

THE GLORIOUS CHURCH

by David Hall

INDEX

| | | |
|----------|---|-----------|
| 1 | Love's Desire | 1 |
| 2 | The Raw Material | 6 |
| 3 | The Cost | 9 |
| 4 | The Workshop | 11 |
| 5 | The Administrator, His Workmen and Tools | 17 |
| 6 | The Pattern and the Process | 20 |
| 7 | When will the Church be Perfect? | 27 |

© Vision One Incorporated, 1989.
NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA
and ISBN 1 875277 01 3

Illustrations by Cheryl Keatley
Proof-reading by Maureen Gordon
Layout and Design by Doug Watt
Published by Vision One,
PO Box 240,
SAMFORD QLD 4520
AUSTRALIA
Ph +61 7 3289 2888 Fax +61 7 3289 2306

For further information please contact:

1 Love's Desire

The heavens and the earth have not always been, but are a created realm made by God for a specific purpose. The angelic hosts which populate heaven are also a part of the created realm, as is the human race inhabiting the earth.

God made all things. But why? Was He bored in His eternity? Was He experimenting with His artistic abilities? Was He indulging His divine whims in a hobby of galactic proportions? Of course not! There is nothing so frivolous about God.

Why then did He create all things? Like multitudes through the ages we ask, "Who am I?", and "Why am I here?" We must know the answer to these questions, for on that answer hangs the whole gospel of our salvation. The answer is found in the nature and heart of God.

God is revealed, not just as a simple numerical one, but as a unique compound unity of three-in-one, a tri-unity, or trinity. He is the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit together in one Godhead. (The Hebrew word 'elohim', translated 'God' is actually a plural word used in a singular setting). The three distinct personalities relate together in such a way as to be indivisible in human terms: a perfect union where three wills are submitted together in one purpose, three sources of expression agree in one testimony, and three beings are manifested as one God.

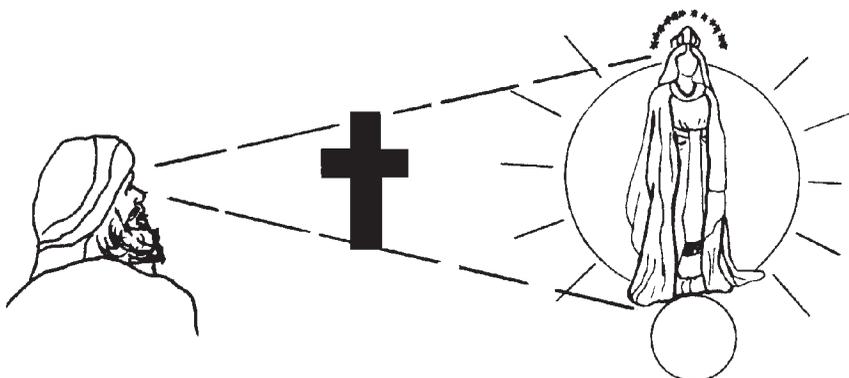
Central to this divine relationship is love - that pre-eminent feature of God's divine nature out of which flow all of His other attributes.

-
- Love desires to **give** completely.
 - Love desires to **relate** totally.
 - Love desires full **expression** and **communication**.
 - Love desires a **subject** upon which it can be lavished.
 - Love desires **marriage**.

In eternity, therefore, in the divine council of the Godhead a plan was established by oath, enabling God's love its full expression. The plan was that, in the context of creation, God would bring forth a bride for His Son. She is otherwise known in the New Testament as the church. The plan is also referred to by various terms and phrases:-

- The hope of His calling. (Eph 1:18).
- God's eternal purpose. (Eph 1:9, 3:11, II Tim 1:9).
- The great mystery. (Eph 5:32, 3:3-4,9, Col 1:26-27, Rom 16:25).
- The hidden wisdom. (I Cor 2:7).
- Predestination. (Eph 1:5,11, 2:10, Rom 8:29).
- The will of God. (Eph 5:17, Col 1:9).
- The inheritance of the church. (Rom 8:17, Eph 1:11, Col 1:12).
- God's covenants. (Heb 13:20, 9:15, 10:16-18, Gal 3:17).
- God's promises. (II Peter 1:4, Rom 4:13,14).

The bride is the reason that Christ went to the cross (Eph 5:25), and she was '*the joy set before Him*' as He endured the suffering, despising the shame. (*Heb 12:2*).



The perfect match

Mismatched marriages are sad to behold. The initial joy of romance and the novelty of a new state soon give way to frustration, pain and sorrow.

The marriage of Christ and His church will be no mismatch! She will be of the same order as He, and able to reciprocate in the same divine love that He has already demonstrated. The quality of her perfection must match His, so that the extent and depth of her love can satisfy His.

Creation teaches us that there can be no union across the lines of the species. A dog cannot be united with a cat nor a bird with a fish. Man cannot be united with the apes, nor can angels be married to men.

Neither can the son of God marry into another order! His bride must be of the same nature, perfection and divinity as He, just as He has already come to share her humanity. (Heb 2:14).

The manifold wisdom of God will be clearly seen in her. (Eph 3:10). The perfection of beauty will be displayed in her. (Psalm 50:2). The fullness of glory will shine forth from her. (Rev 12:1, Rom 8:18, Col 3:4; 1:27). All God's power and authority will be shared with her. (Rev 3:21). But most importantly, she will have the capacity to relate perfectly in all things with her bridegroom. Herein lies the truth of perfection.

But what do we mean by the word 'perfection'? When we say something is 'perfect' we mean that it is 'complete', 'whole', 'ideal' and 'flawless'. When a thing does what it is supposed to do and appears as it is designed to appear, then it is 'perfect'.

But we must consider also the content of perfection. A flawless bicycle is certainly not a flawless Rolls Royce. An ideal refrigerator is not an ideal couch. They perform different functions and are made of different materials.

Regarding Christian perfection, to say that Christians will some day be perfect does not, on its own, convey very much. Sinlessness in eternity will be automatic when there is no Devil to tempt us. But what shall be the content of the church's perfection and when shall her marriage to Christ take place? For the answer to the first part of this question, consider carefully the following verses.

*'I in them and You in Me that they may be made **perfect in one.**' (John 17:23).*

*'that you may be filled with all the **fullness of God.**' (Eph 3:19).*

*'...till we all come ... to the measure of the stature of the **fullness of Christ**, to a perfect man.'* (Eph 4:13).

*'...may grow up in **all things into Him** who is the head - Christ.'* (Eph 4:15).

*'...a **glorious church**, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.'* (Eph 5:27).

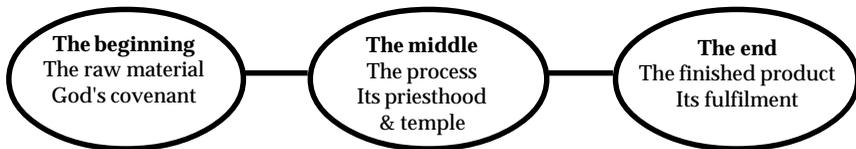
*'...but we all ... beholding ... the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the **same image**, from glory to glory, just as by the spirit of the Lord.'* (II Cor 3:18).

*'Not that I ... am already perfected; but I press on that I may lay hold of **that for which** Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.'* (Phil 3:12).

*'Therefore you shall be perfect just as **your Father** in heaven is perfect.'* (Matt 5:48).

The doctrine of perfection is not fundamentally about the perfection of independent individuals. Rather, it describes the perfection of the church: a corporate perfection where the completeness of Christ will be displayed in her many members as they are made **one**. Independence and individualism will never see perfection, but, in the relationship of the church, every single member will come to perfection.

Let us now step back a little and take a broad view of the outworking of God's plan. It falls into three sections:

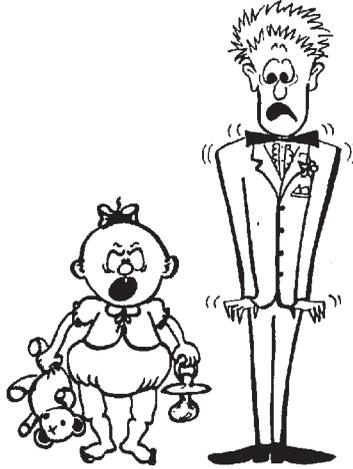


In creation, God set a scene for a process whereby His purpose would be accomplished. This process would involve:

- 1 raw material,
- 2 the cost,
- 3 a workshop in which the process could take place,
- 4 an administrator, His workmen and tools,
- 5 a pattern or blueprint, and a process, and
- 6 a timetable.

How would you like
your bride to be?

Like this?



Like this?

Or like this?



2 The Raw Material

'We are God's workmanship'. (Eph 2:10).

The raw material was man, created in God's image and after His likeness. What better raw material could God have chosen? Paul says we were '*chosen in Him **before** the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him*'. (Eph 1:4).

Because the finished product is to be perfect, the raw material He begins with should also be perfect. But what kind of perfection did Adam possess?

First of all, Adam was flawless. It is inconceivable that the handiwork of God should be anything but flawless. Every craftsman sets out to make something in the hope that it will be without deficiency, and the best of its kind. Adam was just such a creation. He was the most perfect specimen of humanity ever to walk the earth, because, in his original creation, he was physically faultless, emotionally and psychologically secure, intellectually a genius, and relationally ideal. He was in every sense the best of his kind. How could he be anything else? But Adam's perfection was merely perfect humanity - **he was not perfect as God is perfect**.

Adam's perfection could be described as 'baby' perfection. We delight in the beauty and completeness of a new born babe, with its perfectly formed miniature features and smooth complexion. What potential is here to be realised! What abilities does this little one possess

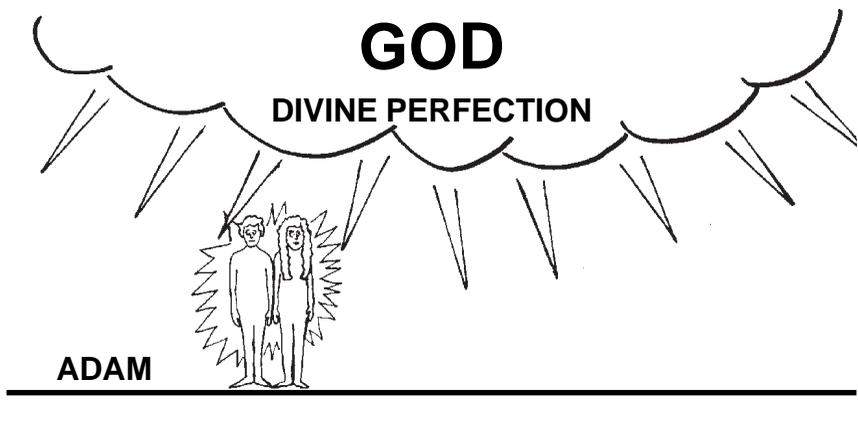
and what will it be able to accomplish? As yet it is still a babe with so much to face before its maturity is reached and its potential realised.

So it was with Adam. He was perfectly formed and with so much potential. But he became marred by sin. The raw material was tainted in man's fall.

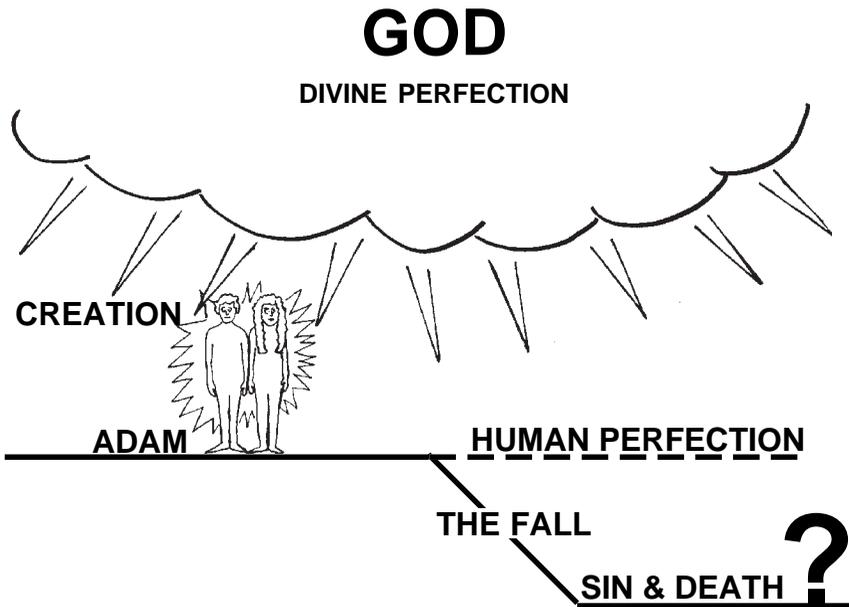
How could this have happened? He had such an impeccable beginning! The answer lies in one aspect of man's creation - he was created in freedom.

The reason for this freedom is love - the love that the bride of Christ ultimately would be capable of sharing with her bridegroom under the New Covenant. God created mankind for love, in love, and to love - but love must contain an element of choice. One cannot command that another love him. He may inspire love, or win love, but he cannot force love from another. A programmed response of verbal expressions of love could not satisfy God. Thus, because of the love that will finally be part of the bride's perfection, man had to be created in a context of freedom.

Unfortunately for the human race, Adam misused and misdirected that freedom by turning it in upon himself. By taking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he reached for his own autonomy. He desired to stand apart from God and to set his own destiny. He had become deceived, and thus the first sin (and the basis of all sin), was the sin against love's relationship. By stepping apart from God, he was overcome by sin and Satan, who took him into captivity. Death entered, and every soul born since, of Adam's race, is fathered from a fallen and polluted seed.



God's raw material had been despoiled! How could God now proceed with His plan for a perfect bride for His Son? Instead of man rising from the area of human perfection to that of divine perfection in God, he had been degraded to a level of sin and death.



3 The Cost

God was not taken by surprise. Back in eternity when the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit were formulating this whole scheme, God, in wisdom, realised that man's freedom in love could well be misused. In His foreknowledge He also knew that man indeed would misuse such freedom.

In the light of this foreknowledge what would God's wisdom recommend?

Should He abort the whole plan? No! Love never fails!

Should He lock man away to isolate man from his own mistakes?

No! That would destroy the very ability to love.

Should He destroy the Devil and shield man from temptation? No!

This would mean that love would remain forever unproven.

How then would God prepare against all possibilities?

Love supplied the way !

God would provide Himself to be the means of redeeming man back from his 'fallenness'. God's love is stronger than eternal judgment, stronger than death, and willing to pay the ultimate price.

Thus it was that Christ was '*foreordained*' before the foundation of the world to be the '*lamb of God*', slain, to take away the sin of the world. (*I Peter 3:20, Rev 13:8*).

The death of Jesus on the cross, is therefore the greatest expression of the quality of God's love. In time and in eternity, the cross shows the fervour and intensity of God's love; its length, breadth, depth and

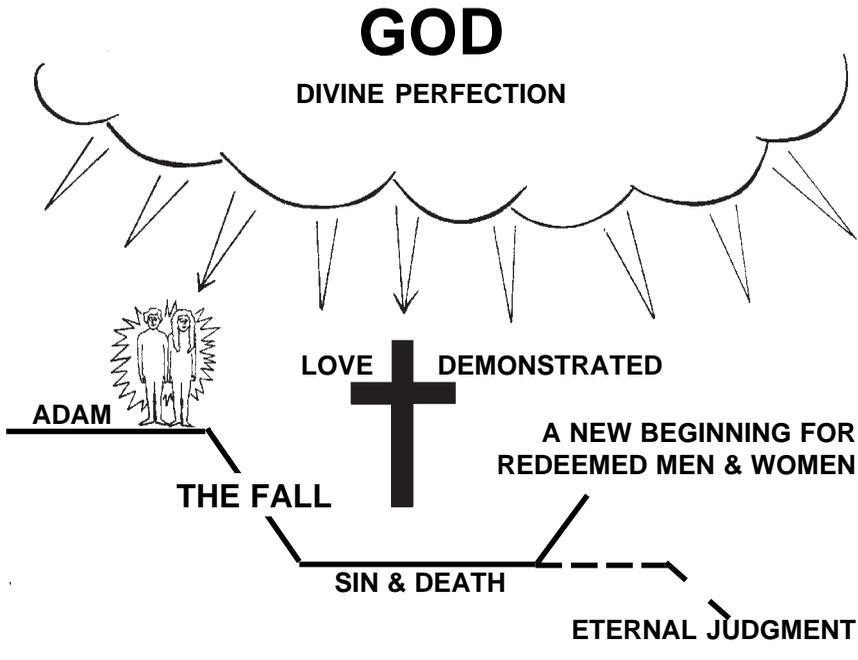
height - all its infinite magnitude. Through the cross alone, the church shall comprehend the fullness of the love of God *'which passes knowledge'*, and *'be filled with all the fullness of God'*. (Eph 3:19).

He has not sought to conquer His bride in the power of the Lion, but He woos her in the meekness of the slain Lamb.

This provision of the Lamb that God made in eternity, not only ensures the freedom in which love can flow between Christ and His church, but it also demonstrates fully the dimensions of divine love.

Because of the cross of Christ, the process to perfection for each redeemed person can proceed because, for them, the fall has been reversed, relationship restored, and the raw material cleansed. We now have a fresh starting point in the form of the *'new creature'*. (II Cor 5:17, Gal 6:15, I Peter 1:23).

Though sin appears in each of us from time to time, it cannot be attributed to the *'new creature'*, for *'that which is born of God sinneth not'*, and *'whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world'*. (I John 5:4,18). The *'old man'* whom sin conquered has been declared dead at baptism, and the ultimate carrying out of his death sentence is in progress now as we walk daily in the light. (I John 1:7-9).



4 The Workshop

God is limitless in every capacity and dimension. At the opening of the temple, Solomon declared, *'The heaven and the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain Him.'* (II Chron 2:6). But to accomplish what He had in mind, God decided to use a finite realm where certain bounds could be set. Man could not be created in timelessness nor infinity. Man would be limited.

The 'raw material' in its initial form was not ready in certain ways to cope with infinite capacities like God's; as events in the garden of Eden were to prove. Neither would God create an instantly mature and perfect bride of divine calibre. She must *'grow up into Him in all things'*. (Eph 4:15). A process would be initiated whereby the seed of His own fathering would come to maturity, and in true freedom give herself, and be given, fully as the bride to the only begotten Son of God. But where would all this take place? The answer must be considered in three parts.

Creation

Creation is the first expression of the 'workshop' where the processes could proceed upon the 'raw material'. Man's surroundings were to be beautiful and even now men attest to the beauty of nature all around us. Man is not the by-product of natural selection, as evolutionists would have us believe. Rather, the whole of creation,

including the galaxies and stars, was made for man! God would administer the process from His throne room in heaven while man would inhabit the earth.

So, *'in the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth'*. (Gen 1:1). He set His throne in these heavens and the creation of heaven and earth became the first and broadest manifestation of the *'true temple'*. (Isa 66:1, Psalm 103:19, Heb 8:1,2). The heavens and the earth have a beginning and an ending. When their purpose is fulfilled, they shall be *'rolled up as a scroll'* and *'folded up as a garment'*. (Isa 34:4, Heb 1:10-12).

The angelic hosts were then made as servants to those who would be *'heirs of salvation'*. (Heb 1:14). In Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, we are given an account of Lucifer's fall. He presumed to be *'like the Most High'* (Isa 14:14), and coveted the place set aside for the bride-to-be, *'the mount of the congregation on the sides of the north'*. (Isa 14:13). Somehow he had come to realise God's intention for the church and he plotted to rob her of it. His rebellion did not succeed and in his fall he took a third part of the angels with him and was cast to the earth. When Adam and Eve appeared on the scene in the garden of Eden, Lucifer had already fallen and appeared to them as the *'serpent'*. Man's first test had arrived!

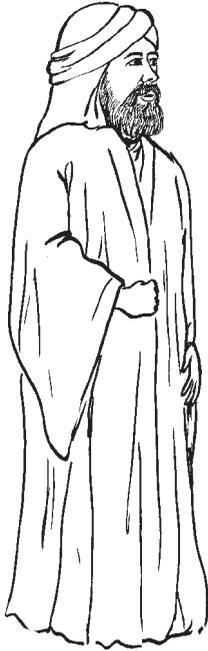
The subsequent fall of man, and the resultant curse, marred the order of nature. The ground now brought forth thorns and thistles, and man was required to live by the sweat of his brow. (Gen 3:17-19). Creation was *'made subject to vanity (vain striving) ... and groans and travails in pain together'* (Rom 8:20-22). The lion was turned into a beast of prey, whilst the scorpion and bee received their stings and the spider, his poison.

But while the fall of man defaced both the *'raw material'* and the earthly *'workshop'*, God's eternal purpose remained unthwarted. God would still have a place in which the processes of perfection would transpire.

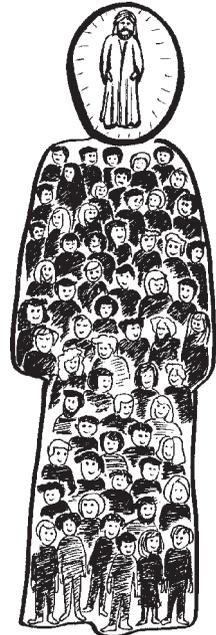
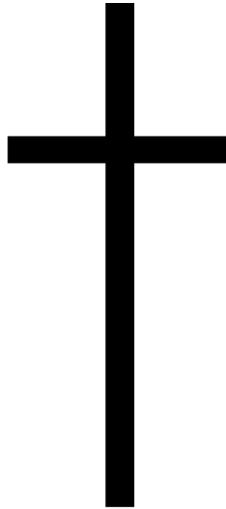
Israel - Living in the time of the shadow

God began to show His purpose to Abraham, whom He called *'the possessor of heaven and earth.'* (Gen 14:19, Rom 4:13). Kings would come out of Abraham and in his seed *'all the families of the earth would be blessed'*. (Gen 12:3).

So it was that Abraham fathered the nation of natural Israel. This



Christ, the man



**Christ, the head
of the body**

nation was given a priesthood and temple which operated for 1500 years. From Moses on it functioned by a law system based on the knowledge of good and evil, but it contained no provision to enable those who tried to keep the Law. This system had no capacity whatever to bring perfection to pass, for it was simply a *'shadow of that which was to come.'* (Heb 10:1).

The body of Christ - the eventual workshop

So *'in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, made of the seed of Abraham,'* and through Him a new nation has been born - a spiritual nation where all who believe are made heirs of His covenant. (Gal 3:29). In this new nation there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, bond nor free, male nor female, but all are *'one in*

Christ'. (Eph 2:11-16, Gal 3:28). This new nation is also referred to as the 'body of Christ' or the 'church'.

This topic of the 'body of Christ' is prominent throughout the New Testament. This expression first applies to the individual body of Jesus, born of the virgin Mary by the process of incarnation. (Heb 10:5, Gal 3:27-29). After His resurrection and ascension to the throne, Jesus became the Head of a much larger, many-membered body: the 'church'.

Paul writes: *'and gave Him to be head over all things to the church which is His body, the fullness of Him who filleth all in all.'* (Eph 1:22-23, Rom 12:4, I Cor 10:17, 12:12). Ephesians chapter 4 is a discussion of the basis and function of the body. The five-fold ministry is given to the church *'...for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ may grow up in all things into Him who is the Head, even Christ, from whom the whole body is joined and knit together'*. (Eph 4:12-16). Clearly, the body of Christ is now the 'workshop' for the perfecting processes which, even now, have begun to operate in us.

The marred earth is the dwelling place of this body of God's people, for Jesus prayed *'not that You would take them out of the world they are not of the world even as I am not of the world'*. (John 17:14-16). We overcome while we are in the world. And yet, even while we live in this world, the location of our life within 'the body' is *'heavenly places'*. (Eph 2:6).

It is here that we have an entrance by the Holy Spirit to our Father God. The completed process will show Christ's perfection in His body, the church. Just as the individual body of Jesus was a temple in which the fullness of God dwelt, so the many membered body of Christ is now a temple in which God, by the Holy Spirit, dwells and operates. (Col 1:19, I Cor 3:9-17).

Paul again writes: *'you are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in Whom all the building grows into a holy temple of the Lord.'* (Eph 2:20-21).

Peter says: *'... you also as living stones are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up sacrifices ...'*, and *'... you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people ...'* (I Peter 2:5,9).

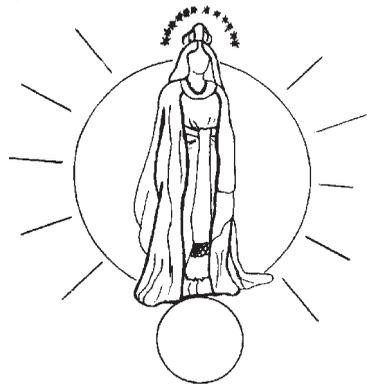
Note how the nation, the house, the temple and the priesthood all refer to the same group of people. The body and the church are also synonymous. (Eph 1:22-23). These are all expressions of the 'workshop'



the raw material



**the church
the body
the temple**



the glorious bride



in which the processes of perfection are taking place, and of the people in whom the glories of divine perfection shall be revealed.

- There can be no growth apart from the body.
- There can be no priesthood outside the temple.
- There can be no identity apart from the nation.
- There can be no building without the other stones.

5 The Administrator, His Workmen and Tools

To see the ‘administrator’ of our analogy we must look at Melchisedec.

Who was, or is, Melchisedec?

Melchisedec first appears in the Bible as the priest who met Abraham after he had rescued Lot. (Gen 14:18). The writer of Hebrews says this of Melchisedec, *‘(He has) neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.’* (Heb 7:3). The psalmist shows us that Jesus is declared to be *‘a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec.’* (Psalm 110:4, Heb 7:17). It is also said of Jesus that He has an *‘unchangeable priesthood.’* (Heb 7:24). His priesthood is unchangeable because He was appointed by an unchanging God to administer an **everlasting covenant**. Paul says this about Christ’s eternal purpose and priesthood, *‘... (it) was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.’* (II Tim 1:9). He also says; *‘We have such a High Priest Who ... is a minister of a better covenant’*, and again, *‘He is the mediator of the New Covenant’.* (Heb 8:1,6; 9:15).

Jesus, in His role as the **high priest** in the **temple**, is the one who has been commissioned to administer the **everlasting covenant**. If the ‘workshop’ of our analogy is the **temple**, then the ‘administrator’ is the High Priest.

Let us now look a little more closely at Jesus' calling.

■ God's oath establishes His High Priesthood as being eternal and unchanging. (Heb 7:21, Psalm 110:4).

■ He has been **anointed** for the task. (Isa 61:1, Heb 1:9, Luke 4:14; 3:22)

■ A throne and authority are His to administer the covenant and to overcome all the enemies of the purpose of God. (Psalm 110:1, Heb 1:3; 2:9; 7:2; 12:2; 4:16, Acts 2:33).

■ He is called by a Name which is above all names. At His birth He was called 'Jesus', which means 'Saviour' and describes the reason He came. But at His ascension, the fulness of His name was revealed as the **Lord Jesus Christ**, and this expresses the fulness of Who He is in His priestly role. (Isa 7:14, Luke 1:31, Acts 2:36, Heb 1:4, Phil 2:9).

Consider some of His priestly tasks.

■ **Cleansing from sin.** He shed His blood as the Lamb of God '*slain from before the foundation of the world.*' (Rev 13:8). His sacrifice is the only one capable of taking away sin.

■ **Ongoing intercession.** His voice is constantly raised on our behalf in the heavenlies, countering all the accusations of the Devil and all accusation of our own daily imperfections. (Job 1, Rev 12:10). Because He is seated on the 'mercy seat' (the throne of grace), we can have access with boldness, into the very throne room of God, despite our mistakes and humanity. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin (constantly) as we continue to walk in the light. (I John 1:7, Heb 4:16; 10:19,22; Eph 2:5,8,18; 3:11,12).

■ **Provision for the processes of perfection.** The first priestly thing Jesus did after His ascension to the throne, was to send the Holy Spirit to the Church. This provision of the Holy Spirit is the main element in the perfecting processes. It was John the Baptist who said of Jesus, '*He shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor ...*' (John 3:11,12). John was referring here to the purifying work that the Holy Spirit would do. Malachi prophesied it in these terms, '*..He (Jesus) is like the refiner's fire and like the fuller's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi and purge them as gold and silver that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness.*' (Mal 3:2-3). True to John's prophecy, when the Holy Spirit came to the disciples in the upper

room on the Day of Pentecost, they were all **baptised with the Holy Spirit** as tongues of fire sat on each of them and they spoke in other tongues, glorifying God. The Church had been born! The Anointing which rests upon the Head was now flowing down over the Body. Those in the upper room were indeed *'baptised by one Spirit into one Body'*. (I Cor 12:13). And now this same baptism of the Holy Spirit is available to every blood-washed believer who asks for it. The promise has never been taken away from the church but is *'unto as many as afar off, as many as the Lord will call.'* (Acts 2:39).

Since the birth of the Church, the Priesthood of Melchisedec is revealed more broadly than the individual person of Jesus. It now includes, and functions through, the members of His Body. (Heb 2:11) We become 'workers together' with Christ, and the **'tools'** we use are those capacities of Grace given to us by the Holy Spirit. We share in His family, His anointing, His Name, His authority and His Cross.

- He is the Head - we are the Body
- He is the Captain - we are the army
- He is the Shepherd - we are the flock
- He is the Vine - we are the branches
- He is the Foundation - we are the building
- He is the King - we are the nation
- He is the High Priest - we are the priesthood

Each item on this list expresses a particular mode of **relationship** and **order** in which we participate with Him. We are not a collection of individual priests but rather one priesthood under the Great High Priest. We are a 'body' which grows by the function and contribution of every part. We are a building of lively stones being built into a *'spiritual house'*. (I Peter 2:5). A collection of all the right, prepared building materials on a site, does not make a building. Those materials must be brought into relationship to one another by the builder.

6 The Pattern and the Process

God is a God of order. His creation bears witness to that. If we are to participate in His priesthood, we must know His order. If we are to build with God, we must view the 'blueprint'. Like Moses, we must *'build according to the pattern'*.

What is the pattern like?

Abraham saw it when he *'looked for a city whose builder and maker is God.'* (Heb 11:10).

Moses saw it on the mount and built the tabernacle accordingly, and then gathered Israel around it. (Ex 25:40).

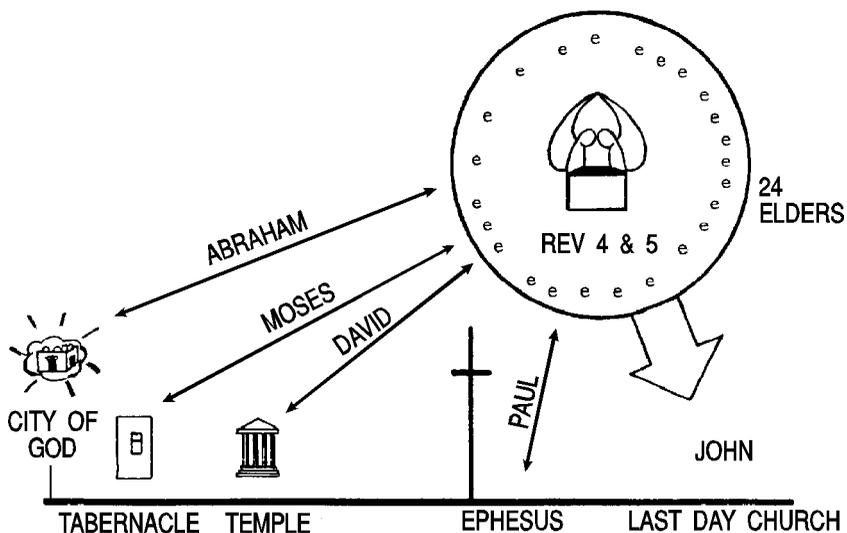
David saw it and gave strict instructions to Solomon for the building of the temple and the ordering of priests and Levites within it. (I Chron 28:11-12).

Ezekiel saw it and described what he saw as *'wheels within wheels'*. (Ezek 1:16).

Paul saw it and established the churches of Asia, each with many responsible leaders. (Acts 20:17-31, Phil 1:1, Acts 14:23).

John saw it and wrote the book of Revelation, giving us a vivid description of the temple of God in heaven. (Rev 4 & 5).

John's view of the scene in heaven is a key in understanding God's pattern of priesthood for our day. He is told, *'come up here and I will show you things which must take place after this.'* (Rev 4:1). We are in that time now.



So when John looks through the open door in heaven, the first thing he sees is the throne, upon which sits the Lamb of God. He is central to the whole scene. Everything is gathered to Him and takes place around Him.

This is the true order; God's temple, the centre of all creation. What clear insight we are given here. Now the patterns of Moses' tabernacle and Solomon's temple become clear. The heavenly 'holiest of all' is opened up where the mercy seat is the throne. The Lamb is the centre of all and from here all authority emanates, and all true priesthood functions.

How is it that John is allowed to view this place, when under Moses, only the high priest could enter the 'holiest', and then only once a year?

The answer is good news for all of us. It was at the cross of Calvary that the 'veil' of Christ's flesh was torn, and now a 'new and living way', (*Heb 10:20*), has been opened for all to enter and join in this heavenly order. It was **after** the cross that John was shown this scene:

An unbroken rainbow surrounds the throne, while 'in and around' are four living ones. Before the throne stands the seven-branched candlestick, depicting the fullness of the Spirit of God. Then comes a circle of 24 thrones upon which are 24 elders, each having crowns and harps. They fall before the Lamb, casting their crowns before Him in

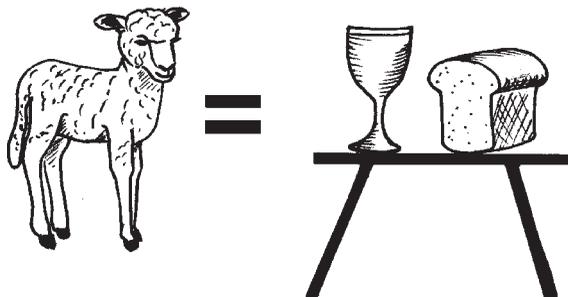
submission to His authority. They worship in song with multiplied thousands of others present in that vast array. The 24 declare that this throng are 'priests unto God', dependant upon the Lamb, and sharing His kingship.

But how is this order to be translated into the church here on earth?

For the answer, let us look at the basic elements of this heavenly order. We can see one centre - the Lamb on the throne to which all gather and to which all bow and all worship. There are 24 thrones and 24 elders.

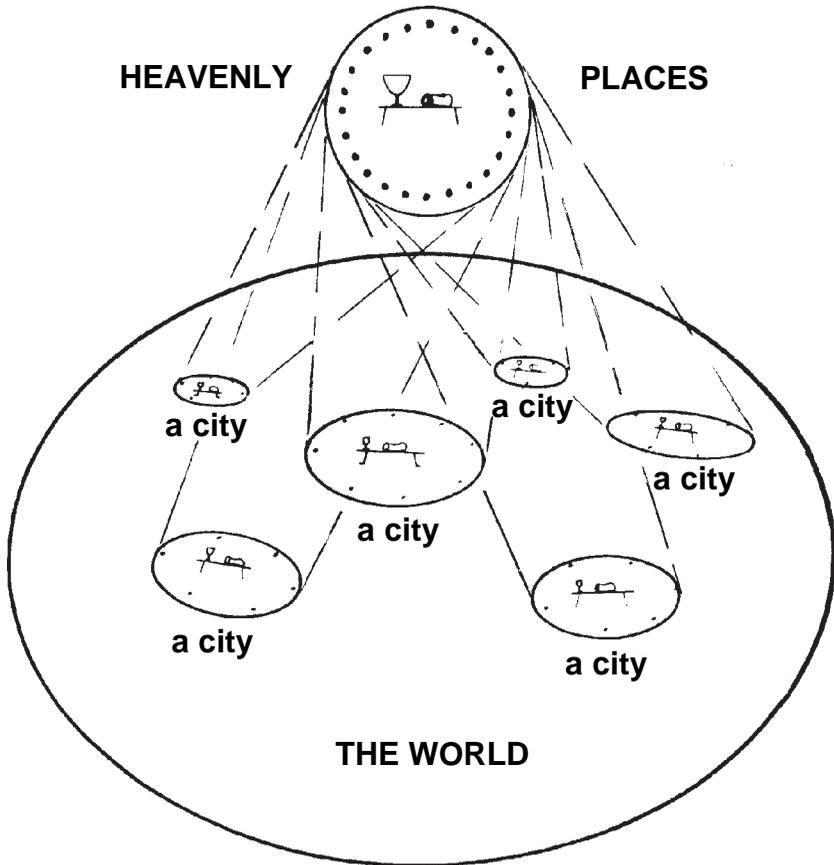
1 One gathering place - the Lamb

Christ was raised from the dead and set upon the throne 'in heavenly places' where He is head over all things to the church. (Eph 1:20-23). We also have been '*...quickened together with Christ, and raised up*



together and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' (Eph 2:5,6). The scene that John saw is the order of the whole church. There is only one church in heaven and earth. The branches of God's vine, the stones in God's building, the sheep in God's flock and the members of His body, are people who have been raised to sit with Christ in heavenly places. Groups, denominations, or organisations as such have no place in the heavenly order.

John's description shows one gathering to one centre, the Lamb of God. This same reality was reflected in each city of the early church. In his letters, Paul always referred to the church (singular) in a particular city. There were not many churches in a city - just one. Clearly we have fallen from this original beginning. However, God is calling us back to His order. He wants His one church to be expressed in each city. The centre of such gathering is to be the Lamb of God. In practice, this gathering to the Lamb is depicted in our gathering to the communion.



God's eternal passover Lamb is Christ, who has given us His flesh to eat as we take the communion. We are told to discern the body of Christ at the communion table, '*...for we being many, are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread.*' (I Cor 10:16-17, 11:29). By the Holy Spirit, we eat of Christ, and His Word thereby progressively becomes flesh in us. He is the centre of all our gathering, and the source of all our life. Jesus said that the eagles gather together where the slain body is. (Matt 24:28). God gathered Israel to Himself into the wilderness '*on eagle's wings*' (Ex 19:4), and there He fed them on manna from above. In the days of the early church, the church at Corinth gathered together in one place for communion, as did the church at Troas. (I Cor 11:20, Acts 20:7).

2 All bow to the Lamb

The twenty-four elders cast their crowns before the throne. This humility is the key to our gathering together. If we are all bowed in heart, then the headship of Christ will function without hindrance. Christ Himself is depicted as having the meekness of a lamb being led to the slaughter. To his disciples He says, ‘...*take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart*’. (Matt 11:29)

The present divided state of the church is due mainly to traditions, goals, ambitions, programmes and organisations to which its leadership gives priority at the expense of the oneness of the body of Christ. However, the Holy Spirit is adjusting our values as we all bow to that one throne in the same attitude as He Who sits upon it. The cross precedes the crown.

3 All worship

Worship is the expression of all-consuming love and adoration. The expression of our love of God must also be an expression of our love for one another. ‘*If someone says, “I love God” and hates his brother, he is a liar; ...*’ (I John 4:20). Our love for each other is expressed in our desire to be together, ‘bowing’ to one another as we together ‘bow’ to the Head. Thus, unity will always be a true measure of our worship.

The major eternal aspect of priesthood is worship. When priesthood has accomplished intercession and redemption, and made the body one, then worship will continue eternally.

4 Many elders

The presence of the twenty-four elders in the heavenly scene represents the leadership of the church under the headship of Christ.

Let us briefly consider the use of the word ‘elder’. In the New Testament, several words are used to describe the same office:

- ‘presbuteros’ means ‘elder’,
- ‘episkopos’ means ‘overseer’ or ‘bishop’, and
- ‘poimaino’ means to ‘feed’ as a shepherd.

These descriptions occur side-by-side in I Peter 5 where Peter, an apostle, calls himself an ‘elder’ and exhorts the local elders to ‘feed the flock’, taking the ‘oversight’ willingly. Timothy was told to ordain ‘elders’, whom Paul later termed ‘bishops’, in his description of their

required qualifications. (*I Tim 3:2*). The Philippian church clearly had a number of 'bishops'. (*Phil 1:1*).

Each church in the New Testament had an oversight consisting of a number of 'elders'. The apostles and others of the five-fold ministry were accounted as part of the eldership. Paul's last words to the Ephesian church were at Miletus where he sent for the 'elders (plural) of the church (singular)'. Then he told these elders to shepherd the flock of God among which the Holy Spirit had made them 'overseers'. Once again, we see a single flock with many shepherds or overseers called 'elders'.

Implications of the pattern

The pattern for leadership in the church in each city is this multiple eldership which gathers one flock to one communion table. These men are to be '*among the flock*', not acting as '*lords over God's heritage*'. (*I Peter 5:2-3*). They are to relate as in a 'family circle', not as a managerial pyramid. They must be 'called by the Holy Spirit' to their place, not elected by a congregation or a church board. They are to be a corporate extension of the fatherhood of God and the overseership of Christ. As they function in this relationship, the many-membered body with all its varied gifts and ministries will be brought to perfection. Perfection can only come to the church as the **whole body** ministers to the **whole body**. If we remain locked away in our smaller groupings, we are cut off from the adjusting elements which are present in the whole body.

The church has been blessed with many loving and caring pastors and leadership, but no one of these, or even small groups of these, has the capacity to bring a congregation to perfection. Neither can visiting preachers at conventions supply the need. There must be an ongoing, living relationship in '*first love*', (*Rev 2:4*), shown by our gathering constantly at the 'table of the Lord'. Here we may lay down our lives, our kingdoms and crowns, and our false identities, (whether individual or group identities), so that we can live by the power of His life and order.

Although the whole flock needs to gather as one for communion, there can of course be regional evangelistic outreach, home Bible studies and fellowship, counselling or the nurture and care of individuals or 'babes-in-Christ'. Within the pattern of God, the priesthood of every believer will be fully realised, and the body liberated into full function and power. But first things must be first, and foundations surely laid. The church must return to 'first love'.

This model of church order can be referred to as the 'Ephesian pattern', because it is in the church at Ephesus that it is most clearly seen. The New Testament order is quite contrary to pyramidal structures, with their successive layers of delegated authority. Jethro proposed such a pyramidal system to Moses, but it failed because it was a man's system. Moses eventually cried out to God for the answer to Israel's shepherding needs and God showed him this same 'eldership' principle of divine order. (Num 11:16-17).

It is the heavenly order alone that is able to bring the church to perfection. This pattern must be reflected city by city as an expression in earth of that one Church in heavenly places, to which we have been raised. In such gatherings all God's provision for the perfecting process will be available.

7 When will the Church be Perfect?

Jesus' Prayer

Jesus prayed for the perfect unity of His people, and His prayer actually indicates when this perfection is to be realised. The heart of His prayer is:

'That they all may be one, as You Father are in Me and I in You'. (John 17:21).

What absolute unity for the church! It is the same unity as exists between the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit. (See first chapter).

In contrast to this, the 'unity' displayed between groups today is often no more than:

- peaceful co-existence,
- mutual toleration,
- co-operation for projects in common, and
- working together for the mutual benefit of our separate groups.

We still have a long way to go.

Perfect unity cannot flow while human nature or structures are involved. Our imperfection divides the church, and this is not surprising, since Adam's sin was against relationship. Imperfection in each of us generates fear causing us to withdraw for protection into our

structures or into ourselves. Imperfect understanding of the purpose of God divides us doctrinally. The substitution of immediate goals for true unity also divides us.

Perfection and unity go together, just as Jesus prayed, *'that they be made perfect in one.'* (John 17:23).

The result of such unity will be a declaration to the world that *'You (the Father) sent me (the Son) into the world, and have loved them as I have loved you.'* This is in accord with Jesus' instruction to His disciples to *'love one another as I have loved you: by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples.'* (John 13:34-35).

But how can the world see this display of love and unity unless it occurs before Christ's return in flaming fire. (II Thess 1:7-10). Perfection must be prior to the close of the day of grace. Heaven to come is not the 'workshop' for bringing the church to perfection. The church shall overcome *'in the world.'* (John 17:15), and then inherit the promise that *'...he who overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne as I overcame and sat down with my Father in His throne.'* (Rev 3:21). Jesus overcame in the world. So shall we, and share in His perfection.

This must happen before Satan is bound, and he being 'the enemy' must still be at large if we are to overcome him. This shall be done by *'...the blood of the Lamb, the word of our testimony and the loving not of our lives unto the death.'* (Rev 12:11).

Jesus promised: *'I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.'* He also taught us to pray: *'Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.'*

'...the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now.' Waiting for what? Not the coming of Christ, (though this is very soon), but the *'manifestation of the sons of God.'* (Rom 8:17-22).

Restoration

Peter, during the fervour and vitality of the early church, said that Jesus must be retained in the heavens until the restoration of all things to the church. (Acts 3:21).

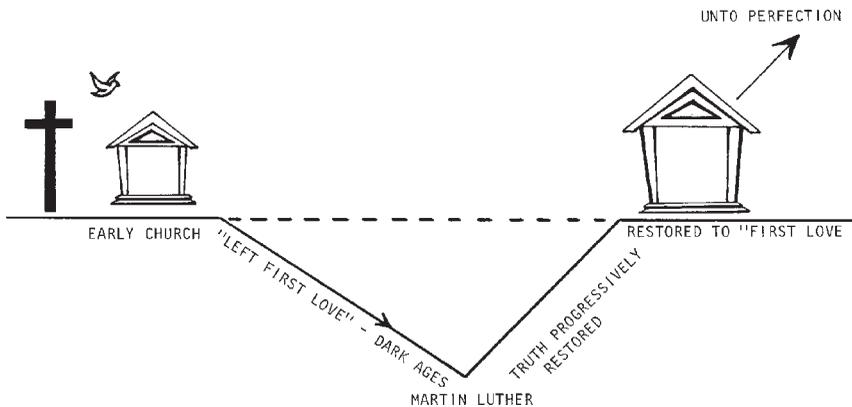
The principal of restoration has been demonstrated repeatedly throughout the Bible. After each of Israel's backslidings, both under the judges and kings, God sent a revival, calling His people back to Himself. Like Israel, the early church began in a mighty move of God. 'First love' abounded on all sides so that they held all their possessions in common. Thousands upon thousands were swept into the kingdom so that it was

said in a very short time that they had 'turned the world upside down'. Miracles freely flowed, confirming the Word of God as it was laid as foundations by the apostles.

A marvellous beginning! But exactly that - a beginning. The early church was never intended to be the ultimate church, just as Israel's exit from Egypt was not, in itself, their goal. Israel's goal was the promised land. The church's goal is full perfection and marriage with the Lamb, but, like Israel, who were delayed in the wilderness for 40 years, so the church has spent nearly 40 'jubilee years' in the wilderness of wandering. So far, we have not seen even the early church's quality of spiritual life, let alone a '*glorious church without spot or wrinkle.*' (Eph 5:27).

But the process of restoration is now taking place. God shall restore to the church the fervour and power of her beginnings, and then He shall take her on from there to the perfection of His eternal purpose. This restorative process began in the desolation of the aptly named 'dark ages', when Martin Luther lit the candle of 'justification by faith'. Since that time, truth has been progressively restored to the church as God has been shedding more and more light on 'foundation principles'. (Heb 6:1-2). At each point of revival in the church, as God has restored truth, people persecuted those who received the truth, and those who received it, in turn, built a wall around that which was received. Denominations have multiplied alongside the process of restoration. But God's call is still: '*Let us go on to perfection.*' (Heb 6:1).

That process is happening now and shall soon culminate in a day



of perfection when He shall 'appear' to His church. (*I John 3:2, Heb 9:28, Acts 10:40 with 1:11*). This will unleash the greatest ingathering revival in the history of mankind. *'The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth and hath long patience for it until he receive the early and latter rain.'* (*James 5:7,8*). The church has yet to demonstrate 'greater works than' the Son, and the power to go into the 'highways and byways and compel them to come in.' (*John 14:12, Luke 14:13*). All the families of the earth have yet to be blessed as promised to Abraham. There are far more people alive today than in the time of the early church, but Jesus said 'the harvest is the end of the age', and the coming ingathering will need the power of the Holy Spirit and the bride to say 'come'.

The feasts of Israel

The whole of the Old Testament is written 'for our learning upon whom the ends of the world are come.' (*I Cor 10:11*). What happened to Israel, especially, is prophetic of what will happen in the church spiritually.

Israel's religious year contained three main events called 'feasts' (though, strictly speaking, they were not 'banquets'). The first was Passover, where they remembered their salvation from the bondage of Egypt by the blood of a spotless slain lamb. It is not hard to see that this picture is fulfilled in Christ as He gave Himself for the life of the world. John the Baptist called Him '....the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world.' (*John 1:29*).

The second feast was Pentecost, when they commemorated their arrival at Sinai 50 days after their release from Egypt. Here at Sinai the fire of God came down on the mountain which shook and quaked, and here, God wrote the law in tables of stone. This dramatic event foreshadowed the day when the church was born, and there was a great shaking as tongues of fire lighted upon the heads of the 120 disciples in the upper room. The Holy Spirit was poured out, and the New Covenant could now be fulfilled by the writing of God's law on the fleshly tables of men's hearts. What John had prophesied had come to pass. Jesus had truly baptised them with the Holy Spirit and fire. The process towards what was foreshadowed in the third feast had now begun.

The third feast was the feast of Tabernacles, and it was not held until they had entered the promised land because it was the feast associated with the end of all their harvests. It began with the blowing

of two silver trumpets to call all the men of Israel to the door of the tabernacle for the climax of their religious year - the day of Atonement. On this day the priest would enter the 'most holy place' and there sprinkle the blood of a goat seven times upon the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. At this moment all the sacrifices of the previous year were validated and Israel was momentarily judicially perfect, in terms of cleansing for sin. However their perfection was shortlived, for they were in the time of the 'shadow' and the Aaronic priesthood had no capacity for providing power to live righteously. Continual sacrifice year after year was their only means of covering their sin until Christ should come.

By contrast, the priesthood of Melchisedec is for the very purpose of producing Christ's perfection in the church, fully and eternal. There is a day when this shall be manifested: a day when Christ's offering at Calvary, and the sprinkling of His blood from those seven wounds will see its purpose perfectly fulfilled and displayed. Christ has already entered into the Holy Place '*not made with hands.*' The church now awaits the day of His appearance to her. This shall not be as the 'second coming', or the rapture, spoken of in I Thess 4:16, which shall take place later before the eyes of a rejecting world. Instead, it shall be as an '*appearing*' to those who '*look for Him*'. (*Heb 9:26-28*). The day of Atonement must see its complete fulfilment before the final harvest is brought in. Just as the fulfilment of the feasts of Passover and Pentecost belongs to the church age, so the fulfilment of the feast of Tabernacles also belongs to this time, not to the millenium. The trumpets are now beginning to sound their call for the church to come together in preparation for that day. More and more a desire for unity is becoming evident amongst God's people. These are the most exciting days of all history, for the culmination of God's eternal purpose is upon us: the climax of all history is soon to take place. Right now God is setting the stage for an intensifying of the processes of perfection for He will '*hasten His word to perform it*'. '*A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation. I, the Lord, will hasten it in its time*'. (*Isa 60:22*). The words of Jesus ring loud and clear, '*Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.*' (*Rev 22:7*).

All the provision has been made by God. The Lamb has been slain and the cross is in place for redemption and cleansing. The Holy Spirit has been given to the church to change Her from glory to glory, and to empower and enable Her. The Word has been broken to us in Christ; been written down for us in the sixty-six books of the Bible; been

planted in our hearts; and is now being illuminated to us by the Holy Spirit. Six foundation principles of repentance from dead works; of faith towards God; of the doctrine of baptisms; of laying on of hands; of resurrection of the dead; and of eternal judgment, have been provided as a strong basis from which the church can go on '*unto perfection*'. (*Heb 6:1-2*). 'A body' has been prepared as the context in which it can all happen.

All that remains, is for us, God's people, to respond progressively to the call that is now going out. May we embrace all of God's provision, believing and allowing Him to bring it to pass. Let us move in faith and love towards the hope set before us; a hope worthy of the infinite price that Jesus paid at the cross. May we join wholeheartedly in the prayer of Jesus who prayed:

'Father, make them perfect in one'.