inherit our name as part of the true Israel of God. When Jesus called Nathanael by name, He proclaimed the same call that belongs to the 144 000 as the firstfruits of the true Israel of God in the time of the end. The apostle John described the 144 000, by saying, 'In their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.' Rev 14:5.

When Jesus called him by name, Nathanael responded by saying, 'How do you know me?' Jesus continued by saying, 'Before Philip called you, when

you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’ Joh 1:48. This is a significant statement. Nathanael may well have been under a natural fig tree when Philip called him. However, Jesus saw him as a man under his fig tree *before* Philip called him. Indeed, before the foundation of the world, he was predestined to be a man under his fig tree. In the prophetic Scriptures, the phrase ‘under his vine and fig tree’ described a man who belongs to the body of Christ (the vine), who also has a worthy house in the true Israel of God (the fig tree).

The prophet Micah declared, ‘It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths”. For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from [the heavenly] Jerusalem ... everyone shall sit under his vine and *under his fig tree*, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.’ Mic 4:1-2,4.

In the time of the end, worthy houses who belong to the true Israel of God, will be places of provision and protection during the opening of the seals. The prophet Isaiah said, ‘Come, my people, enter into your rooms and close your doors behind you; hide a little while until indignation runs its course.’ Isa 26:20. However, at the same time, worthy houses will also be the context for the evangelistic ministry of the church. The 144 000 will comprise a network of worthy houses that is suitable to gather the great multitude from every tribe, nation, people, and tongue. Speaking about the day of the Lord that will commence when the Father takes His seat, the prophet Zechariah declared, ‘In that day ... everyone will invite his neighbour under his vine and under his fig tree’. Zec 3:10.

Chapter Three

The end of the age

Jesus completed His final public sermon in the temple by lamenting the unwillingness of the Jewish nation to repent in response to the gospel of peace. Mat 23:37-39. He then departed from the temple for the last time, never to set foot inside its walls again. As Jesus walked to the Mount of Olives, the disciples asked about the beautiful buildings that belonged to the temple precinct. Jesus said to them, 'Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.' Mat 24:2.

Once they had reached the Mount of Olives, the disciples asked Jesus two important questions. In relation to the destruction of the temple, they asked, 'When will these things be?' In addition to this question, they asked, 'And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?' Mat 24:3. It is helpful to remember that Jesus was answering both of these questions. Some of His prophetic statements had both *a short-term* fulfilment and *a long-term* fulfilment.

Jesus did describe the events that would precede the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. We know that this happened within forty years of His crucifixion. The temple and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed by the Romans, led by Prince Titus, in AD70. However, we note that the

destruction of the temple was not His major focus. Rather, when we consider the prophetic statements of Jesus, we find a comprehensive description of the events that will precede the end of the age.

Jesus repeatedly referred to 'the end'. He made statements such as 'the end is not yet', 'he who endures to the end will be saved', and 'then the end will come'. Mat 24:6,13,14. Notably, it is the blowing of the seventh trumpet that announces the end of the age and heralds the physical coming of Christ. 1Th 4:16. The seventh trumpet will begin to blow seven years before the physical second coming of Christ. Rev 11:15. It will continue to blow until the end of the present 'heavens and earth' and the inauguration of 'the new heavens and the new earth'. Rev 21:1.

False messengers

Jesus began His response to the disciples by saying, 'Take heed that no-one deceives you.' Mat 24:4. He said that there will be many false messengers who will presume to speak in the name of Christ and will claim to be anointed by God for their ministry. These false messengers will propagate false gospels and will deceive many believers. Mat 24:5. We know that there have been many false messengers during the entire church age. It is notable that the propagation of false gospels will increase as we approach the end of the age.

The false gospels in the church also include many different false teachings on eschatology. We could compare the prevalence of these false teachings in our day with the words of the false prophets who presumed to minister in the name of the Lord in the days of the prophet Jeremiah. We recall that Jeremiah prophesied before, and then during, the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. This period of great tribulation was God's judgement upon the Jewish nation because of their disobedience and idolatry.

Jeremiah proclaimed the coming judgement of God and gave all the people a simple choice. He set before them the way of life and the way of death. Jer 21:8. In those days, Jeremiah proclaimed the way of escape for the believing remnant by instructing them to humble themselves under the hand of God by being taken captive to Babylon. Jeremiah declared that if the people did not submit themselves to being taken into exile, they would be consumed by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. Jer 21:9. Jer 14:12. We note that these are the same judgements that will come upon the whole world when Christ opens the second, third and fourth seals in the time of the end.

However, during this same time, there were also many false prophets in the land. In direct opposition to Jeremiah, the false prophets did not accept that God was going to judge the nation. They did not call the people to repentance. Rather, they said to the people, 'You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.' Jer 14:13. We could liken these false prophets to religious leaders who bless the idols in the hearts of their followers in our day. Eze 14:4,8-10. They do not recognise, nor accept, that the Father will take His seat to bring the idolatry of all men to judgement.

The Lord pronounced that the false prophets who vainly promised peace would be consumed by the same judgement as were their unrepentant hearers. He said, 'The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who prophesy in My name, whom I did not send, and who say, "Sword and famine shall not be in this land"- By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed!" ' Jer 14:14-15.

Jeremiah further declared to the people, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord. They continually say to those who despise Me, 'The Lord has said, "You shall have peace", and to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, "No evil shall come upon you". For who has stood in the counsel of the Lord, and has perceived and heard His word?' Jer 23:16-18.

Jeremiah continued to say concerning the coming judgement, 'Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord has gone forth in fury - a violent whirlwind! It will fall violently on the head of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not turn back until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart.' Jer 23:19-20. Jeremiah was referring to the judgement of God upon the nation of Israel in his day. However, he was referring also to the judgement of God upon the world in the time of the end. We know this because he concluded by stating, '*In the latter days* you will understand it perfectly.' Jer 23:20.

The prophetic word to the nations

It is important to recognise that Jeremiah was not only appointed to be a prophet to the Jewish nation. He was also appointed to be 'a prophet to

the nations'. When the Lord first called Jeremiah, He said, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.' Jer 1:5. The Lord placed His words in the mouth of Jeremiah and gave him authority over nations and kingdoms. The word that was given to him had the authority to root out and to pull down while, at the same time, it had the authority to build and to plant.

The word of Jeremiah had a specific application to the Jews who would be uprooted from the land of Israel and taken captive to the land of Babylon. After seventy years, a remnant would return to be planted again in their homeland. The temple and the city of Jerusalem would be rebuilt. However, we know that the remnant of the Jewish nation was uprooted again through the offering of Christ. Mat 3:10. The Law Covenant that God had made with the nation of Israel was brought to a complete end. Jeremiah declared that the Lord would make *a new covenant* with both the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Jer 31:31.

The New Covenant belongs to the true Israel of God. Isa 48:1. The true Israel of God was formed by Christ, in His physical body, while He was being chastened for our peace in the court of Caiaphas. Eph 2. The true Israel of God includes both Jews and Gentiles in the one body of Christ. During the church age, the true Israel of God has been sown into all the nations of the world as 'the elect' who belong to Christ's lampstand churches. Jeremiah prophesied that the Lord would gather His elect from the nations in the time of the end. Jer 31:28.

As the prophet to the nations, Jeremiah declared, 'Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it to the isles afar off, and say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock". For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he. Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, streaming to the goodness of the Lord for wheat and new wine and oil, for the young of the flock and the herd; their souls shall be like a well-watered garden, and they shall sorrow no more at all.' Jer 31:10-12.

Notably, after Jeremiah received the mandate for his ministry, his first prophetic vision was of the branch of an almond tree. Jer 1:11. This vision revealed the instrument that the Lord would use to fulfil the prophetic word of Jeremiah, including the harvest of a great multitude from every nation in the time of the end. 'The branch of an almond tree' is a lampstand church. The Lord said to Jeremiah concerning the vision

of the almond branch, 'You have seen well, for I am ready to perform My word.' Jer 1:12. The Lord speaks to the nations, and will accomplish His purpose through the ministry of lampstand churches.

In Jeremiah's second vision, he saw a boiling pot that was facing away from the north. Jer 1:13. This vision revealed that the Lord's irrevocable judgement was coming from the North and that it would overtake every person who did not respond with repentance and faith to the word of Jeremiah. 'The boiling pot from the north' represented God's judgement upon the Jews at the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar from the nation of Babylon. However, more than this, the boiling pot from the north represents the coming judgement of God upon the inhabitants of the whole world at the hands of Gog and Magog when the second seal is opened.

Wars – the second seal

Having warned us about false messengers who will proclaim false peace in the face of God's judgement, Jesus began to describe the events that will precede the end of the age. He said that there will be 'wars and rumours of wars'. Mat 24:6. Of course, there have been many wars throughout the church age. However, the continual *reporting* of wars is a much more recent phenomenon that belongs to the seventh world kingdom. It has been made possible only because of the rapid advancement of technology, including the internet. It is now possible to have continual media coverage of an armed conflict that is happening anywhere in the world.

In relation to the wars and the reporting of wars, Jesus said, 'See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but *the end is not yet*.' Mat 24:6. He continued to say that 'nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom'. Mat 24:7. The United Nations was formed in the aftermath of the second world war for the sake of promoting global peace and prosperity. However, the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's prophetic dream teaches us that the seventh world kingdom is *a divided kingdom*. Dan 2:41-43. It describes the ongoing division between the Eastern and the Western nations. However, it is also characterised by the division between 'the iron and the clay'.

The conflicts that are presently happening in the world belong to *the beginning of birth pains* which commence before the Father takes His seat. They are harbingers of the global conflict that will envelop the entire world after the Father has taken His seat, and Christ has begun to

open the scroll with its seven seals. Specifically, when Christ opens the second seal, peace will be taken from Earth. The apostle John described the opening of the second seal by saying, 'Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword.' Rev 6:4.

The opening of the second seal will precipitate a worldwide war that will continue until the opening of the sixth seal. This will be a time of unprecedented conflict and distress for all nations. It will also be a time of great persecution for the church. Jesus said, 'For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.' Mat 24:21-22. The days will be shortened when God sovereignly judges the armies of Gog and Magog at the opening of the sixth seal.

Ezekiel described the judgement of the armies of Gog and Magog in detail. Eze 38-39. The judgement of Gog and Magog on the mountains of Israel will reveal to the nations the fury in the face of God and the wrath of the Lamb. Eze 38:18,23. We read in the book of Revelation that the leaders of the seventh world kingdom will say to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?' Rev 6:16-17.

Notably, the Lord described the slaughter of Gog and Magog to the prophet Ezekiel as 'My sacrificial meal'. He said to Ezekiel, 'Speak to every sort of bird and to every beast of the field: "Assemble yourselves and come; gather together from all sides to My sacrificial meal which I am sacrificing for you, a great sacrificial meal on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood".' Eze 39:17. Jesus was referring to this same sacrificial meal when He said to the disciples, 'Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.' Mat 24:28.

The destruction of the weapons and rearmament for Armageddon

Following this great judgement, it will take seven months to bury the bodies, and seven years to burn all of the weapons. Eze 39:9,12. The seven years to burn the weapons belongs to the opening of the sixth seal. The overseers who belong to the presbytery, with its twenty-four divisions around the throne of the Father, will instruct the rulers of the

seventh world kingdom to destroy all of their armaments. Remarkably, the fear of God will compel the world's leaders to obey this instruction. Isaiah declared that the nations 'will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks'. Isa 2:4.

Following the opening of the sixth seal, no nation will lift up a sword against another nation again. Isa 2:4. The nations will not be rearmed until the time of the sole reign of Antichrist over the eighth world kingdom for three and half years. During that time, the nations will be rearmed and then gathered by Antichrist to the battle of Armageddon. Rev 16:16. We note that the battle of Armageddon will not be another world war. It will not be nation against nation. Rather, Antichrist will lead the armies of all the nations against Christ and His saints. Rev 19:19. The battle of Armageddon will coincide with the physical second coming of Christ at the end of the reign of Antichrist.

When Christ physically returns, He will capture Antichrist and the false prophet, and will throw them alive into the lake of fire. Rev 19:20. The kings of the earth and all of their armies will then be killed by the sword that proceeds from the mouth of Christ. Rev 19:21. The book of Revelation describes this slaughter as 'the supper of the great God'. Rev 19:17. In a similar way to the opening of the sixth seal, the birds of heaven will again be called to feast on the flesh of those who will be slain. In this regard, we note that there are some similarities between the opening of the sixth seal and Armageddon. However, it is important that we do not confuse or conflate the two events.

Further, it is important that we understand the distinction between the opening of the sixth seal, the battle of Armageddon, and the final judgement of all ungodly persons from every generation, at the end of the Millennium. 2Pe 3:7. When Satan is released from the abyss at the end of the Millennium, 'the ungodly' will be raised in their mortal and corruptible bodies. Rev 20:7. In this case, the book of Revelation uses the name 'Gog and Magog' to symbolically describe all of the ungodly people who have died since the beginning of creation. Rev 20:8. Led by Satan, the ungodly will surround the camp of the saints for war, before they are sovereignly consumed by fire from heaven. Rev 20:9.

Famines – the third seal

Returning to the events described by Jesus in Matthew Chapter 24, He also said, 'There will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.' Mat 24:7. There are presently famines in the world because of

various conflicts, corruption and inflation. These famines belong to the time of the beginning of birth pains before the Father takes His seat. However, after the Father has taken His seat, and Christ has opened the third seal, the trading system that belongs to the seventh world kingdom will be impacted by unprecedented economic upheaval and scarcity of resources.

The apostle John described the opening of the third seal by saying, 'I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a Voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine".' Rev 6:5-6. In the first case, this statement describes rampant inflation. In the Scriptures, a *denarius* is the equivalent of a day's wages. A *quart of wheat* is approximately the size of a loaf of bread.

The voice that comes from the middle of the four living creatures belongs to Christ as the Lamb of God standing in the middle of the Father's throne. When the third seal is opened, the Lamb will also proclaim, 'Do not harm the oil and the wine.' Rev 6:6. The 'wine' is the fruit of the vine. Jesus used the vine and the branches to describe the fellowship of the body of Christ. Joh 15:5. The 'oil' is the fruit of the olive tree. The apostle Paul used the olive tree to describe the kingdom of God. Rom 11. It comprises sons of God who have been illuminated to *see the kingdom*, who are also being saved to *enter the kingdom* by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit each day. Joh 3:3-5. Tit 3:5.

During the opening of the seals, the church will experience the same events and circumstances that will befall the entire world. However, in the middle of these circumstances, the Lamb, who is our great Shepherd, will be leading us to the 'springs of the water of life'. Rev 7:17. Our provision and protection will be the grace of Christ's resurrection life in the fellowship of the Father's *agape* meal. In a similar manner to that of the early church in Jerusalem, there will also be a practical fellowship of offering that will sustain the members of the body of Christ and the citizens of the bride city so that there will be no lack among the Lord's people. Act 2:42-47. Act 4:32-37.

We also note that 'the oil and the wine' describe the harvest that belongs to the Feast of Tabernacles. The celebration of the true Feast of Tabernacles will commence when the Father takes His seat and *spreads His tabernacle* over all of the inhabitants of Mount Zion who have

responded to Christ's cleansing initiative toward them. Isa 4:5-6. We know that, in addition to the remnant from Christ's lampstand churches, there will be a great multitude from every nation who will come into the kingdom of God to celebrate the true Feast of Tabernacles in the time of the end. Rev 7:15-17.

The fall of the economy of Babylon

As we have considered, the opening of the third seal will cause major economic upheaval that will lead to rampant inflation. This will be a major failure of the economic system of Babylon. However, this will not be the end of the trading system that belongs to the administration of Babylon. Even when the political and military power of the seventh world kingdom has been completely shattered at the opening of the sixth seal, the economy of Babylon will continue to function in the world. It will continue to operate during the seven years during which 'the mountain of the Lord's house' will be established over the nations.

The blowing of the second trumpet will announce the fall of the economic system of Babylon. John described the second trumpet by saying, 'And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood.' Rev 8:8. The prophet Jeremiah identified that Babylon is the 'burnt mountain'. Jer 51:25. The impact of the fall of the economy of Babylon is expanded in Chapter 18 of the book of Revelation. We particularly read concerning all the businessmen in the world that 'the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no-one buys their merchandise anymore'. Rev 18:11.

Even though the economy of Babylon will fall at the blowing of the second trumpet, it will not be replaced by Antichrist until after the blowing of the seventh trumpet. When Antichrist revives the seventh world kingdom to become the eighth world kingdom, he will replace the trading system of Babylon with a new economic system. The false prophet will be the one who implements this new economic system. Rev 13:11-18. The use of money as a measure of wealth and as a medium of exchange will come to an end. We read in the book of Revelation, 'No-one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name'. Rev 13:16-17.

Pestilences – the fourth seal

In addition to the wars and famines, Jesus also identified that there will be pestilences as we approach the end of the age. Mat 24:7. A pestilence is an infectious disease. In the normal course of life, a pestilence is simply a symptom of mortality that is the outcome of the fall of man. However, there are also numerous examples in Scripture when pestilence was the manifestation of the specific judgement of God. For example, when the men of Israel committed harlotry with the women of Moab, the Lord sent a plague that killed twenty-four thousand people before the godly intervention of Phinehas. Num 25:1-9. 2Sa 24:15.

The pestilence that will be released on Earth when Christ opens the fourth seal will be an unprecedented manifestation of God's judgement on mankind. John described the opening of the fourth seal by saying, 'I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with the sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.' Rev 6:8.

We know that the sword belongs to the opening of the second seal, and the famine belongs to the opening of the third seal. The 'death' that will be the result of pestilence and wild beasts belongs to the opening of the fourth seal. It is remarkable to consider that the cumulative impact of the opening of these three seals will be the death of one quarter of the world's population. This means that over 2 billion people will die under the judgement of God in a reasonably short period of time. 'Death and Hell' will then continue to ride throughout the time of the end.

Another major manifestation of death under the judgement of God will occur at the blowing of the sixth trumpet. Rev 9:13-21. When the sixth trumpet is blown, the four angels who are presently bound at the great river Euphrates will be released to kill one third of mankind within one year. Rev 9:14-15. The four angels will lead a host of 200 million fallen angels. John described this great demonic horde as having 'heads like lions and tails like serpents'. Notably, they will have no power to harm or kill anyone who has the seal of the living God on their forehead.

Earthquakes – the sixth seal

Jesus said that there will also be earthquakes as we approach the end of the age. Mat 24:7. We know that earthquakes are a common occurrence in the world, particularly in certain regions. In the most generic sense,

an earthquake bears witness to the impact of the fall of man upon the natural environment as well as man's inability to control his natural environment. More specifically, if the world's fault lines were caused by the flood, then each subsequent earthquake is a small reminder of the judgement of God in the days of Noah, and is a small harbinger of the coming judgement of God in the end of the age. 2Pe 3:3-5.

Jesus drew our attention to 'earthquakes in various places' that belong to the beginning of birth pains before the Father takes His seat. However, when Christ opens the sixth seal, there will be a great earthquake that will impact the entire world to some degree. John recorded, 'I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was *a great earthquake*; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood'. Rev 6:12. Remarkably, the impact of this great earthquake is that every mountain and island will be moved out of its place. Rev 6:14.

Further, when we continue to read the book of Revelation, we observe that many of the major waypoints in the time of the end will be accompanied by earthquakes. For example, the opening of the seventh seal, the blowing of the seventh trumpet, and the resurrection of Moses and Elijah to mortality at the end of their ministry will all be accompanied by earthquakes. Rev 8:5. Rev 11:19. Rev 11:13. The earthquake at the end of the ministry of Moses and Elijah, specifically, will kill seven thousand people.

The greatest of all earthquakes will occur after the seven vials that contain the fullness of the wrath of God have been poured out upon Antichrist and the eighth world kingdom. We read concerning the outpouring of the seventh vial, 'There were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was *a great earthquake* as had not occurred since men were on the earth'. Rev 16:18. Interestingly, the physical second coming of Christ for the battle of Armageddon will not be accompanied by an earthquake.

Persecution – the fifth seal

Jesus also identified the persecution that the church will experience during the opening of the seals, and warned us that there will be many martyrs. He said, 'Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.' Mat 24:9-10. Jesus specifically identified the issue of *betrayal* in

the church because it is the transgression that causes the church, and particularly the messengers of Christ, to be trampled by the world.

The persecution of the church during the opening of the seals will reach its climax at the opening of the fifth seal. John said, 'I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.' Rev 6:9-11.

After the seventh trumpet has been blown, Moses and Elijah will minister for three and a half years. Rev 11:3-4. The fruit of their ministry will be a final harvest of martyrs who will be killed when they believe the gospel of God and therefore refuse to worship Antichrist and his new image for man. Rev 14:9-13. At the end of their ministry, Moses and Elijah will also be killed as the final two martyrs. Rev 11:7. Following their resurrection to mortality after three and a half days, the Lord will then answer the prayer of all the martyrs under the altar by pouring out upon Antichrist and the eighth world kingdom the seven vials that contain the fullness of His wrath. Rev 15.

Testimony – the first seal

In the first part of His prophetic statement to the disciples, Jesus clearly identified the major events that will accompany the opening of the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth seals. He then returned to focus on the opening of the first seal by saying, 'This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.' Mat 24:14. John said regarding the opening of the first seal, 'I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.' Rev 6:2.

When the first seal is opened, the 144 000, who are the firstfruits of the true Israel of God, will be sent into all nations to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom. Rev 7:1-8. The fruit of their evangelistic ministry in the time of the end will be 'a great multitude from every tribe, nation, people, and tongue'. Rev 7:9-17. During the opening of the seals, every person in the world will hear the gospel of God and will be given the opportunity to

make a response to the word that has been proclaimed to them. For this reason, the people of the world will be polarised by the gospel of God.

Every person who comes into the kingdom of God in the time of the end will need to be clothed in a white, priestly robe that has been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. Rev 7:9. This means that every son of God must embrace their own unique participation in the seven wounding events of Christ. If they do not embrace this fellowship, they will not be saved from sin through the process of regeneration. Neither will they learn the obedience that belongs to their own sanctification. A person who is offended by the need to learn obedience will stumble and fall away to perdition.

There will be a notable portion of the great harvest that will fall away in the time of the end. With this in view, Jesus said, 'He who endures to the end will be saved.' Mat 24:13. During the blowing of the trumpets, the great falling away will be manifest as the heavenly sanctuary is finally cleansed. As we have already considered, 'the end' will be announced by the blowing of the seventh trumpet. The seventh trumpet will begin to blow seven years before the physical second coming of Christ. It will continue to blow until the end of the present 'heavens and earth' and the inauguration of 'the new heavens and new earth'.

Chapter Four

The opening of the sixth seal

Jesus described the opening of the sixth seal, by saying, 'Wherever the carcass is, there the eagles [lit. vultures] will be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.' Mat 24:28-30.

When we consider this passage, we observe that Jesus described *three major events* that belong to the opening of the sixth seal. The *first* is the slaughter of Gog and Magog on the mountains of Israel. The *second* is the signs that will appear in the natural universe, which indicate that the dissolution of the present heavens and earth is at hand. These signs accompany the judgement of God that belongs to 'the day of the Lord'. The *third* is the sign of the Son of Man that will appear in the heavenly places, which will lead to a great harvest from every tribe, nation, people, and tongue.

The judgement of Gog and Magog

When Jesus Christ opens the second seal in the time of the end, peace will be taken from the earth. The opening of the second seal will initiate a period of great conflict between nations and unprecedented distress in the world. This period of conflict will be unlike anything that the world has experienced before. It will bring the whole of humanity to the brink of destroying itself. Mat 24:22. When the sixth seal is opened, Christ will sovereignly intervene in the affairs of men, for the sake of the elect, by slaughtering the armies of Gog and Magog on the mountains of Israel.

Jesus described the outcome of this judgement by saying, 'Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.' Mat 24:28. This short and succinct statement by Jesus is a summary of the judgement of Gog and Magog, which is extensively described in the books of Ezekiel and Zechariah. The Lord revealed to the prophet Ezekiel that, in the time of the end, He will bring the armies of Gog and Magog down to the land of Israel. Eze 38:15-16. It is important that we do not confuse Gog with Antichrist. Gog is the king of the north. Eze 38:2. Dan 11:40. He is one of the ten kings, or rulers, who belong to the seventh world kingdom.

During the opening of the seals, a particular focal point of the world-wide conflict will be in the land of Israel. The armies of Gog and Magog will be an instrument of judgement in the Lord's hand, in the same way that the army of Prince Titus was an instrument of judgement upon the Jewish nation in AD70. However, in contrast to AD70, when the whole city of Jerusalem was captured and destroyed, we read in the book of Zechariah that only *half of the city* will be captured in the time of the end. Zec 14:2. The believing remnant among the Jewish nation will be among those who are preserved by the Lord.

During this time of severe judgement, at the hands of Gog and Magog, one third of the Jewish nation will receive the gospel of God and learn to call upon the name of the Lord to be saved. Zec 13:8-9. The season of judgement will become a trial of faith for the sons of God who embrace their unique participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. When the Lord has completed His refining work in their lives, He will then judge the armies of Gog and Magog on the mountains of Israel. The prophet Zechariah declared, 'Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle.' Zec 14:3.

The Lord declared, through the prophet Ezekiel, 'And it will come to pass at the same time, when Gog comes against the land of Israel ... that My

fury will show in My face.’ Eze 38:18. The Lord will cause the armies of Gog and Magog to become confused, to panic, and to fight against one another. Every man’s sword will be against his brother. Furthermore, He said, ‘I will bring him to judgement with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.’ Eze 38:22-23.

Notably, the Lord referred to this great slaughter as ‘My sacrificial meal’. He instructed the prophet Ezekiel to invite all of the birds to come and feast upon the dead bodies of the slain. He said, ‘Speak to every sort of bird and to every beast of the field: “Assemble yourselves and come; gather together from all sides to My sacrificial meal which I am sacrificing for you. A great sacrificial meal on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood ... You shall eat fat till you are full, and drink blood until you are drunk, at My sacrificial meal which I am sacrificing for you.” ’ Eze 39:17,19. As we have considered, Jesus described this specific event, when He said, ‘Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.’ Mat 24:28.

The judgement of the armies of Gog and Magog on the mountains of Israel is a harbinger for the judgement of Antichrist, along with the armies of all the kings of the earth, at the battle of Armageddon. In relation to this battle, the apostle John heard an angel invite all of the birds of heaven to gather for ‘the supper of the great God’. The angel said, ‘Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.’ Rev 19:17-18.

The sun will be darkened

Jesus identified the second major event that belongs to the opening of the sixth seal, when He said, ‘Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.’ Mat 24:29. The apostle John described this same event in the book of Revelation. He said, ‘I looked when He [Christ] opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of

the heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind.' Rev 6:12-13.

The judgement of God upon the present heavens and earth has already been accomplished on the day of Christ's crucifixion. When the sun is darkened at the opening of the sixth seal, it will be the sign that this judgement will soon be fulfilled in the end of the age. It is important to appreciate that Christ has already judged and finished the present heavens and earth on the cross. Jesus highlighted this reality when He said to the multitudes, 'Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, *until heaven and earth pass away*, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.' Mat 5:17-18.

The simple point is that Christ fulfilled the Law and abolished the present heavens and earth on His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. Remarkably, the sun, as the source of the natural light and life of the world, was struck by God at the sixth hour. As Christ hung on the cross, deep darkness covered the entire world from the sixth hour, which is midday, to the ninth hour, which is around 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Mar 15:33. When Matthew, Mark, and Luke recorded this event, they were not simply referring to a solar eclipse being experienced in the local Jerusalem area. The sun itself was darkened; it was not simply obscured from view. The sun itself did not shine on the entire world for three whole hours! Luk 23:44-45.

Speaking about the day of Christ's crucifixion, the prophet Amos declared, ' "And it shall come to pass in that day", says the Lord God, "That I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight; I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring sackcloth on every waist, and baldness on every head; I will make it like mourning for an only son, and its end like a bitter day." ' Amo 8:9-10. During those three hours of great darkness, Christ took the entire first creation out into the sea of God's forgetfulness.

In this regard, the present heavens and earth have already passed away under the judgement of God on the day of Christ's crucifixion. It is already finished! However, on that same day, we know that Jesus Christ also brought the new creation, in Himself, out of the waters of God's judgement and back to God. The new creation includes everything that belongs to the new heavens and new earth. It was an expression of the mercy of God to reactivate the light of the sun at the ninth hour, at the

conclusion of Christ's offering journey. The entire natural creation is now preserved by the prophetic word of God. However, it is also reserved, by this same prophetic word, for judgement in the end of the age.

In his second letter, the apostle Peter reminded us that the present heavens and earth were created by the word of God. He then declared, 'The heavens and the earth which *are now preserved by the same word*, are reserved for fire until the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men.' 2Pe 3:7. The present heavens and earth are preserved by the prophetic word of God to give all men the opportunity to escape the judgement that has already been pronounced on the old creation. The only way of escape is to call upon the name of the Lord by being baptised into His death, burial, and resurrection. 1Pe 3:21. We are saved from our sin only by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit in the fellowship of Christ's offering. Tit 3:5.

The present heavens and earth are being preserved by the prophetic word of God for the purpose of giving all men the opportunity for repentance. However, we are fast approaching the time when the Father will take His seat to begin judging the world. The apostle Peter continued, 'The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.' 2Pe 3:9-10.

When the sun is darkened at the opening of the sixth seal, it will be a profound reminder of the same event that happened on the day of Christ's crucifixion. It will signify that the present heavens and earth have already been abolished by Christ's offering. Furthermore, it will be the irrevocable sign that the opportunity for man's repentance is coming to an end and the final judgement of God upon the present heavens and earth is at hand. Jesus foretold that this event would cause great distress among the nations. The hearts of men will be consumed by fear because of their expectation of the things which will come upon the earth. Luk 21:26.

The prophet Isaiah described this time by saying, 'Wail, for the day of the Lord is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will fall limp, and every man's heart will melt. They will be terrified, pains and anguish will take hold of them; they will writhe like a woman in labour, they will look at one another in astonishment,

their faces aflame. Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; *the sun will be dark* when it rises and the moon will not shed its light.' Isa 13:6-10.

Isaiah also declared, 'The earth is violently broken, the earth is split open, the earth is shaken exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall totter like a hut; its transgression shall be heavy upon it, and it will fall, and not rise again. It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord will punish on high the host of exalted ones, and on the earth the kings of the earth. They will be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in a pit, and will be shut up in prison; after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be disgraced, and the sun ashamed; for the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before His elders, gloriously.' Isa 24:19-23.

The sign of the Son of Man

Jesus identified the third major event that belongs to the opening of the sixth seal when He said, 'Then the sign of *the Son of Man will appear in heaven*, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.' Mat 24:30. The appearance of *the sign* of the Son of Man in the heavens is not the physical second coming of Christ. It is important that we do not confuse the *sign* of the Son of Man with the *Person* of the Son of Man. When Jesus Christ physically returns, we will not see a sign - *we will see Him!* Referring to the physical second coming of Christ, the apostle John wrote, 'Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for *we shall see Him as He is*.' 1Jn 3:2.

We have already considered that when the sun and moon are darkened, it will be the sign that the end of the present heavens and earth is at hand. However, the signs in the natural universe are not the same as the sign of the Son of Man that will appear in heaven. When Jesus spoke of 'heaven', He was not referring to the first heaven that belongs to the physical creation. Nor was He referring to the second heaven that belongs to the angelic administration. He was referring to the third heaven, which is the top of Mount Zion. 2Co 12:2. The top of Mount Zion is the place of the true temple, which is the body of Christ, and the heavenly Jerusalem, which is the bride of Christ.

The *sign* of the Son of Man that will appear in heaven is clearly identified in the book of Revelation. It is called a great sign! 'Now *a great sign appeared in heaven*: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labour and in pain to give birth.' Rev 12:1-2. It is remarkable to consider that *the sign* of the Son of Man will be a glorified woman! In this regard, we are reminded that Paul wrote to the Corinthians that the 'woman is the glory of man'. 1Co 11:7. The apostle John saw this woman in the heavenly places, so we know that this was not a vision of Eve or Mary. It was a vision of the glorified church, as the bride of Christ, in the time of the end.

The glorified Son of Man

We know that Jesus Christ was glorified as the Son of Man on His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. Joh 12:23. When His offering had been completed, a soldier pierced the side of His physical body with a spear. Joh 19:34. The blood, water, and the Spirit of grace and supplication that flowed from His side comprised 'the rib' that was taken from His physical body to form the church as His bride.

Gen 2:21-22. On the day of His physical resurrection, Christ was raised as the glorified Son of Man. He was revealed as the first Man in the image and likeness of God. Rom 8:29. 2Co 3:18. Christ was also raised to be the immortal Head of His body and His bride.

It is important to recognise that Christ is the Head of the church as the *glorified Son of Man*, not simply the incarnate Son of God. Christ did not become the last Adam until He became the glorified Son of Man.

1Co 15:45. The rib, from which the church is presently being formed, was taken from the side of Christ as *the last Adam*. Jesus Christ is the last Adam as the first Man in the image and likeness of God and *the Husband* of the virgin church. However, the name of Christ as *Everlasting Father* will not be fully revealed until the day of resurrection. Isa 9:6. The spiritual resurrection body that we will receive on the day of resurrection will be the fruit of the consummation of the marriage between Christ and the church.

In this present age, the ministry of the virgin bride of Christ is to bring forth sons of God by the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul declared that the church has been married to Christ, by covenant, for the purpose of bearing *fruit for God*. Rom 7:4. In the first case, the 'fruit for God' describes the children who are brought forth by Christian parents who

have a remnant of the Spirit in their marriage. As soon as the child is conceived as a new identity in the womb of their mother, the Father sends forth the Spirit of His Son into their heart and they are born as a son of God by the Holy Spirit. The Father also places them, by the Spirit, into the fellowship of the body of Christ. In the second case, the evangelistic ministry of the church also brings forth sons of God.

Every son of God must then proceed to be baptised into the name above every name that has been given to the glorified Son of Man. Act 2:36. When we are baptised into the name that has been given to Christ, we are joined to the context and the process in which the Son of God became the glorified Son of Man. Christ was glorified as the Son of Man through the seven wounding events that He suffered from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. In the fellowship of these seven wounding events, we are being saved through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. Tit 3:5. We are being saved from sin as the other law is circumcised from our heart. However, more than this, as our heart is being regenerated and renewed, we are receiving 'a new heart'. Eze 36:26. Rom 5:5. We are becoming *new-creation* sons of men.

The new heart is the 'heart of flesh' that belongs to Christ as the glorified Son of Man. Through the process of regeneration and renewing by the Spirit, our inner man is being conformed to the image of Christ. 2Co 3:18. This is a daily reality as we are yoked to Christ in the fellowship of His offering. The apostle Paul declared, 'Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.' 2Co 4:16. During our natural lifetime, the Holy Spirit also quickens our physical, mortal body so that we can fulfil the works of our sonship each day. Rom 8:11. However, our outer man is not regenerated until the day of resurrection when we receive our immortal and incorruptible resurrection body from Christ. In that day, we will be sons of God and sons of Christ, the glorified Son of Man.

In relation to the washing of regeneration, which is applied to the ground of our heart during our lifetime, it is helpful to remember that the voice of Christ, as the glorified Son of Man, is likened to 'the voice of many waters'. Rev 1:15. In the first case, the voice of Christ is heard when the Holy Spirit articulates the word of God through the messengers of Christ who are in His right hand. In each season, the Holy Spirit articulates the word of God as a word of present truth for the churches. For this reason, Jesus said to every lampstand church, 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' Rev 2:7. This is how the waters of

regeneration are applied, by the Spirit, to every individual and family in Christ's lampstand churches.

As individual sons of men, we are being saved by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit in the fellowship of Christ's offering. Tit 3:5. The same washing of regeneration is also necessary *to sanctify and cleanse* every family in the church to become a worthy house that belongs to the glorious bride of Christ. This is Christ's major focus during the church age. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of the water of the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish'. Eph 5:25-27.

The glorified bride of Christ

The bride of Christ is comprised of worthy households who gather, in the name of the Lord, in local congregations. In the Scriptures, a local congregation that belongs to the fellowship of a lampstand church is likened to an 'elect lady'. 2Jn 1:1. 1Pe 5:13. A local congregation that is being sanctified and cleansed by Christ, as an elect lady, is a local manifestation of the bride of Christ. In our present day, the bride of Christ is largely hidden from the world. However, after the Father has taken His seat, the time will come for the bride of Christ to become the light of the world. The heavenly Jerusalem on the top of Mount Zion will be the city set on a hill that cannot be hidden. Mat 5:14.

When the Father takes His seat, it will initiate the season of the Son of Man's coming as the Bridegroom and the revelation of the church as the glorified bride of Christ. The prophet Joel declared concerning this time, 'Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes, let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, and the bride from her dressing room.' Joe 2:16. In the time of the end, the church will proceed from her dressing room as a bride who has been adorned by God for her husband. Rev 21:2,10-11. Notably, the church will be revealed in glory before the physical second coming of Christ.

We know that the church was married to Christ, by covenant, on the day of His crucifixion. However, as we have considered, the consummation of the marriage between Christ and the church will not happen until His

physical second coming. The church is presently betrothed to Christ as a chaste virgin. 2Co 11:2. We are reminded that Mary brought forth *the Son of God*, by the Holy Spirit, while she was a virgin, betrothed to Joseph. Luk 1:26-35. The prophet Isaiah declared to the house of David, 'Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall called His name Immanuel.' Isa 7:14. In a similar way, the church is presently bringing forth sons of God, by the Holy Spirit, as the virgin bride of Christ.

In the time of the end, the entire world will be given *a great sign* in heaven that precedes the physical second coming of Christ. The church, as the virgin bride of Christ, will be revealed in glory, and then bring forth a great multitude of sons of God, by the Holy Spirit, from all nations. It is particularly significant that the glorified church will be 'clothed with the sun'. Rev 12:1. The light of the sun is the glory of the Father that shines from the face of Jesus Christ. We recall that when the apostle John described the personal attributes that belong to the glorified Son of Man, he said that 'His face was like the sun shining in its strength'. Rev 1:16.

In the first case, the light that shines from the face of Christ is revealed by the messengers of Christ who are in His right hand. 2Co 4:5-6. The gospel of God is proclaimed by the messengers of Christ to every family within the fellowship of lampstand churches. Each family within a lampstand church has been called to reflect and focus this light, as a testimony, in the household of God, and then to the world. Mat 5:15. We know that the evangelistic ministry of Christ's lampstand churches has only had a limited impact upon the world during the church age. However, when Jesus Christ opens the first seal, the 144 000 will proclaim the gospel of the kingdom as a testimony in all nations. Rev 6:1-2. Mat 24:14.

By the time that the sixth seal has been opened, the church, led by the world-wide presbytery around the throne of the Father, will be fully revealed as the face of Christ to the nations. The manchild that is caught up to God and His throne will be a great multitude of sons of God from every tribe, nation, people, and tongue. Rev 12:5. The great multitude will be born as sons of God, through the evangelistic ministry of the church, and then proceed to be saved by regeneration as they embrace their own unique participation in Christ's offering and sufferings. Having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, they will continually serve God as priests in His temple. Rev 7:9-17.

As we conclude this chapter, let us highlight an important distinction between the three major events that belong to the opening of the sixth seal. We know that the slaughter of Gog and Magog on the mountains of Israel, accompanied by the great earthquake, will cause the Lord to be revealed as 'holy' in the eyes of the nations. Eze 38:16-23. Likewise, when the sun is darkened, as the harbinger of the dissolution of the present heavens and earth, it will cause all the nations to fear God. Luk 21:25-26. The outcome of these two events will be sufficient to cause all the leaders of the seventh world kingdom to flee from the presence of God and to say to the rocks and mountains, 'Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?' Rev 6:16-17.

However, these two events alone will not be sufficient to cause the nations to mourn and repent. Notably, it is only when the sign of the Son of Man appears in heaven that 'all the tribes of the earth will mourn'. Mat 24:30. It is the evangelistic ministry of the glorified bride of Christ that will reveal the face of Christ to the nations, causing a great multitude to look upon Him whom they have pierced and mourn with godly sorrow. Zec 12:10. Jesus said that all the tribes of the earth will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Mat 24:30. We are reminded that 'the clouds of heaven' are the witnesses of Christ. Led by the presbytery around the throne, the worthy houses that belong to the bride of Christ will manifest *the power* of His resurrection life in their mortality and reveal *the glory* that shines from His face to the nations.

The prophet Isaiah declared concerning the bride of Christ in the time of the end, 'Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see: they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be nursed at your side. Then you shall see and become radiant, and your heart shall swell with joy; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you.' Isa 60:1-5.

Chapter Five

The 2300 year prophecy

When the Father takes His seat, it will initiate the time of a great harvest of sons of God. The 144 000, who are the firstfruits of the true Israel of God, are also described as ‘virgins’, because they are the wise virgins who comprise the virgin church in the time of the end. Rev 14:4. Mat 25:4. Ministering as the bride of Christ, the 144 000 will be a blameless company who will bring forth *a great multitude of sons of God* from every tribe, nation, people and tongue. However, Jesus also explained that there will be a great falling away from the kingdom of God in the time of the end. He explained to His disciples, ‘Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.’ Mat 24:11-12.

The great falling away will take place *after* the Father takes His seat and *before* the appointed time that Jesus called ‘the end’. He said to the disciples, ‘But he who endures *to the end* will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then *the end* will come.’ Mat 24:13-14. In Chapter 3, we identified that it is the blowing of the seventh trumpet that will announce ‘the end’ and will herald the physical second coming of Christ. 1Th 4:16. 1Co 15:52.

The book of Revelation teaches us that the seventh trumpet will begin to blow seven years before the physical second coming of Christ. Rev 11:15. Following the day of resurrection, it will then continue to blow all the way to the end of the Millennium. The end of the Millennium will be the end of the seventeen prophetic days that the Father has sovereignly ordained for the present heavens and earth. In this regard, the seventh trumpet will blow until the end of the present 'heavens and earth' and the inauguration of 'the new heavens and new earth'. Rev 21:1.

When the seventh trumpet begins to blow, it will also announce the end of the 2300 year prophecy. Jesus referred to the 2300 year prophecy when He said, 'Therefore, when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.' Mat 24:15-16. We know that this command to flee from Judea had a specific application for the Christians in Jerusalem prior to AD 70. However, more broadly, Jesus drew our attention to the 2300 year prophecy because of its particular relevance to the time of the end.

It is notable that Matthew wrote, 'let the reader understand', as he recorded the words of Jesus in relation to this prophecy. Mat 24:15. He was exhorting every person who reads his gospel account to seek an understanding of the 2300 year prophecy in the book of Daniel. If we do not understand this prophecy, we will not understand the rise of Antichrist and the great falling away in the time of the end. 2Th 2:3. Likewise, we will not understand how Satan has gained access to the heavenly places, and how he will be overcome and then cast from the heavenly places in the time of the end. Rev 12:7-11.

Daniel's vision

The 2300 year prophecy is recorded in Chapter 8 of the book of Daniel. The prophet Daniel received the vision in the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar. Dan 8:1. It is notable that this vision was *a further development* in relation to the vision of the four beasts, which Daniel had already received in the first year of Belshazzar's reign. Dan 7. We recall that Daniel's vision of the four beasts included the rise of Antichrist as *a little horn* with the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words. Dan 7:8. The 2300year prophecy explains how and why Antichrist will emerge in this manner in the end of the age.

In the vision of the 2300 years, Daniel was taken to the River Ulai in the province of Elam. Dan 8:2. He saw a ram standing beside the river, with two horns that pushed to the west, the north and the south. Dan 8:3-4. The ram represented the Medo-Persian Empire. The prophet Daniel then saw a male goat coming from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground. Dan 8:5. The goat had a notable horn between its eyes. The goat ran at the ram with furious power and then trampled the ram to the ground. Dan 8:6-7. The male goat represented the Greek Empire, and the notable horn signified Alexander the Great.

As soon as the male goat grew very strong, the notable horn was broken and was replaced by four horns that grew up to the four winds of heaven. Dan 8:8. Alexander the Great died suddenly at the age of 32 in the city of Babylon, with no appointed successor. His death precipitated a prolonged power struggle between his generals, who fought for control of the empire. The little horn that grew exceedingly great toward the south, the east and the promised land was Seleucus, who became the founder the Seleucid Empire. Dan 8:9. Significantly, Daniel saw that the Seleucid Empire would grow up to the host of heaven.

Daniel described the impact of the Seleucid Empire by saying, 'It grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it trampled them down. It even magnified itself to be equal with the Commander of the host; and it removed the regular sacrifice from Him, and the place of His sanctuary was thrown down. And *on account of transgression* the host will be given over to the horn along with the regular sacrifice; and it will fling truth to the ground and perform its will and prosper.' Dan 8:10-12. We note that this passage identifies *five outcomes* that will be *caused by the little horn*.

However, before we consider the outcomes, it is important to recognise that the little horn is only able to cause these outcomes because it has been empowered from the heavenly places. It has been empowered by Satan from the heavenly places because of the transgression among the Lord's people. The transgression is variously called 'the transgression which causes horror', 'the transgression of desolation', and 'the desolating transgression'. Dan 8:13. The key point is that all of the outcomes in the 2300 year prophecy are 'on account of transgression'. Dan 8:12. The transgression among the Lord's people is the root cause of the problem.

Through the prophet Malachi, the Lord identified *the specific transgressions* that comprise 'the desolating transgression' among the

Lord's people. The Lord began His admonition by affirming His love for the people as 'Jacob'. Mal 1:2. In His mercy, He was addressing 'the transgression of Jacob'. However, the Lord also reminded the nation that He 'hated Esau' because they were demonstrating the same arrogant presumption that caused Esau to come under the wrath and judgement of God. When Esau rejected his predestination to serve his younger brother, he became a godless and immoral man. He found no place for repentance. However, he still presumed that God should bless him. Heb 12:16-17.

Some of the host of heaven will fall

The *first outcome* that belongs to the 2300 year prophecy is that the little horn will cause some of the host of heaven to fall. 'The host of heaven' refers to the angels who serve the Lord of hosts under the command of the archangel Michael. Michael is 'the Commander of the host'. Zec 1:8. Dan 10:21. He is the angel of the Lord who met Joshua as the nation of Israel entered the promised land. Jos 5:13-15. He had come to help the nation of Israel to drive out the enemies from the land, as long as the people continued to be obedient to their own sanctification.

The priests who served in the tabernacle of Moses and in the temple of Solomon performed their priestly duties under the angelic administration. We recall that the glory of the Shekinah dwelt above the ark of the covenant and between the wings of the cherubim. Exo 25:20-22. Psa 99:1. Isa 37:16. Images of cherubim were woven into the fabric of the veil that separated the holy place from the most holy place. Exo 26:31. Likewise, images of cherubim were woven into the fabric of the curtains that covered the entire sanctuary. Exo 26:1. The angelic administration had an important role in guarding the sanctification of the tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon.

When the Shekinah departed from the temple of Solomon, and the Jews were taken captive to Babylon, the face of the cherubim replaced the face of the priesthood in the administration of the nation of Israel. Eze 10:14. There was no priestly ministry for seventy years. The prophet Zechariah recorded that when the Jewish remnant returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, the angel of the Lord interceded on behalf of the people. The angel prayed, 'O LORD of hosts, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which You were angry these seventy years?' Zec 1:12.

In a subsequent vision, the prophet Zechariah saw Joshua the high priest standing before the archangel Michael, as the Angel of the Lord. Zec 3:1. Satan was also standing at Joshua's right hand to oppose him. Joshua was clothed with filthy garments because of the uncleanness in his family and extended family. Zec 3:3. Many of the people, including the sons of Joshua, had married foreign wives. Ezr 10:18. Zechariah witnessed that the Lord would cleanse Joshua and give him a new priestly mandate. Zec 3:4. Significantly, when Joshua was restored as high priest, he no longer functioned under the angelic administration.

The archangel Michael said to Joshua, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "If you will walk in My ways, and if you will keep My command, then you shall also judge My house, and likewise have charge of My courts; I will give you places to walk among these who stand here".' Zec 3:6-7. We note that the mandate to judge and guard the house of the Lord, which had previously belonged to the cherubim in the angelic administration, was given to Joshua the high priest and his friends. Furthermore, Joshua was given places to walk among the angelic administration in the heavenly places.

The new priestly mandate was a major upgrade in the administration of the nation of Israel. However, the great responsibility to guard the house of the Lord, and the great privilege of having access to the heavenly places, also carried a great risk! When the priests became unclean again, and failed to guard the sanctification of the Lord's house, it gave Satan and his demonic host access to the heavenly places. We know that Satan works only by *advantage*. 2Co 2:11. He has access to the heavenly places only because of the uncleanness of the Lord's people in the heavenly places.

Satan regained access to the heavenly places

In the days of the prophet Malachi, the Lord said to the priests, 'Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar!' Mal 1:10. It is remarkable to consider that the Lord desired one of the priests to put a stop to the regular sacrifices and to shut the doors of the temple. However, none of the priests were willing to do this for the sake of guarding the sanctification of the Lord's house. Rather, as the transgression continued among the Lord's people, the door was left wide open for Satan to regain access into the heavenly places.

Satan gained access to the heavenly places sometime during the early reign of the Seleucid Empire. Of course, there is a distinction between Satan and the little horn. Satan belongs to the angelic administration and the little horn belongs to the nations. However, Daniel saw the little horn grow up to the host of heaven because, as soon as Satan had access to the heavenly places, the Seleucid Empire also began to derive its power from the heavenly places. Dan 8:10. It is sobering to consider that the power of this secular kingdom was derived, through Satan, from the misappropriation of the mandate that had been given by God to the restored Jewish priesthood.

The access of Satan to the heavenly places, and the subsequent empowerment of the little horn from the heavenly places, caused some of the angelic host to fall. This was possible only because Michael had *stood aside* from his mandate to stand guard over the Lord's house. He now *stood by* as a servant to the priests who had been given this mandate by God. Zec 3:7. This meant that the plight of Michael and his angelic host was now tied to the viability of the priesthood and the sanctification of the nation. The uncleanness of the Lord's people has caused Michael and his angelic host to be immobilised in relation to their mandate as the servants to the heirs of salvation. Heb 1:14.

After the Father takes His seat to initiate the events that belong to the time of the end, Michael will stand up again. Gabriel said to Daniel, 'At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people'. Dan 12:1. Michael is the strong angel who will proclaim with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?' Rev 5:2. When Michael stands up in this manner, it will signify that the end of the 2300 year prophecy is at hand, but it will not be the end. This is a helpful distinction. The end of the 2300 year prophecy will be when Michael and his angels wage war with Satan and his angels and then cast them out of heaven forever. Rev 12:7-10.

Some of the stars will fall

The *second outcome* is that the little horn will cause some of 'the stars' to fall and to be trampled. We note that Daniel made a distinction between 'the host of heaven' and 'the stars'. Dan 8:10. The stars do not belong to the angelic administration. The stars describe the Lord's messengers who have been called to proclaim the word of God as light-bearers to the Lord's people. We read in the final chapter of the book of Daniel, 'Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those

who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever'.
Dan 12:3.

Referring to the stars of heaven, we read in Chapter 11 of the book of Daniel, 'Those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many; yet they will fall by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder for many days'. Dan 11:33. The 'many days' in this passage refers to the duration of the 2300 years. In the church age, the stars are the presbyteries in the right hand of Christ. Rev 1:20. We know that every true presbytery will suffer persecution. However, it is the loss of first love that causes a presbytery to fall from the heavenly places and then to be trampled by the sword, flame, captivity or plunder. Rev 2:4-5.

When a presbytery is trampled in this manner, it is an expression of the Lord's judgement upon it because of the loss of first love. However, recognising that Jesus Christ has fully identified Himself with every fallen star, we know that the cross is both the place of judgement and the place of mercy. The Lord declared to Daniel concerning the fallen stars, 'Now when they fall, they will be *granted a little help*.' Dan 11:34. It is important that we understand the nature of this help. The work of the Holy Spirit as our Helper is to enable us to repent and believe in response to the word of Christ when we meet Him eye to eye.

A presbytery that is receiving 'a little help' will be on a pathway of restoration. Rev 3:8. As they recover first love, they will be effective in ministering the gospel of God and in turning many from their own self-righteousness to the righteousness of Christ. Dan 12:3. However, at the same time, a presbytery that is recovering first love will also be beset by many leaders and people who 'cleave to them with deceit'. Dan 11:34. Many will try to cleave to a presbytery in this manner because they view the word of present truth as a resource, and those with ascension gift grace as a source of empowerment for their own ministry or lifestyle projections.

In addition, there will be some leaders who have been called by name to serve the flock within the fellowship of a presbytery, yet they will fall into the sin of presumption. That is, rather than continuing to lay down their lives to reveal Christ and their brethren, they will exalt themselves above the fellowship of the presbytery. The sin of presumption was first manifested by Satan himself when he exalted himself above the stars of God. Isa 14:13. In the fellowship of a true presbytery, there will be messengers who become puffed up with pride and, as a result, will fall

into the same condemnation of the devil. The apostle Paul noted that a novice is particularly vulnerable to this presumption. 1Ti 3:6.

When messengers fall in this manner, it does bring reproach upon the remainder of the presbytery. However, this reproach should have a refining and purifying effect upon the presbytery. The Lord declared to Daniel, 'Some of those who have insight will fall, in order to refine, purge, and make them pure until the end time, because it is still to come at the appointed time.' Dan 11:35. In the time of the end, the tail of the dragon will cause one third of the stars to fall into the sin of presumption and will fling them to the ground. Rev 12:4. Antichrist himself will fall in this manner when he exalts himself above the fellowship of the presbytery and begins to promote an alternative image of man in opposition to Christ.

The continual offering will be removed

The *third outcome* is that the little horn will cause 'the continual offering' to cease. Under the Old Covenant, the continual offering included the sacrifice of a lamb in the morning and in the evening every day. Dan 12:11. Exo 29:38-42. The continual offering was the daily appropriation of the Passover Lamb for the nation of Israel. The true feast of Passover is the *agape* meal. 1Co 5:8. When we consider the fellowship of the early church in Jerusalem, we observe that there was a daily appropriation of the *agape* meal, both publicly and from house to house. Act 2:46.

In the days of the prophet Malachi, the Lord addressed the corruption of the continual offering within the Jewish nation. When this corruption was accommodated and normalised by the priests, it became the first transgression which enabled Satan to regain access into the heavenly places. Notably, the priests and the people were completely blind to the nature of this transgression and to the gravity of its spiritual consequences. For example, when the Lord confronted the people by saying, 'You offer defiled food on My altar', they immediately replied, 'In what way have we defiled You?' Mal 1:7.

Emphasising that the continual offering was a type of the *agape* meal, the prophet Malachi referred to the altar as 'the table of the Lord'. Mal 1:7. The priests and the people demonstrated their contempt for the table of the Lord by giving blind, lame and sick offerings to the Lord. Mal 1:8. Notably, the physical condition of the sacrifices represented the heart attitude and spiritual condition of the people. That is, when the people

brought a blind sacrifice, it demonstrated their spiritual blindness. The blindness and religious arrogance of the people were demonstrated by their presumption that God would be pleased with their offerings.

We demonstrate the same arrogance in the fellowship of the *agape* meal if we impose our spiritual blindness, lameness and sickness upon our brethren. Our spiritual blindness is our deception. If we have not met Christ eye to eye, as Peter met Christ in the court of Caiaphas, we will not be delivered from our blindness. Luk 22:61. We will continue to believe in the veracity of the self-righteous image that we have created for ourselves and will demand that others accept our image. Similarly, if we do not embrace the Father's chastening in our life, we will not be healed from our relational lameness. Heb 12:10-13. We will expect that others accept and compensate for our lameness.

Further, if we are not properly connected to the order of headship in our own marriage, so that we are finding grace to deal with uncleanness in our home, we will be subject to the oppression of unclean spirits. If unclean spirits control the agenda in our home, this uncleanness will invariably have an impact on our brethren in the body of Christ. This is also a desolating transgression that will bring us under the judgement of God. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, 'For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgement to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason, many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep'. 1Co 11:29-30.

The prophet Malachi identified the corruption of the continual offering among the Jewish remnant, which led to its removal by the little horn. Notably, the faith of the continual offering was removed by the Hellenising impact of the Seleucid Empire upon the Jewish nation, a long time before the physical practice of the daily sacrifices was stopped by Antiochus Epiphanes. Dan 11:31. In a similar way, faith for the *agape* meal was removed from the early church before it was replaced by the sacramental practice of the Eucharist. That is, the Eucharist was established as a substitute for the fellowship of the *agape* meal that had already been lost.

We know that the church was established during the time of the Roman Empire. However, interestingly, it was the Hellenising impact of the former Greek Empire that had the greatest doctrinal impact upon the early church. Even before the apostle Paul had died, the proclamation of the word of present truth among the Gentile churches was already being

replaced by theology that was strongly influenced by Greek philosophy. 2Ti 1:15. Notably, the replacement of the fellowship of the *agape* meal by the Eucharist happened in a concurrent manner with the replacement of the word of present truth by theology and philosophy. For the entire church age, this has been part of the removal of the continual offering by the little horn.

The place of the sanctuary will be cast down

The *fourth outcome* is that the little horn will cause ‘the place of the sanctuary’ to be cast down and trampled. Dan 8:11. It is important that we understand the meaning of ‘the place of the sanctuary’, because it does not refer to the physical temple. ‘The place of the sanctuary’ describes the place where the Lord has chosen to put His name as His dwelling place. Before the nation of Israel entered the promised land, Moses said to the people, ‘But you shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go.’ Deu 12:5.

The place of the sanctuary is cast down when the name of the Lord is despised and profaned. We have considered already that the continual offering was corrupted by the Lord’s people before it was removed by the little horn. In a similar way, the name of the Lord was despised by His people before it was cast down as profane before the nations. The psalmist described the casting down of the sanctuary by saying, ‘Your enemies roar in the midst of Your meeting place; they set up banners for signs ... they have set fire to Your sanctuary; they have defiled *the dwelling place of Your name* to the ground.’ Psa 74:4,7.

In the days of Malachi, the Jewish remnant despised the name of the Lord. Mal 1:11-12. The name of the Lord is the fellowship of Yahweh. The people despised the fellowship of Yahweh because they presumed that God should accept and embrace their idolatry. They did not honour God as their Father; nor did they respect the Son as their Lord. Mal 1:6. We do not honour the Father if we reject the name that He has given to us, in favour of the image that we have created for ourselves. Likewise, we do not respect Jesus Christ if we draw back from His eyes in unbelief or reject our participation in His seven wounding events as being the only context for our salvation.

We also despise the name of the Lord when we reject the order of headship that God has established for every marriage. We must honour the Father as the source of the order of headship. The prophet

Malachi declared, 'Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers?' Mal 2:10. The Father has appointed Christ to be the Head of His body and of His church. Eph 1:22. Col 1:18. He is the Head of every house. Every man must respect Christ as his Lord by submitting to His headship. 1Co 11:3. Likewise, every woman must respect Christ as her Lord by submitting to the headship of her husband in relation to their own home. Eph 5:22.

Malachi described godly marriage as 'the Lord's holy institution which He loves'. Mal 2:11. The prophet identified two major ways in which the people were profaning the name of the Lord because of the culture of their marriages. First, he identified that many of the men had married foreign wives and then embraced their foreign gods. Malachi warned that the Lord would judge any man who became aware of his situation but, despite the uncleanness of his house, presumed to continue to make offering in the house of the Lord. Mal 2:12. Second, he identified that there were men who were 'dealing treacherously' with their own wives. Mal 2:14.

When the people of God live in an unsanctified manner among the nations, the name of the Lord is profaned before the eyes of the nations. Speaking about the Lord's regenerative work in our lives, and in our families, the Lord declared through the prophet Ezekiel, 'It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord ... when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.' Eze 36:22-23.

Truth will be flung to the ground

The *fifth outcome* is that the little horn will cause truth to be flung to the ground. Dan 8:12. It is easy to identify that truth has been flung to the ground by the ungodly people in the world who have suppressed the truth in unrighteousness. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul said, 'They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.' Rom 1:25. The way in which the theory of evolution is propagated, and the possibility of a worldwide flood is ridiculed, is a good example of the way in which truth is presently flung to the ground in the world.

However, as we have considered in relation to all the outcomes in the 2300 year prophecy, we observe that corruption is first manifest in the church before it is manifest in the world. Truth is flung to the ground in the church by false messengers who proclaim false gospels. The word of the Father is the sum of all truth. We are reminded that Jesus prayed to the Father on the Mount of Olives, 'Sanctify them in the truth: Your word is truth.' Joh 17:17. Jesus proclaimed the word of truth because He did not speak from His own resources. Joh 12:49-50. He spoke only the words that He had received from the Father.

In contrast to this, Jesus said concerning Satan, 'He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.' Joh 8:44. Truth is continually flung to the ground by messengers who claim to speak the words of God, but they are speaking from their own resources. In this regard, the Lord said to Jeremiah, 'The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds.' Jer 14:14.

The first and foremost activity of Satan in the heavenly places is the propagation of false gospels. 2Co 11:13-15. There are many false gospels, but one of the most pervasive is the doctrine of *unconditional love* that denies the wrath of God upon our sin, and does not accept that salvation is the outcome of regeneration. This doctrine produces confusion, and undermines the need for sanctification. Speaking to those who promote this false gospel, the prophet Malachi said, 'You have wearied the Lord with your words, yet you say, "In what way have we wearied Him?" In that you say, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delights in them".' Mal 2:17.

In the days of Malachi, it was the work of the priests to proclaim the law of truth and to teach the people how to live in a sanctified manner in their houses. Mal 2:7. However, rather than proclaiming the law of truth, the priests flung truth to the ground by turning aside from the way of sanctification. Mal 2:8. When the priests did not maintain the law of sanctification in their own houses, they caused many within the nation to stumble at their teaching. Furthermore, the priests began to show partiality in the way that they applied the Law. Mal 2:9. That is, the priests began to apply the word of God in a selective manner,

depending on the circumstances, because of their own desire to avoid conflict or to achieve a certain outcome.

In our days, it is the work of presbyteries in the right hand of Christ to proclaim the gospel of God as *the truth* that reveals the pathway of sanctification for every believer and household. Rather than showing partiality in their teaching, a presbyter must be willing to stand for the truth of the gospel. The apostle Paul exemplified this ministry when he noticed that Peter and Barnabas had been carried away by the hypocrisy of the Judaizers who had travelled from Jerusalem to Antioch. He withstood Peter to his face, in the presence of all the believers, because he had fallen into the sin of partiality and was no longer 'straightforward about *the truth of the gospel*'. Gal 2:14.

The vision pertains to the time of the end

Daniel testified that he heard one of the angels ask the revelatory angel who was speaking to him, 'How long will the vision about the regular sacrifice apply, while *the transgression causes horror*, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?' Dan 8:13. In response to this question, Gabriel declared to Daniel, 'For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.' Dan 8:14. Applying the prophetic 'day for a year' principle that is often used in the book of Daniel, we know that this is 2300 years.

As we have considered, the 2300 years began during the early reign of the Seleucid Empire. The end of the 2300 years will be announced by the blowing of the seventh trumpet. The prophet Daniel testified that the angel Gabriel clearly explained to him that the 2300 year prophecy would reach its climax and then conclude in the time of the end. Daniel said, 'So he came near where I stood, and when he came I was afraid and fell on my face; but he said to me, "Understand, son of man, that the vision refers to the time of the end".' Dan 8:17.

Additionally, Gabriel said to Daniel, 'Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation, for at the appointed time the end shall be.' Dan 8:19. The indignation refers to God's wrath and fury. It describes the judgement of God upon His people because of the desolating transgression. The latter time of the indignation will commence when the Father takes His seat to judge the world. Isa 34:1-2. During the opening of the seals, the indignation of God

will be manifested before the eyes of all men *in a quarter measure*. During the blowing of the trumpets, the indignation of God will be manifested *in a third measure*.

Antiochus Epiphanes was a type

Speaking about the Seleucid Empire, Gabriel said to Daniel, 'And in the latter time of their kingdom, *when the transgressors have reached their fullness*, a king shall arise, having fierce features who understands sinister schemes. His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; he shall destroy fearfully, and shall prosper and thrive; he shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people. Through his cunning he shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; and he shall exalt himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without human means.' Dan 8:23-25.

The king who arose toward the end of the Seleucid Empire with 'fierce features and sinister schemes' was Antiochus Epiphanes. By the time of his rulership, the transgression among the Jewish nation had 'reached a fullness'. Dan 8:23. Historical records indicate that the Jewish priesthood had become so corrupt that the office of the high priest was obtained by whoever was willing to pay the highest bribe to Antiochus Epiphanes. The Greek ruler was empowered by Satan from the heavenly places. However, at the same time, he was used as an instrument of judgement in the Lord's hand.

When Antiochus Epiphanes conquered the land of Israel, and desecrated the temple in Jerusalem, it was an expression of the Lord's judgement upon the nation. The angel explained to Daniel in relation to his subsequent vision, 'And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there *the abomination of desolation*.' Dan 11:31. We see that if the Lord's people refuse to repent in response to the Lord's word in order to be delivered from their transgression, the Lord will use a secular ruler to bring the transgression to an end. Then, when the secular ruler sets up their own abomination of desolation, they also come under the judgement of God.

Antiochus Epiphanes was 'a type' of Antichrist in the end of the age. Antichrist and the false prophet will set up the final abomination of desolation when they deceive the nations into making a new image of man. We read in the book of Revelation concerning the false prophet,

'He deceives those who dwell on the earth - by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.' Rev 13:14-15.

The new image of man will be crafted by Antichrist *in his own likeness*. Antichrist will not recognise God's sovereignty in relation to the predestination of man. He will presume to take the place of God by crafting a new image of man. Furthermore, the new image of man will be set up in complete opposition to Jesus Christ, who is the full revelation of Man in the image and likeness of God. The new image will be accompanied by a new economy that will require all men to possess the mark of the beast to be able to buy and sell. Rev 13:15-16. This new economy will replace the economy that belongs to the administration of Babylon. However, more than this, it will be set up in opposition to the economy of offering that belongs to the kingdom of God.

Antichrist will exalt himself

Speaking about Antichrist in the end of the age, Gabriel explained to Daniel, 'Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper until the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done. He shall regard neither the God of his fathers nor the desire of women, nor regard any god; for he shall exalt himself above them all.' Dan 11:36-37. The apostle Paul was referring directly to the fulfilment of this passage when he described Antichrist as 'the son of perdition who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God'. 2Th 2:3-4.

What does it mean that Antichrist will sit 'as God in the temple of God'? This statement has been the source of much confusion for Christians. Some commentators have proposed that this refers to a physical temple that will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. However, Paul was referring to *the true temple of God*. The true temple is the many-membered body of Christ which was established on the day of Christ's offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. Eph 2:19-22. The true temple was then anointed on the Day of Pentecost when the sevenfold Spirit of God

was poured out, through the Holy Spirit, upon an entire kingdom of priests who have been called to serve God in the body of Christ. 1Pe 2:5. Rev 1:6.

The key point is that Antichrist *will first exalt himself in the true temple*, which is the body of Christ, before he falls from the heavenly places to become the ruler of the eighth world kingdom. In the time of the end, the desolating transgression among the Lord's people will reach its fullness when Antichrist and one third of the stars of heaven exalt themselves above the fellowship of the presbytery that is seated around the throne of the Father. Rev 12:4. Antichrist will cease from worshipping God. Deceived by Satan, he will presume to sit as God in the temple of God by promoting his own image of man. This doctrine of Antichrist in relation to this new image of man will precipitate the great falling away.

The blowing of the seven trumpets is particularly significant in relation to the 2300 year prophecy because the trumpets announce the final cleansing of the true temple in heaven. Dan 8:14. When the third trumpet is blown, Antichrist will be cast from the heavenly places as a great fallen star. Rev 8:10-11. When the fifth trumpet is blown, he will misappropriate the authority of the key of David that belongs to the presbytery around the throne of the Father, and will release Abaddon and his demonic host from the bottomless pit. Rev 9:1-2. The angels from the bottomless pit will be given power to torment the ungodly on Earth. Rev 9:3-11. However, they will have no access to the true temple in heaven.

When the seventh trumpet is blown, it will announce that the cleansing and restoration of the true temple is complete. Rev 11:15. This will be the end of the 2300 years. As soon as the seventh trumpet sounds, Michael and his angels will cast Satan and his angels out of the heavenly places and down to Earth. Rev 12:7-10. Satan will have no opportunity to return to the heavenly places again. As soon as Satan has been cast from the heavenly places, the true temple will be measured and the door to the temple will be closed. Rev 11:1-2. The body of Christ will no longer be the context for a cleansing and purifying process. The final harvest of sons of God, who will be the fruit of the ministry of Moses and Elijah, will not come into the true temple as a place of process. They will be killed by Antichrist as martyrs and then will await the day of resurrection. Rev 14:13.

Chapter Six

The great falling away

In His final public sermon, Jesus pronounced judgement upon all false messengers and carnal religious leaders. He described the scribes and Pharisees as being leaders who wanted to maintain the religious image and reputation that they had created for themselves among the people. For example, Jesus said, 'They love the best places at feasts, and the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men "Rabbi, Rabbi".' Mat 23:6-7. We know that Jesus was referring to the religious leaders of the Jewish nation in His day. However, this same profile of 'the clergyman' or 'the pastor' is also prevalent among churches and religious denominations in our day.

A true messenger, who belongs to a presbytery in the right hand of Christ, will proclaim the gospel of God for the purpose of begetting sons of God who have a personal relationship with their own heavenly Father. Rom 1:1. Likewise, a true messenger will proclaim the word of the cross for the purpose of making disciples who have a personal relationship with Christ as their own Lord and Teacher. 1Co 2:2. As our Teacher, Christ is teaching us the obedience that belongs to our sanctification, which He has already learned for us on His offering journey from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. Heb 5:8-9. Mat 11:29.

Speaking as part of a presbytery, the apostle John declared, 'That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.' 1Jn 1:3. In contrast to this, a carnal religious leader will try to make people become children of their carnal religious doctrine and disciples of their religious cause. This is great and destructive corruption. For this reason, Jesus said to the people, 'Do not call anyone on Earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.' Mat 23:9-10.

A synagogue of Satan

Jesus repeatedly described the scribes and Pharisees as 'hypocrites'. A hypocrite is an actor who pretends to be a certain character in a performance for the purpose of convincing the audience that their portrayal is authentic. Of course, an actor in a stage play will know that their character is fictitious. However, there are many false messengers and religious leaders who believe their own lie. That is, they believe that the religious image that they have created for themselves is real. For example, the scribes and Pharisees believed that they were the spiritual leaders of the Jewish nation.

Jesus proclaimed the truth by identifying that the scribes and Pharisees were 'a synagogue of Satan' within the nation of Israel. Joh 8:44. They were deceived by Satan and had become his messengers to the nation. Jesus called them 'serpents and a brood of vipers'. Mat 23:33. They could not escape the condemnation of hell because they had refused to repent from their false mode of ministry. Furthermore, they were determined to kill Jesus because He had refused to affirm and empower the religious projection that they had created for themselves. Mat 26:4.

Having ascended into heaven and taken His seat at the right hand of God, Jesus identified that there was also a synagogue of Satan within the presbyteries of His lampstand churches. He said to the presbytery in Smyrna, 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are *a synagogue of Satan*.' Rev 2:9. Jesus was not referring to a group of believers who were claiming false ethnicity. He was describing a group of self-righteous leaders who comprised 'a false circumcision' because their confidence was in the flesh. Php 3:1-11.

When He addressed the presbyteries of His lampstand churches, Jesus described the various doctrines that belong to the synagogue of Satan. For example, the *doctrine of the Nicolaitans* is believed and taught by

church leaders who presume to 'lord it over' the flock. Rev 2:6,15. A leader with a Nicolaitan profile will view the word of God as a resource, and the presbytery as a source of empowerment for their ministry. Jesus also identified that the synagogue of Satan includes leaders who believe and teach the doctrine of Balaam, the doctrine of Jezebel, and the doctrine of the Laodiceans. Rev 2:14. Rev 2:20. Rev 3:17.

The eight declarations of woe

Standing in the physical temple for the final time, Jesus pronounced 'woe' upon every leader who belongs to the synagogue of Satan. Mat 23:13. The pronouncement of 'woe' by Christ upon the scribes and Pharisees was the declaration of His irrevocable judgement upon them. We note that Jesus pronounced judgement upon the religious *leaders* before He pronounced judgement upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and before He prophesied about the destruction of the temple itself. Mat 23:37-39. Mat 24:2. In relation to the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus identified eight specific reasons why they were condemned.

1. Jesus said, 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.'
Mat 23:13. *The kingdom of heaven is the fellowship of Yahweh.*
Mat 6:9-10. Jesus has given the keys of the kingdom to His messengers because it is their mandate to proclaim the gospel of God. Mat 16:19. The gospel of God invites every person to be born as a son of God to see the kingdom, and then to be born of water and of the Spirit to enter the kingdom of heaven. Joh 3:3,5.

In contrast, the messengers of Satan replace the gospel of God with their own man-made doctrines. Mat 15:7-9. When we consider the history of the early church, we observe that this had already begun to happen during the lifetime of the apostle Paul. Gal 1:6-7. 2Ti 1:15. In a short period of time, the fellowship of the word of present truth was replaced by theology that was based on Greek philosophy. The fellowship of the *agape* meal was replaced by sacramental practices such as the Eucharist. The fellowship of a presbytery was replaced by a hierarchical clergy structure. The simplicity of learning the obedience of Christ each day was replaced by the activity of religious zealots. 2Co 11:3.

2. Jesus said, 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.' Mat 23:14. Jesus

was referring to leaders who maintain a pious public demeanour while, at the same time, they devour the resources that belong to ‘the little ones in the flock’ for the sake of their own gain. The prophet Ezekiel described such leaders by saying, ‘Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?’ Eze 34:2.

3. Jesus said, ‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.’ Mat 23:15. This describes leaders who will go to great lengths to convert, or proselytise, a person to their religious ideology, and then train that person as a disciple for their cause. In this regard, the apostle Paul warned the presbytery in Ephesus by saying, ‘From among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.’ Act 20:30.
4. Jesus said, ‘Woe to you, blind guides, who say, “Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.” Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?’ Mat 23:26-17. Jesus was referring to leaders who demand that their followers make religious commitments and fulfil their religious obligations, without themselves having any spiritual sight regarding the fellowship that must *sanctify* all offering. These leaders do not see that the true temple is the body of Christ; nor do they see that we partake of the true altar by participating in the seven wounding events of Christ’s offering. Heb 8:1-2. Heb 13:10.
5. Jesus said, ‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.’ Mat 23:23. This describes the leader who believes that they are pleasing to God because of their own self-righteousness. They live in this deluded state, and encourage others to emulate their behaviour. They have not seen the ugliness of their own self-righteousness because they have not met Christ eye to eye. Luk 22:61. Without this illumination, a leader will believe in the integrity of their own heart and in the soundness of their own wisdom.

Jesus likened the behaviour of a self-righteous person, who does not realise that they are repudiating the offering of Christ, to someone who ‘strains out a gnat, but swallows a camel’. Mat 23:24. We could

compare this self-righteous activity to the behaviour of the nation of Israel in the days of the prophet Isaiah. The people were 'trampling the Lord's courts' because they were complying with the exactness of an external commandment, but they were not obedient from the heart. Isa 1:12. Having our heart regenerated in the offering of Christ is the only context in which we can lay hold of our justification, become a vessel of mercy, and live by faith. Mat 23:23. Mic 6:8.

6. Jesus said, 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.' Mat 23:25. This statement may describe a leader who is focused on building a successful church which is full of loyal adherents, for the purpose of supporting their own ministry. When a person confesses their sin, the leader will often focus on cleaning 'the outside of the cup' by scripting a pathway of penance for the person. They will try to function as an intermediary between Christ and the person by offering absolution for their sin in exchange for the person's loyalty. This kind of trading mechanism has no power to deal with sin and is the breeding ground for corruption.
7. Jesus said, 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.' Mat 23:27. This describes leaders who have already died spiritually, but continue to maintain a religious projection in the vain hope that it will hide their corruption. Notably, Jesus warned the presbytery in Sardis that there were some leaders among them in this predicament. He said to them, 'I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.' Rev 3:1.
8. Jesus said, 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, "If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets".' Mat 23:29-30. Jesus was speaking to the religious leaders in His day who believed that they were more righteous than their forefathers. However, their antagonism toward Him and His word demonstrated that they were also filling up the measure of their fathers' guilt. Act 7:51-53. This same condemnation will apply to every generation of leaders who do not continue to walk in the light of the word of present truth.

Jesus used this sermon to pronounce woe upon the scribes and Pharisees. However, we observe that Jesus addressed this sermon to the multitudes and to the disciples. Mat 23:1. This sermon contained a sober warning to His twelve disciples, which is also applicable for every presbyter and believer in our day. Jesus said, 'He who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.' Mat 23:11-12. We know that the disciples had been disputing among themselves about who would be the greatest in the kingdom. This dispute began soon after Jesus was transfigured on the mountain and continued all the way to the last supper. Luk 9:46. Luk 22:24.

The apostasy

It is important to recognise that the first step on the pathway to apostasy for any presbyter is to exalt himself above the fellowship of a presbytery. This will be the first step on the pathway to apostasy for Antichrist, and for all of the messengers who will fall in the time of the end. When the man who will become the Antichrist first comes into the kingdom of God, he will likely belong to the apostolic administration of Christ that is 'in and around' the Father's throne. Rev 4:4-6. We can make this assumption with reasonable certainty because, after Antichrist falls from the heavenly places, he will misappropriate the authority of Christ to open the bottomless pit. Rev 9:1.

In the time of the end, the word of the apostolic administration will initiate the expression of worship by the worldwide presbytery that is seated around the throne of the Father. Rev 4:9-11. John observed that each presbyter will continually cast down their crown to worship the Father and the Lamb. All those who belong to the apostolic administration of Christ also belong to the fellowship of this presbytery. However, Antichrist will decide to retain his crown, rather than cast down his crown as part of this fellowship of offering. He will choose to exalt himself above the fellowship of the presbytery. In this way, he will cease to worship God and to submit himself to Christ.

Paul taught that the fall of Antichrist will be part of a great falling away in the time of the end. He wrote to the Thessalonians, 'Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no-one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin

is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.' 2Th 2:1-4.

The apostle Paul clearly identified that there will be *a great falling away* before the physical second coming of Jesus Christ at the end of the age. We know that there is a falling away from the true temple in our day. We are presently in 'the day of small things'. However, when the apostle Paul spoke of 'the falling away', or 'the apostasy', he was referring to the great falling away that will happen in the time of the end, after the Father has taken His seat. Mat 24:11-12. The great falling away will follow the great harvest from every tribe, nation, people and tongue. Rev 7:9.

The great falling away will be caused by Satan and his messengers. The apostle John saw 'a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads'. Rev 12:3. The seven heads are the administration of Babylon through which Satan exercises his rulership over the seventh world kingdom. Notably, John saw that *the tail of the dragon* will draw a third of the stars of heaven and will throw them to the earth. Rev 12:4. 'The tail of the dragon' is the prophet who speaks lies. The prophet Isaiah declared, 'The elder and honourable, he is the head; the prophet who teaches lies, he is the tail. For the leaders of this people cause them to err, and those who are led by them are destroyed.' Isa 9:15-16.

Multiple phases of false prophets

Jesus explained that there will be many false prophets in the world as we approach the time of the end, and that there will also be many false prophets during the time of the end. Mat 24:5,11-12. Recognising that Satan works by advantage, it is likely that the false prophets will continue to adapt the word that they are proclaiming as the circumstances in the world change. For example, in our present day, while we wait for the Father to take His seat, there are many scoffers saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.' 2Pe 3:4.

Once the Father has taken His seat, and Jesus Christ has begun to open the seals, there will be a time of unprecedented distress and trouble in the world. Jesus described the time between the opening of the second seal and the opening of the sixth seal as a period of 'great tribulation'. Mat 24:21. During this time, it is likely that false prophets will promote various gospels that promise an escape from tribulation and persecution. For example, the commonly held 'rapture doctrine' proposes that there

will be *a secret return of Christ* to take His believers out of the world before or during the period of tribulation.

Jesus was clear that He will not secretly return before the day of His physical second coming. He said to His disciples, 'If anyone says to you, "Look, here is the Christ!" or "There!" do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, "Look, He is in the desert!" do not go out; or "Look, He is in the inner rooms!" do not believe it.' Mat 24:23-26.

Following the tribulation that belongs to the opening of the seals, the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the heavens. The evangelistic ministry of the glorified bride of Christ will cause a great multitude from all nations to mourn when they 'look upon Him whom they have pierced'. Mat 24:30. We read in the book of Revelation that 'every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him.' Rev 1:7. This is evidently not referring to a secret return of Christ, because '*every eye* will see Him'. Nor is it describing His physical return for the battle of Armageddon. We know this because when Christ physically returns for the battle of Armageddon there will be *no opportunity* for the nations to mourn with godly sorrow that leads to repentance.

After the opening of the sixth seal, 'the mountain of the house of the Lord' will be established as the chief, or the head, of all the other 'mountains'. Isa 2:2. The presbytery around the Father's throne will instruct the leaders of the seventh world kingdom to destroy all of their weapons. Isa 2:4. Eze 39:9. More importantly, the presbytery will oversee the public and house to house fellowship of the church in all nations. The fellowship of the *agape* meal will be the major agenda in the world for a period of seven years. During this seven-year period, a great multitude from every tribe, nation, people and tongue will stream into the kingdom of God. Rev 7:9-17.

The period of seven years that belongs to the opening of the sixth seal will be the church's finest hour in the world! 'The Earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.' Hab 2:14. Isa 11:9. However, this period of peace and prosperity also will provide a unique opportunity for another wave of false prophets. Perhaps this wave of false prophets will proclaim a new form of triumphalism, and may propose that the church give its attention to reviving the fortunes of the seventh world kingdom. Jesus said,

'Then *many false prophets* will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.' Mat 24:11-12.

It is likely that during this period of peace Antichrist will begin to exalt himself above the presbytery in the true temple of God. The apostle Paul described the rise of Antichrist by saying that he will come 'according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved'. 2Th 2:9-10.

Antichrist will be deceived by Satan, and will then become a messenger of Satan, while he is still in the church. His ministry will deceive those who have not received the love of the truth. The truth that they will deny is that Christ is coming in the flesh of His people as they remain in the fellowship of the body of Christ, the church. 2Jn 1:7. Jesus described the fellowship of His body by saying that He is the Vine, and we are the branches. Joh 15:5.

Antichrist will presume to have the divine nature as a man 'like God', and will then 'sit as God in the temple of God'. 2Th 2:4. He will begin to promote his own vision for the image of man, which does not recognise the need to remain in fellowship with Yahweh as an eternal reality. It is sobering to consider that if a believer does not receive the love of the truth by receiving the gospel of God and embracing the pathway of their salvation, God will send upon them a strong delusion so that they will believe the lie of Antichrist. 2Th 2:11-12. In this regard, we note that the polarising impact of the word that is proclaimed by the messengers who belong to the Elijah ministry will continue all the way through the time of the end.

The fall of Antichrist, along with the great falling away from the church, will be fully manifest in the earth during the blowing of the trumpets. When the third trumpet blows, Antichrist will be revealed as a great star who has fallen from heaven. John recorded that when he heard the third trumpet, '*A great star* fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter.' Rev 8:10-11.

The summary in Daniel Chapter 12

When we read Chapter 12 of the book of Daniel, it commences with a description of the time when the Father takes His seat. We read, '*At that time* Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was

since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.’ Dan 12:1. This verse contains a very brief summary of the opening of the seals.

When Jesus Christ stands up from His throne at the right hand of the Father, and then moves the administration of the body of Christ to the centre of the Father’s throne, Michael will also stand up again. Dan 12:1. He is the strong angel who will proclaim with a mighty voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?’ Rev 5:2. When Christ begins to open the seals, there will be a time of unprecedented trouble in the world. Mat 24:21. The elect will be delivered from this time of trouble when Christ opens the sixth seal and then slaughters the armies of Gog and Magog on the mountains of Israel. Mat 24:22.

The Lord then revealed to Daniel that there will be two resurrections at the end of the age. The first resurrection will be to *everlasting life*, and the second resurrection will be to *everlasting contempt*. Dan 12:2. Likewise, Jesus said that there will be a resurrection of *life* and a resurrection of *condemnation*. Joh 5:29. The resurrection of life will occur on the day of Christ’s physical second coming. On that day, every believer will receive an immortal and incorruptible resurrection body that has been composed from the DNA of Christ’s resurrection body. 1Co 15:51-54. 1Th 4:13-18. Php 3:20-21. The resurrection of condemnation will happen at the end of the Millenium when every unbeliever will be raised again in their mortal body and then cast into the lake of fire. Rev 20:7-15.

The Lord then spoke to Daniel in very broad terms regarding the evangelistic ministry of the church after the Father takes His seat and before the physical second coming of Christ. He revealed to Daniel that the messengers of Christ, in the time of the end, ‘will shine like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever’. Dan 12:3. The *fruit* of their ministry will be a great multitude from every tribe, nation, people and tongue. Rev 7:9-17. However, we also know from the book of Revelation that the tail of the dragon will cause one third of these stars to fall. Rev 12:3-4. The fall of Antichrist will be part of this great falling away. 2Th 2:3.

The angel then instructed Daniel to seal up the words of his prophetic book until the time of the end. Dan 12:4. The fact that Daniel was told to place his prophetic seal upon the book indicates that this was the end of the revelation. We could consider the remaining verses in Chapter 12 to be ‘a prophetic postscript’. The Lord revealed to Daniel that there will be

two separate three and a half-year periods before the day of resurrection. Notably, Daniel did not receive the detail of this seven-year period. The detail that belongs to this seven-year period was revealed to the apostle John when he received the 'little book' that contains the finished mystery of God. Rev 10.

Two distinct 3 ½ year periods

In relation to the first 3 ½ year period, Daniel testified, 'I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, as he raised his right hand and his left toward heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed.' Dan 12:7. We note the striking parallel between Daniel's vision of the man who was dressed in linen and John's vision of the mighty angel with the little book in his hand. Rev 10. The mighty angel swore by Him who lives forever and ever 'that there will be delay no longer'. Rev 10:6.

When the seventh trumpet is blown to announce the end of the age, Moses and Elijah will minister for 3 ½ years as the final prophetic witnesses. Rev 11:3-4. The ministry of Moses and Elijah, supported by the 144 000, is particularly significant in relation to the fulfilment of the Seventy Weeks prophecy. We know that the Seventy Weeks prophecy was given to the holy people. Dan 9:24. The *period of delay* within the seventieth week will come to an end when the archangel Michael proclaims that 'there will be delay no longer'. Rev 10:6. The ministry of Moses and Elijah for 3 ½ years is the second half of the seventieth week that has been given to the people of God for the sake of their salvation. The fruit of their ministry will be the salvation of a final harvest of martyrs. Rev 14:13.

The power of the holy people will be shattered when Moses and Elijah are martyred by Antichrist and Abaddon at the end of their ministry. 'The power of the holy people' is more than the church's authority over the nations. It also refers to the power for salvation that accompanies the proclamation of the gospel of God. Rom 1:16. The martyrdom of Moses and Elijah will bring the final proclamation of the gospel of God to an end. The power of the holy people to minister faith and grace for salvation will be completely removed from the world. This will mark 'the end of the wonders', or 'the end of the miracles', in relation to the final harvest of sons of God. Dan 12:6.

After Moses and Elijah have been martyred, the vials that contain the fullness of the wrath of God will be poured out upon Antichrist and his kingdom at the beginning of his reign. Rev 15. When the vials are poured out, a 'complete destruction' will be poured out upon Antichrist as the desolator. Dan 9:27. The outpouring of the vials is the final event that belongs to the Seventy Weeks prophecy. Interestingly, when Daniel heard about this first 3 ½ year period, which is 'the end of wonders', he did not understand the meaning of it. He then asked the angel, 'My lord, what shall be the end of these things?' Dan 12:8. He was effectively asking, 'What will be the outcome of these events?' or 'What will happen after this?'

The angel replied by saying, 'Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.' Dan 12:9. Evidently, Daniel did not need to worry about the answer to his question. Nevertheless, the angel did reveal to him that there will be a further 3 ½ year period that belongs to the wicked. He said, 'And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days.' Dan 12:11. This final abomination of desolation refers to the new image of man that will be set up by Antichrist and the false prophet to replace Christ who is the full revelation of man in the image and likeness of God.

After the new image of man has been fully established, it is likely that the 1290 days refers to the length of time until the battle of Armageddon, which will occur at the end of the reign of Antichrist. The angel continued, 'Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days.' Dan 12:12. The end of the 1335 days may refer to the renovation of the present heavens and earth for the beginning of the Millenium. The believers from all ages will receive an incorruptible and immortal resurrection body from Christ when He physically returns, and then they will reign with Christ on the earth for 1000 years. Rev 20:6. Notably, the angel concluded by saying to Daniel, 'But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at *the end of the days.*' Dan 12:13.

THE TIME OF THE END

