

A REVELATION OF..... DIVIDING THE WATERS

**RESTORING GOD'S CHURCH IN
THESE END TIMES**

**ONE OF A SERIES OF REVELATIONS ON VARIOUS
ASPECTS OF SCRIPTURE, AS INSPIRED BY THE
HOLY SPIRIT.**

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**“Growing Believers into Disciples, United in Christ,
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A NOTE FROM DAVID.....

The week before Christmas, last year, the Lord asked me read the whole New Testament over the week. A challenge for any week, but particularly the busy one just before Christmas! So I read, and found it wonderful. To get an overall view of the whole New Covenant was enlightening. Particularly apparent was the theme of 'sacrifice', firstly of Jesus, then the disciples and finally, the challenge for us to walk the same path.

For me, it took 2½ to 3 hours a day. Including the odd time I dozed off or was distracted and had to repeat bits! Sometimes just happens, when you read the Bible, doesn't it? I would highly recommend this to you too. The reading, not the sleeping, of course!

This inspired me, at my own volition, to start reading the Old Testament in the same way. Without the same time pressure, it will take a little longer – about a month at a couple of hours a day.

As I was reading through the Book of 2 Kings the Lord stopped me, and gave this revelation which I am now sharing with you. It slowed down my reading programme for a day, but I hope you will agree that it's worth it! Even if it has ended up 4 times the anticipated size!

If you haven't much time, checkout the summaries at the end of each section first. Then surely, you'll want to read the rest!

The Lord is serious about wanting His church and people to change and embrace the full potential of all that He has made available. And requires to be fully embraced before Jesus returns.

My prayer, hope and encouragement is that each of us may fulfil our full potential in Him so that 'the Church', the sum of us all, will become the glorious witness and reflection of Jesus that God so desires it to be.

His servant and yours,
David Tait

PART 1: THE BACKGROUND

DEFINITION OF TERMS

SEA (Heb. yām; Gk. thalassa and pelagos: this latter term, meaning ‘open sea’, occurs only once, Acts 27:5). The predominating sea in the OT is, of course, the Mediterranean. Indeed, the word yām also means ‘west’, ‘westward’, i.e. ‘seaward’, from the geographical position of the Mediterranean with reference to Palestine. The Mediterranean is termed ‘the Great Sea’ (Jos. 1:4), ‘the western sea’ (Dt. 11:24), and ‘the sea of the Philistines’ (Ex. 23:31).

Other seas mentioned in the OT are the Red Sea, lit. ‘sea of reeds’ (Ex. 13:18); the Dead Sea, lit. ‘sea of salt’ (Gn. 14:3); the Sea of Galilee, lit. ‘sea of kinneret’ (Nu. 34:11). The word yām was also used of a particularly broad river, such as the Euphrates (Je. 51:35f.) and the Nile (Na. 3:8). It is used with reference to the great basin in the Temple court (1 Ki. 7:23).

As one would expect, the NT thalassa is used with reference to the same seas as are mentioned in the OT.

The Hebrews betrayed little interest in, or enthusiasm for, the sea. Probably their fear of the ocean stemmed from the ancient Semitic belief that the deep personified the power that fought against the deity. But for Israel the Lord was its Creator (Gn. 1:9f.), and therefore its Controller (Ps. 104:7-9; Acts 4:24). He compels it to contribute to man’s good (Gn. 49:25; Dt. 33:13) and to utter his praise (Ps. 148:7). In the figurative language of Isaiah (17:12) and Jeremiah (6:23) the sea is completely under God’s command. Many of the manifestations of the Lord’s miraculous power were against the sea (Ex. 14-15; Ps. 77:16; Jon. 1-2). So also Christ’s walking on the sea and stilling the storm (Mt. 14:25-33; cf. G. Bornkamm, ‘The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew’, in G. Bornkamm, G. Barth and H. J. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, 1963, pp. 52ff.). God’s

final triumph will witness the disappearance of the sea in the world to come (Rev. 21:1). 1

SEA, THE — (Heb. *yam*, signifies (1) “the gathering together of the waters,” the ocean (Gen. 1:10); (2) a river, as the Nile (Isa. 19:5), the Euphrates (Isa. 21:1; Jer. 51:36); (3) the Red Sea (Ex. 14:16, 27; 15:4, etc.); (4) the Mediterranean (Ex. 23:31; Num. 34:6, 7; Josh. 15:47; Ps. 80:11, etc.); (5) the “sea of Galilee,” an inland fresh-water lake, and (6) the Dead Sea or “salt sea” (Gen. 14:3; Num. 34:3, 12, etc.). The word “sea” is used symbolically in Isa. 60:5, where it probably means the nations around the Mediterranean. In Dan. 7:3, Rev. 13:1 it may mean the tumultuous changes among the nations of the earth. 2

RIVER. Hebrew has a good many different words often rendered ‘river’, although this is not always an accurate translation of the original term.

The Heb. word *naḥal* is common, meaning a wadi or torrent-valley; in summer a dry river-bed or ravine, but a raging torrent in the rainy season. The Jabbok was such a wadi (Dt. 2:37), as were all the streams mentioned in the Elijah stories. Because these river-beds could suddenly become raging torrents, they often symbolize the pride of nations (Is. 66:12), the strength of the invader (Je. 47:2), and the power of the foe (Ps. 124:4). In his vision it was a *naḥal* that Ezekiel saw issuing from the Temple (47:5-12).

The second term, *nāhār*, is the regular word for ‘river’ in Heb. It is used of particular rivers: *e.g.* the rivers of Eden (Gn. 2:10, 13-14), the Euphrates (Dt. 1:7), and the rivers of Ethiopia (Is. 18:1), Damascus (2 Ki. 5:12), *etc.* In Ex. 7:19; Ps. 137:1, the word should almost certainly be rendered ‘canals’. The waters from the rock struck by Moses formed a *nāhār* (Ps. 105:41).

The word used most frequently of the Nile is *yē’ôr*. The term is also found in Coptic, and was probably an Egypt. loan-word (*BDB*): see, *e.g.*,

1*The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

2Easton, M. G., M. A. D. D., *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1996.

Gn. 41:1; Ex. 1:22. It is used by Jeremiah (46:7f.) as a similitude of Egypt. invasion.

Other Heb. terms for 'river' are *peleḡ*, irrigating canals (Pss. 1:3; 65:9); 'āpîq, channel or river-bed (Ps. 42:1; Is. 8:7; and *yûbāl* or 'ûbāl, a stream or watercourse (Is. 30:25; Dn. 8:2-3, 6). In the NT the word for 'river' is *potamos*. It is used of the Euphrates (Rev. 16:12) and the Jordan (Mk. 1:5); of the river issuing from God's throne (Rev. 22:1f.); and of the Holy Spirit under the figure of living water (Jn. 7:38f.). J.G.S.S.T.2

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RED SEA — The sea so called extends along the west coast of Arabia for about 1,400 miles, and separates Asia from Africa. It is connected with the Indian Ocean, of which it is an arm, by the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb. At a point (Ras Mohammed) about 200 miles from its northern extremity it is divided into two arms, that on the east called the AElanitic Gulf, now the Bahr el-'Akabah, about 100 miles long by 15 broad, and that on the west the Gulf of Suez, about 150 miles long by about 20 broad. This branch is now connected with the Mediterranean by the Suez Canal. Between these two arms lies the Sinaitic Peninsula.

The Hebrew name generally given to this sea is *Yam Suph*. This word *suph* means a woolly kind of sea-weed, which the sea casts up in great abundance on its shores. In these passages, Ex. 10:19; 13:18; 15:4, 22; 23:31; Num. 14:25, etc., the Hebrew name is always translated ‘Red Sea,’ which was the name given to it by the Greeks. The origin of this name (Red Sea) is uncertain. Some think it is derived from the red colour of the mountains on the western shore; others from the red coral found in the sea, or the red appearance sometimes given to the water by certain zoophytes floating in it. In the New Testament (Acts 7:36; Heb. 11:29) this name is given to the Gulf of Suez.

This sea was also called by the Hebrews *Yam-mitstraim*, i.e., ‘the Egyptian sea’ (Isa. 11:15), and simply *Ha-yam*, ‘the sea’ (Ex. 14:2, 9, 16, 21, 28; Josh. 24:6, 7; Isa. 10:26, etc.).

The great historical event connected with the Red Sea is the passage of the children of Israel, and the overthrow of the Egyptians, to which there is frequent reference in Scripture (Ex. 14, 15; Num. 33:8; Deut. 11:4; Josh. 2:10; Judg. 11:16; 2 Sam. 22:16; Neh. 9:9–11; Ps. 66:6; Isa. 10:26; Acts 7:36, etc.). 2

RED SEA, PASSAGE OF — The account of the march of the Israelites through the Red Sea is given in Ex. 14:22–31. There has been great diversity of opinion as to the precise place where this occurred. The difficulty of arriving at any definite conclusion on the matter is much increased by the consideration that the head of the Gulf of Suez, which was the branch of the sea that was crossed, must have extended at the time of the Exodus probably 50 miles farther north than it does at present. Some

have argued that the crossing took place opposite the Wady Tawarik, where the sea is at present some 7 miles broad. But the opinion that seems to be best supported is that which points to the neighbourhood of Suez. This position perfectly satisfies all the conditions of the stupendous miracle as recorded in the sacred narrative.²

EXODUS — the great deliverance wrought for the children of Isreal when they were brought out of the land of Egypt with “a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm” (Ex 12:51; Deut. 26:8; Ps 114; 136), about 1490, and four hundred and eighty years (1 Kings 6:1) before the building of Solomon’s temple.

The time of their sojourning in Egypt was, according to Ex. 12:40, the space of four hundred and thirty years. In the LXX., the words are, “The sojourning of the children of Israel which they sojourned in Egypt and in the land of Canaan was four hundred and thirty years;” and the Samaritan version reads, “The sojourning of the children of Israel and of their fathers which they sojourned in the land of Canaan and in the land of Egypt was four hundred and thirty years.” In Gen. 15:13–16, the period is prophetically given (in round numbers) as four hundred years. This passage is quoted by Stephen in his defence before the council (Acts 7:6).

The chronology of the “sojourning” is variously estimated. Those who adopt the longer term reckon thus:

Years

71	From the descent of Jacob into Egypt to the death of Joseph
278	From the death of Joseph to the birth of Moses
40	From the birth of Moses to his flight into Midian
40	From the flight of Moses to his return into Egypt
1	From the return of Moses to the Exodus
In all ... 430	

Others contend for the shorter period of two hundred and fifteen years, holding that the period of four hundred and thirty years comprehends the years from the entrance of Abraham into Canaan (see LXX. and Samaritan) to the descent of Jacob into Egypt. They reckon thus:

Years

- 25 From Abraham's arrival in Canaan to Isaac's birth
 - 60 From Isaac's birth to that of his twin sons Esau and Jacob
 - 130 From Jacob's birth to the going down into Egypt
- (215)
- From Jacob's going down into Egypt to the death of Joseph
 - 64 From death of Joseph to the birth of Moses
 - 80 From birth of Moses to the Exodus

In all ... 430

During the forty years of Moses' sojourn in the land of Midian, the Hebrews in Egypt were being gradually prepared for the great national crisis which was approaching. The plagues that successively fell upon the land loosened the bonds by which Pharaoh held them in slavery, and at length he was eager that they should depart. But the Hebrews must now also be ready to go. They were poor; for generations they had laboured for the Egyptians without wages. They asked gifts from their neighbours around them (Ex. 12:35), and these were readily bestowed. And then, as the first step towards their independent national organization, they observed the feast of the Passover, which was now instituted as a perpetual memorial. The blood of the paschal lamb was duly sprinkled on the door-posts and lintels of all their houses, and they were all within, waiting the next movement in the working out of God's plan. At length the last stroke fell on the land of Egypt. "It came to pass, that at midnight Jehovah smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt." Pharaoh rose up in the night, and called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve Jehovah, as ye have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also." Thus was Pharaoh (q.v.) completely humbled and broken down. These words he spoke to Moses and Aaron "seem to gleam through the tears of the humbled king, as he lamented his son snatched from him by so sudden a death, and tremble with a sense of the helplessness which his proud soul at last felt when the avenging hand of God had visited even his palace."

The terror-stricken Egyptians now urged the instant departure of the Hebrews. In the midst of the Passover feast, before the dawn of the 15th

day of the month Abib (our April nearly), which was to be to them henceforth the beginning of the year, as it was the commencement of a new epoch in their history, every family, with all that appertained to it, was ready for the march, which instantly began under the leadership of the heads of tribes with their various sub-divisions. They moved onward, increasing as they went forward from all the districts of Goshen, over the whole of which they were scattered, to the common centre. Three or four days perhaps elapsed before the whole body of the people were assembled at Rameses, and ready to set out under their leader Moses (Ex. 12:37; Num. 33:3). This city was at that time the residence of the Egyptian court, and here the interviews between Moses and Pharaoh had taken place.

From Rameses they journeyed to Succoth (Ex. 12:37), identified with Tel-el-Maskhuta, about 12 miles west of Ismailia. (See 13:20, ‘in the edge of the wilderness,’ and was probably a little to the west of the modern town of Ismailia, on the Suez Canal. Here they were commanded ‘to turn and encamp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea’, i.e., to change their route from east to due south. The Lord now assumed the direction of their march in the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. They were then led along the west shore of the Red Sea till they came to an extensive camping-ground ‘before Pi-hahiroth,’ about 40 miles from Etham. This distance from Etham may have taken three days to traverse, for the number of camping-places by no means indicates the number of days spent on the journey: e.g., it took fully a month to travel from Rameses to the wilderness of Sin (Ex. 16:1), yet reference is made to only six camping-places during all that time. The exact spot of their encampment before they crossed the Red Sea cannot be determined. It was probably somewhere near the present site of Suez.

Under the direction of God the children of Israel went ‘forward’ from the camp ‘before Pi-hahiroth,’ and the sea opened a pathway for them, so that they crossed to the farther shore in safety. The Egyptian host pursued after them, and, attempting to follow through the sea, were overwhelmed in its returning waters, and thus the whole military force of the Egyptians perished. They ‘sank as lead in the mighty waters’ (Ex. 15:1–9; comp. Ps. 77:16–19).

Having reached the eastern shore of the sea, perhaps a little way to the north of ‘Ayun Musa (‘the springs of Moses’), there they encamped and

rested probably for a day. Here Miriam and the other women sang the triumphal song recorded in Ex. 15:1–21.

From ‘Ayun Musa they went on for three days through a part of the barren ‘wilderness of Shur’ (22), called also the ‘wilderness of Etham’ (Num. 33:8; comp. Ex. 13:20), without finding water. On the last of these days they came to Marah (q.v.), where the ‘bitter’ water was by a miracle made drinkable.

Their next camping-place was Elim (q.v.), where were twelve springs of water and a grove of ‘threescore and ten’ palm trees (Ex. 15:27).

After a time the children of Israel ‘took their journey from Elim,’ and encamped by the Red Sea (Num. 33:10), and thence removed to the ‘wilderness of Sin’ (to be distinguished from the wilderness of Zin, 20:1), where they again encamped. Here, probably the modern el-Markha, the supply of bread they had brought with them out of Egypt failed. They began to ‘murmur’ for want of bread. God ‘heard their murmurings’ and gave them quails and manna, ‘bread from heaven’ (Ex. 16:4–36). Moses directed that an omer of manna should be put aside and preserved as a perpetual memorial of God’s goodness. They now turned inland, and after three encampments came to the rich and fertile valley of Rephidim, in the Wady Feiran. Here they found no water, and again murmured against Moses. Directed by God, Moses procured a miraculous supply of water from the ‘rock in Horeb,’ one of the hills of the Sinai group (17:1–7); and shortly afterwards the children of Israel here fought their first battle with the Amalekites, whom they smote with the edge of the sword.

From the eastern extremity of the Wady Feiran the line of march now probably led through the Wady esh-Sheikh and the Wady Solaf, meeting in the Wady er-Rahah, ‘the enclosed plain in front of the magnificent cliffs of Ras Sufsafeh.’ Here they encamped for more than a year (Num. 1:1 ; 10:11) before Sinai (q.v.).

The different encampments of the children of Israel, from the time of their leaving Egypt till they reached the Promised Land, are mentioned in Ex. 12:37–19; Num. 10–21; 33; Deut. 1, 2, 10.

It is worthy of notice that there are unmistakable evidences that the Egyptians had a tradition of a great exodus from their country, which could be none other than the exodus of the Hebrews. 2

RED SEA. In modern geography, the sea that divides NE Africa from Arabia and extends some 1,900 km from the straits of Bab el-Mandeb near Aden N to the S tip of the Sinai peninsula. For nearly another 300 km, the Gulfs of Suez and Aqabah continue the sea N on the W and E sides of the Sinai peninsula respectively. In classical antiquity the name Red Sea (erythra thalassa) included also the Arabian and Indian Seas to the NW coast of India. In the OT the term yam sûp, 'sea of reeds' (and/or 'weed'), is used to cover: (a) the Bitter Lakes region in the Egyptian Delta N of Suez along the line of the present Suez Canal; and (b) the Gulfs of Suez and Aqabah and possibly the Red Sea proper beyond these.

I. The Bitter Lakes region

In general terms, the Israelites were led from Egypt on the way of the wilderness and the yam sûp (Ex. 13:18). Ex. 14 and 15 are more specific: on leaving Succoth (Tell el-Maskhuta) and Etham, Israel were to turn back and camp before Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the 'sea', before Baalzephon (Ex. 14:1-2, 9; cf. *Encampment by the Sea). It was this 'sea', near all these places, that God drove back and divided by a 'strong east wind' for Israel to cross dryshod, and then brought back upon the pursuing Egyptians (Ex. 14:16, 21-31; 15:1, 4, 19, 21). From the 'sea of reeds', yam sûp, Israel went into the wilderness of Shur (Ex. 25:22; Nu. 33:8) and then on towards Sinai. Various points suggest that this famous crossing, the Exodus in the narrow sense, took place in the Bitter Lakes region, roughly between Qantara (48 km S of Port Said) and just N of Suez. First, geographically, the wilderness of Shur, which Israel entered directly from crossing the yam sûp (Ex. 15:22), is opposite this very area (*Shur). Secondly, geophysically, the reedy waters of the Bitter Lakes and Lake Menzaleh can be affected by strong E winds precisely in the way described in Ex. 14:21 and experienced on a small scale by Aly Shafei Bey in 1945-6 (*Bulletin de la Société Royale de Géographie d'Egypte* 21, August 1946, pp. 231ff.; cf. also *JTVI* 28, 1894-5, pp. 267-280). Thirdly, philologically, the Heb. word sûp is generally admitted to be a loan-word from Egyp. ṯwf(y), 'papyrus', and p'-ṯwf, a location, 'the papyrus-marshes' *par excellence* in the NE part of the Delta between Tanis (Zoan), Qantir and the present line of the Suez Canal N of Ismailia, on the former Pelusiac arm of the Nile. For details and references, see A. H. Gardiner, *Ancient*

Egyptian Onomastica, 2, 1947, pp. 201*-202*; R. A. Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 1954, p. 79; Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch d. Aegypt. Sprache*, 5, 1931, p. 359: 6-10. Ps. 78:12, 43, puts the great events preceding the Exodus in the 'field of Zoan', *i.e.* in the NE Delta.

II. The Gulfs of Suez and Aqabah

Turning S from Shur *via* Etham, Marah and Elim, the Israelites pitched by the yam sûp and then went on to Sin and Dophkah (Nu. 33:10-11). This would appear to refer to the Gulf of Suez. Whether Ex. 10:19 during the plagues refers to the Lakes region, the Gulf of Suez or the Red Sea proper is not certain; see *Plagues of Egypt (eighth plague) and G. Hort, ZAW 70, 1958, pp. 51-52. The yam sûp of Ex. 23:31 is ambiguous, but perhaps it is the Gulf of Aqabah.

Various references clearly show that the term yam sûp applied to the Gulf of Aqabah. After their first halt at Kadesh-barnea (*Kadesh), the Israelites were ordered into the wilderness by the way to the yam sûp (Nu. 14:25; Dt. 1:40; 2:1), *i.e.* by the Arabah towards the Gulf of Aqabah as suggested by the physical circumstances in which the earth swallowed Korah and his company (*Wilderness of Wandering; G. Hort, *Australian Biblical Review* 7, 1959, pp. 19-26). After a second sojourn at Kadesh, Israel went by the way of the yam sûp to go round Edom (Nu. 21:4; Jdg. 11:16), again with reference to the Gulf of Aqabah. Solomon's seaport of Ezion-geber or *Elath on this gulf is placed on the yam sûp by 1 Ki. 9:26; Teman in Edom is associated with it (Je. 49:21).

That the term yam sûp should have a wider use for the two N arms of the Red Sea as well as the more restricted application to the line of reedy lakes from Suez N to Lake Menzaleh and the Mediterranean is not specially remarkable or unparalleled. About 1470 BC, for example, Egyp. texts of a single epoch can use the name Wadjwer, 'Great Green (Sea)', of both the Mediterranean and Red Seas (Erman-Grapow, *op.cit.*, 1, p. 269: 13-14, references), and Ta-neter, 'God's Land', of both Punt (E Sudan?) in particular and E lands generally (*ibid.*, 5, p. 225: 1-4, references). 1

JORDAN — Heb. Yarden, "the descender;" Arab. Nahr-esh-Sheriah, "the watering-place" the chief river of Palestine. It flows from north to

south down a deep valley in the centre of the country. The name descender is significant of the fact that there is along its whole course a descent to its banks; or it may simply denote the rapidity with which it “descends” to the Dead Sea.

It originates in the snows of Hermon, which feed its perennial fountains. Two sources are generally spoken of. (1.) From the western base of a hill on which once stood the city of Dan, the northern border-city of Palestine, there gushes forth a considerable fountain called the Leddan, which is the largest fountain in Syria and the principal source of the Jordan. (2.) Beside the ruins of Banias, the ancient Caesarea Philippi and the yet more ancient Panium, is a lofty cliff of limestone, at the base of which is a fountain. This is the other source of the Jordan, and has always been regarded by the Jews as its true source. It rushes down to the plain in a foaming torrent, and joins the Leddan about 5 miles south of Dan (Tell-el-Kady). (3.) But besides these two historical fountains there is a third, called the Hasbany, which rises in the bottom of a valley at the western base of Hermon, 12 miles north of Tell-el-Kady. It joins the main stream about a mile below the junction of the Leddan and the Banias. The river thus formed is at this point about 45 feet wide, and flows in a channel from 12 to 20 feet below the plain. After this it flows, “with a swift current and a much-twisted course,” through a marshy plain for some 6 miles, when it falls into the Lake Huleh, “the waters of Merom” (q.v.).

During this part of its course the Jordan has descended about 1,100 feet. At Banias it is 1,080 feet above sea-level. Flowing from the southern extremity of Lake Huleh, here almost on a level with the sea, it flows for 2 miles “through a waste of islets and papyrus,” and then for 9 miles through a narrow gorge in a foaming torrent onward to the Sea of Galilee (q.v.).

“In the whole valley of the Jordan from the Lake Huleh to the Sea of Galilee there is not a single settled inhabitant. Along the whole eastern bank of the river and the lakes, from the base of Hermon to the ravine of Hieromax, a region of great fertility, 30 miles long by 7 or 8 wide, there are only some three inhabited villages. The western bank is almost as desolate. Ruins are numerous enough. Every mile or two is an old site of town or village, now well nigh hid beneath a dense jungle of thorns and thistles. The words of Scripture here recur to us with peculiar force: ‘I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation ... And

I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it ... And your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate' (Lev. 26:31–34).”, Dr. Porter’s Handbook.

From the Sea of Galilee, at the level of 682 feet below the Mediterranean, the river flows through a long, low plain called ‘the region of Jordan’ (Matt. 3:5), and by the modern Arabs the Ghor, or ‘sunken plain.’ This section is properly the Jordan of Scripture. Down through the midst of the ‘plain of Jordan’ there winds a ravine varying in breadth from 200 yards to half a mile, and in depth from 40 to 150 feet. Through it the Jordan flows in a rapid, rugged, tortuous course down to the Dead Sea. The whole distance from the southern extremity of the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea is in a straight line about 65 miles, but following the windings of the river about 200 miles, during which it falls 618 feet. The total length of the Jordan from Banias is about 104 miles in a straight line, during which it falls 2,380 feet.

There are two considerable affluents which enter the river between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, both from the east. (1.) The Wady Mandhur, called the Yarmuk by the Rabbins and the Hieromax by the Greeks. It formed the boundary between Bashan and Gilead. It drains the plateau of the Hauran. (2.) The Jabbok or Wady Zerka, formerly the northern boundary of Ammon. It enters the Jordan about 20 miles north of Jericho.

The first historical notice of the Jordan is in the account of the separation of Abraham and Lot (Gen. 13:10). ‘Lot beheld the plain of Jordan as the garden of the Lord.’ Jacob crossed and recrossed ‘this Jordan’ (32:10). The Israelites passed over it as ‘on dry ground’ (Josh. 3:17 ; Ps. 114:3). Twice afterwards its waters were miraculously divided at the same spot by Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2:8, 14).

The Jordan is mentioned in the Old Testament about one hundred and eighty times, and in the New Testament fifteen times. The chief events in gospel history connected with it are (1) John the Baptist’s ministry, when ‘there went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and were baptized of him in Jordan’ (Matt. 3:6). (2.) Jesus also ‘was baptized of John in Jordan’ (Mark 1:9). 2

JORDAN. The Jordan depression is unique among the features of physical geography. Formed as a result of a rift valley, it is the lowest depression on earth. The headwaters of the river Jordan, fed by springs, collect into Lake Huleh, 70 m above sea-level. Ten km S at Lake Tiberias the river is already nearly 200 m below the Mediterranean, while at the N end of the Dead Sea the floor of the trench has dropped a further 177 m and the river has plunged to 393 m below sea-level. Thus the name 'Jordan' (Heb. *yārdēn*) aptly means 'the descender'. The river is the largest perennial course in Palestine, and its distance of some 120 km from Lake Huleh to the Dead Sea is more than doubled by its meander. No other river has more biblical allusions and significance.

I. Archaeological sites

Archaeological sites in the Jordan valley have revealed it to be one of the earliest loci of urban settlement in the world. The Natufian transition from hunting to urban life at Jericho may be as old as 7000 BC. A pottery-making people arrived about 5000 BC, and with the later pottery (Neolithic B culture) the first evidence occurs of links with other Jordan valley sites and the N Fertile Crescent. Copper was introduced in the Chalcolithic period (4500-3200 BC), such as at Teleilat Ghassul, just N of the Dead Sea. At Ghassul, three city levels existed from the 4th millennium onwards, with evidence of irrigation farming. This Ghassulian culture is identified widely in Palestine, but it was especially prevalent in the Jordan valley, at Mefjar, Abu Habil, Jiftlik Beth-shan, En-gedi and Tell esh-Shuneh, S of the Sea of Galilee.

At the end of the 4th millennium at least three groups of peoples entered the Jordan valley from the N, to settle in unwallled villages in the plains of Esdraelon, or from the E via Jericho. This period K. M. Kenyon has called proto-urban. City-states then began to appear in the Jordan valley, such as Jericho in the S, Beth-shan in the centre and Beth-yerah (Khirbet Kerak) in the N, and these traded with Egypt and Mesopotamia.

About 2200 BC Amorite nomads invaded the valley and destroyed many of the urban centres. They may have been part of a vast general eruption of peoples that went on from 2300 to 1900 BC, that is, to the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age. Abraham may have come into the Jordan valley in association with this period of nomadic unrest. This was

followed by the N invasion of the Hyksos culture, when elaborate urban defences in depth were built at such towns as Jericho. Following the defeat of the Hyksos by the Egyptians, the great fortress towns of the Jordan valley, such as Beth-shan and Hazor, were rebuilt and equipped with Egyptian garrisons. Then later in the Bronze Age, at least by 1220 BC, the Israelites entered Palestine through the Jordan valley. There is evidence of the destruction of the cities of Hazor, Debir and Lachish. But the archaeological evidence for Joshua's capture of Jericho is obscure.

II. Topographical features

a. The Huleh basin

The Jordan valley begins below Mt Hermon (2,814 m), out of whose limestone springs issue the headwaters of the Jordan. Baniyas, later called Caesarea Philippi, may have been the centre of Baal-gad in the valley 'of Lebanon' (Jos. 12:7). It was the territory of Dan, the N limit of Israel, whose inhabitants controlled the vital trade route into Syria and were likened to a nest of vipers (Gn. 49:17). Moving down the upper valley is the Huleh area, a depression some 5 x 15 km, where ancient lava flows blocked the valley, so that the Jordan plunges 280 m in 15 km of gorges. On the plateau overlooking the Huleh plain stands the site of Hazor, the great Canaanite town.

b. The Tiberias district

Beyond the Huleh gorges, at about 213 m below sea-level, the Jordan enters the Sea of Galilee, a harp-shaped lake, 21 km long, and about 13 km across. Fed by numerous thermal springs, its fresh waters are well stocked with fish, the maximum depth of 50 m permitting vertical migrations of the fish with the seasonal temperatures. It was, therefore, probably in the hot summer season when the normal winter temperature of 13°C. lies 37 m below the surface of the lake, that Jesus advised the fishermen to 'cast into the deep' (Lk. 5:4). The methods of catching *fish referred to in the Gospels are still practised: the single-hook line (Mt. 17:27); the circular fishing net (Mt. 4:18; Mk. 1:16); the draw-net cast out by a boat (Mt. 13:47f.); deep-sea nets (Mt. 4:18f.; Mk. 1:19f.); and deep-sea fishing undertaken with two boats (Lk. 5:10).

A dense population clustered round the lake in our Lord's day, and it was the sophisticated city folk of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum that he condemned (Mt. 11:20-24). 'There is no spot in the whole of Palestine where memories heap themselves up to such an extent as in Capernaum' (G. Dalman). Jewish life throbbed in its synagogues (Mt. 12:9; Mk. 1:21; 3:1; 5:22; Lk. 4:31; 6:6; 8:41). There lived Jairus, the chief of the synagogue (Mk. 5:22), the centurion who built a synagogue (Lk. 7:5) and Levi the customs official (Mt. 9:9; Mk. 2:14; Lk. 5:27). E of Capernaum was Bethsaida from which Philip, Andrew and Peter came (Jn. 1:44), and beyond that the less populous district of the Gadarenes, where the heathen reared their pigs (Lk. 8:3;). The lake, plains and steep rocky slopes, interspersed with boulders and thistle-fields, provide the setting for the parable of the sower (Mk. 4:2-8), while in spring the flowered carpets of asphodels, anemones and irises are also telling sermons.

Dominating this lake environment are the surrounding mountains, especially those of the NW, which played so vital a part in the prayer-life of our Lord, where he taught his disciples (Mt. 5:1) and from which he appeared as the risen Lord (Mt. 28:16). The NE corner of the lake is supposedly the scene of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand (Lk. 9:10-17).

c. The 'Ghor' or Jordan valley

This runs for over 105 km between Lake Tiberias and the Dead Sea. The Yarmuk, entering the left bank of the Jordan 8 km downstream from the lake, doubles the volume of flow, and the valley is progressively deepened to as much as 50 m below the floor of the trough. In this sector, three physical zones are distinguishable: the broad upper terrace of the Pliocene trough, the Ghoreasingly more arid, until at the head of the Dead Sea there is scarcely more than 5 cm mean annual rainfall. The Qattara badlands, carved grotesquely in soft marls and clays, create a steep, desolate descent to the valley floor. The Zor, making its way in vivid green vegetation cover, stands out in sharp contrast below, hence its name gā'ôn ('luxuriant growth') of Jordan (Je. 12:5; 49:19; 50:44; Zc. 11:3; cf. Pss. 47:4; 59:12; Pr. 16:18). The haunt of wild animals (Je. 49:19), it is partly flooded in spring (Jos. 3:15). Thus the question can be understood, 'And if

in a safe land you fall down, how will you do in the jungle of the Jordan?’ (Je. 12:5).

Between the Yarmuk in the N and the Jabbok are nine other perennial streams entering the left bank of the Jordan, and their water-supply explains why all the important settlements were located on the E side of the Ghor, towns such as Succoth, Zaphon, Zaretan, Jabesh-gilead and Pella. With the aid of irrigation, this was probably the view Lot saw ‘like the garden of the Lord’ (Gn. 13:10). The brook Cherith may well have been a seasonal tributary of the Jabesh farther N, where Elijah, a native of Jabesh-gilead, hid himself from Ahab (1 Ki. 17:1-7). Between Succoth and Zarthan (identified by Glueck as Tell es-Saidiyeh) Solomon had his copper cast in earthen moulds, using local clay and fuel (1 Ki. 7:46; 2 Ch. 4:17). In this section of the valley, there are a number of fords, though the river was not bridged until Roman times. Near the mouth of the Jabbok, both Abraham and Jacob crossed it (Gn. 32:10). Somewhere here, the Midianites crossed pursued by Gideon (Jdg. 7:24; 8:4-5). Twice David crossed it in the rebellion of Absalom (2 Sa. 17:22-24; 19:15-18). But between the Jabbok confluence and the Dead Sea, crossings are more difficult, owing to the swift current. The miraculous crossing of the Israelites appears to have taken place at Adam (modern Tell Dâmiyeh), 26 km N of Jericho (Jos. 3:1-17; 4:1-24; Ps. 114:3, 5).

Between the Jabbok and Beth-nimrah for 26 km (Is. 15:6) there are no streams entering the Jordan, and little settlement. Oasis towns occur near springs, such as Jericho W of the Jordan, and in the plains of Moab (Nu. 20:1) to the E was Shittim, where the spies were sent (Jos. 2:1-7).

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PART 2: A REVELATION OF.....

DIVIDING THE WATERS

THE POWER OF 3 IN GOD

One of the most striking things about God and His mode of operation, is the way He works in ‘threes’. This is revealed in His form, i.e. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The three apply, whether you are a oneness, ‘twoness’ or Trinitarian believer. (We keep trying to do the impossible by putting God into a box!) For in each theology, the ‘essence’ of God is revealed in 3 ways. Moving right on through to the New Testament ‘triad’ to faith, hope and love, God continues to reveal himself in threes.

Our personal walk is one of salvation through Jesus, release of the power of the Holy Spirit, and obedience to the will of the Father, as revealed in the words given to John the Revelator, the friend of Jesus;

¹¹ They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb (Jesus) and by the word of their testimony (Holy Spirit); they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death (The Father). (Revelation 12:11) 3

The pattern of Church development too, can be viewed in a similar way. This lines up with the design of God’s first church, the Tabernacle of Moses.

You enter through the gate into the Outer Court, which contains the Brazen Altar, upon which the sacrifices were made. And the Washing Basin or Laver, where the priests washed (purified) themselves before performing their priestly duties. The **Outer Court** typifies the **Traditional and Evangelical Church** traditions with their focus on the Altar of ‘salvation by faith’, (Traditional) then with baptism added, symbolised by the Laver. (Evangelical)

3 All scripture is from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984 unless otherwise stated.

The **Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches** relate to the **Holy Place**, found in the Tent. The tent itself symbolises the Holy Spirit. The three pieces of furniture in the Holy Place relate to key aspects of these traditions. The Table of Shewbread symbolises the revelation of the Word, the Golden Candlestick the Gifts of the Spirit, and the Incense Altar, praise, worship and prayer, all features of these churches.

The third and final area of the Tabernacle is the **Holy of Holies**, representing the **End Time Church, the Bride of Christ**. Here the presence of God dwelled between the wings of the Cherubim, above the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant. This room was only entered once a year by the High Priest on the most holy day of the Jewish religious year, the Day of Atonement. Then only after first making purification sacrifices both for himself and then the people. For sin cannot exist in God's presence. And like us all, the High priest valued his life! Of course, Jesus opened the way for us individually to enter, when the curtain of the Temple (the 'permanent' tabernacle) was supernaturally ripped in two, from top to bottom. So now we may enter through the cleansing of the blood of Jesus.

Jesus did this for us '*positionally*', on the cross, but it is up to each of us to live holy lives '*experientially*' as the fulfilment of what He has done for us. So the call of the end time 'third church' is to purity, to maturity, to obedience and submission to the will of God the Father, as characterised by Jesus. To become the pure, righteous Bride of Christ, for whom Jesus is to return.

Yes, the 'power of three' is a powerful aid in both understanding God and His purposes for us. It is likely not by chance then, that what now follows, is a further reflection of these patterns of three, as God reveals more of His will for His Church in these final days.

1. DIVIDING THE RED SEA

TYPES AND PATTERNS

To understand the application of this incredible event to today, we need to see who and what the three major players in the story represent to us now. For the Scriptures are full of patterns and types that relate to today's world.

1. EGYPTIANS: Throughout Scripture the country of Egypt is commonly regarded as being a type of the **‘world’**. A world of unbelievers, of independence, of those who follow their own desires and place self before God.

This can be understood from Scriptures such as this one where Egypt is cast in the typical worldly role of military self-reliance.

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD. (Isaiah 31:1)

And as among those in the world who will be punished ‘on the day of the Lord.’

The word of the LORD came to me: ² “Son of man, prophesy and say: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ” ‘Wail and say, “Alas for that day!”’ ³ For the day is near, the day of the LORD is near—a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations. ⁴ A sword will come against Egypt, and anguish will come upon Cush. When the slain fall in Egypt, her wealth will be carried away and her foundations torn down. ⁵ Cush and Put, Lydia and all Arabia, Libya and the people of the covenant land will fall by the sword along with Egypt. (Ezekiel 30:1-5)

And where God's two witnesses will die, before coming back to life after 3½ days.

³ And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.” ⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. ⁵ If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. ⁶ These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want. ⁷ Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. ⁸ Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. ⁹ For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. ¹⁰ The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth. ¹¹ But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. ¹² Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on. (Revelation 11:3-12)

2. ISRAEL: The Israelites are well known to be God’s chosen people:

²² ‘How great you are, O Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears. ²³ And who is like your people Israel—the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt? ²⁴ You have established your people Israel as your very own forever, and you, O LORD, have become their God. (2 Samuel 7:22-24)

Of course, they rejected Jesus, and we, the gentiles have been incorporated into the ‘vine’ of God’s chosen, when we accept Him as Saviour.

Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious (Romans 11:11)

For all who believe in Jesus are one body in Him.

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 3:6)

Therefore Old Testament Israel can be looked at as being a type or pattern of the Church today.

3. MOSES: Moses is a colossus, sitting astride the Old Testament. He was of course, God's chosen vessel as deliverer of the Israelites from captivity.

Then the LORD said to Moses, 'See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. ² You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country. ³ But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, ⁴ he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites. ⁵ And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it. (Exodus 7:1-5)

To the Jews today, he remains the most important human figure in their history.

So now, the deliverer the Jews are looking for is another Moses. As Christians, we understand that the deliverer of the New Testament, for both us and the Jews, was Jesus. Moses is the Old Testament type of Jesus, the deliverer.

THE STORY ITSELF AND ITS APPLICATION TO TODAY'S CHURCH

The crossing of the Red Sea has parallels and lessons for the Church today.

1. **THE WORLD PROVIDED FUNDS FOR THEIR USE:** Before the people left Egypt, the Egyptians provided them with the materials they would shortly need to build their first church, the Tabernacle, in the desert.

³⁵ The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. ³⁶ The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians. (Exodus 12:35-6)

New Testament Fulfilment: This is an area that the church has struggled with over the centuries. Should 'tainted' worldly funds be used to extend God's Kingdom? Does the Lord provide through the world?

There is no doubt that one of the major themes of the New Testament is a dire warning about dangers inherent in the excessive acquisition and love of money. Practical observation too, indicates that money is one of the greatest causes of dissension and dissatisfaction in the church.

This is highlighted in the hard to understand Parable of the Shrewd Manager, which we generally, me included, try to avoid. Primarily, because we don't understand the traditions of Jewish society at the time. However, this parable is really the New Testament equivalent of the unusual action of the Egyptians in giving away their wealth.

For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. ¹⁰ 'Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be

dishonest with much. ¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹² And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? ¹³ 'No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.' ¹⁴ The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. ¹⁵ He said to them, 'You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight. (Luke 16:8b-15)

Today's Application: Its overall message is yes, use the world's money, but don't let it take hold of you and lead you away from godly pursuits. For money is the lubrication of the world. It can be used for noble purposes or spent on selfish carnal, even religious, desires. The basic problem is not with money, but with our hearts.

2. GOD VISIBLY GUIDED THEM during their journey.

²⁰ After leaving Succoth they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. ²¹ By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. ²² Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. (Exodus 13:20-22)

New Testament Fulfilment: Our guiding light today is the Holy Spirit, leading us from within. He points out the way we are to go.

²³ Jesus replied, 'If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. ²⁵ 'All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:23-6)

Today's Application: While our guide isn't physically visible, He is present within 24/7. Wherever we are, He tailors His guidance specifically to our unique, personal situation. The challenge for us is simply to cut out the static and listen! Practically speaking, static reduction, the hearing of the voice of the Holy Spirit, is achieved as we submit ourselves to Jesus and obey the Father's will for our life.

3. THEY LOOKED TO BE IN DISARRAY to the Egyptians, and so, were considered an easy target to attack.

³ Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.' (Exodus 14:3)

New Testament Fulfilment: The world cannot understand the Church, so its ways appear as foolishness to them.

¹¹ For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³

This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. ¹⁴

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:11-14)

Today's Application: Church organisation can be frustrating for us too, when we have our 'human blinkers' on! We think the Church should be organised in an 'authority downwards', traditional pyramid management structure. The reality though, is that the Church is to run in the apparently unstable fashion of an upside down pyramid, the point at the bottom! Operated on a 'servanthood' basis, where the most senior should be the greatest servant of all in the organisation. As reflected in the example of Jesus.

4. THE PHARAOH TOOK ADVANTAGE of the apparent confusion to attack with all his military might.

⁴ And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD." So the Israelites did this. ⁵ When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, "What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!" ⁶ So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. ⁷ He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. ⁸ The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly. ⁹ The Egyptians—all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, horsemen and troops—pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon. (Exodus 14:4-9)

New Testament Fulfilment: The Church is attacked by those in the world using human methods, trying to exterminate it or reduce its influence.

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Revelation 2:10)

But we have the ultimate victory through our faith in and obedience to Jesus!

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. ² This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³ This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. (1 John 5:1-5)

Today's Application: The reality is that the world and the church are in opposition camps! One living in the sin of Adam and Eve, the other under the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross for each believer, to remove the sin from our lives. Black v white! At least the Church should be white, not a shade of gray! However, we must avoid 'fighting' the world with its own weapons of criticism, anger and force, but rather, reflect the godly attributes of love and servanthood. These are the weapons that have the most effect, effects the world cannot counter. A parallel can be drawn with guerillas or terrorists fighting a powerful army. By avoiding direct confrontation, engaging in battle on our own terms.

5. THE ISRAELITES WERE TERRIFIED when they saw the Egyptian army and wanted to give up.

As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ They said to Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt?' ¹² Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!'" (Exodus 14:10-12)

New Testament Fulfilment: Fear of the apparent power of the world to control or kill us is a natural human reaction, but we have Jesus who has overcome death and hell on our behalf, to counteract our fear.

¹⁷ *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.*
¹⁸ *I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. (Revelation 1:17-18)*

Today's Application: We all like life. We have a natural, inbuilt survival instinct. However, Jesus overcame death to bring us eternal life, so that earthly death is no longer to be feared. Now it is simply a transition point

to a better life to come. It is only the complete absorption of this understanding that overcomes fear in our life.

6. RELY UPON THE LORD, Moses told the people.

¹³ Moses answered the people, ‘Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.’ (Exodus 14:13-14)

New Testament Fulfilment: We can now rely upon Jesus, through a direct personal relationship, as evidenced by the Holy Spirit living within. During the exodus, this provision was only available to the people via Moses.

¹³ We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. (1 John 4:13-15)

Today’s Application: Many Christians prefer to return to Old Testament times and let others hear from God for them. To follow the ‘modern Moses’! Whether it is the TV evangelist, a pastor or other leader. But God lives in us all individually through His Holy Spirit who is to be our primary teacher and guide. Of course, godly leaders can advise and assist us, for their experience and wisdom can help us avoid many of the common pitfalls we are wont to make. However our lives are to be guided by the Holy Spirit within, not controlled by leadership without. We must rely upon the Lord, not man. This is the godly way. Not as the ‘*independent human spirit*’ so common today, but being truly submitted to the Holy Spirit within, and working ‘*interdependently with other believers.*’

7. GOD GAVE MOSES HIS INSTRUCTIONS.

¹⁵ Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. ¹⁶ Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the

sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷ I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. ¹⁸ The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.” (Exodus 14:15-18)

New Testament Fulfilment: Jesus has given us our instructions through His Word, succinctly summed up in the ‘Great Commission’.

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*” ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”
(Matthew 28:16-20)

Today’s Application: Our instructions are contained in the teachings of Jesus. These are recorded in the New Testament of the Bible. If we follow them, He has promised to remain with us until the end of this age and indeed, eternally. The Lord is calling His people and His Church to obedience to His Word today.

8. GOD MOVED TO PROTECT HIS PEOPLE before the action started.

¹⁹ Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel’s army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, ²⁰ coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.
(Exodus 14:19-20)

New Testament Fulfilment: Our protection from the world’s attacks is found in Jesus.

³ *But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.* ⁴ *We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command.* ⁵ *May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance. (2 Thessalonians 3:3-5)*

Today's Application: Unlike the 'Father Christmas' version of Christianity that is so often taught today, reality is not like that, nor is it so promised. We are in a war. We will come under attack. And we require love and perseverance to win, if not every battle, then assuredly, the war. The walk with Jesus is not one of continuous victory, but sometimes of the trial and testing necessary to bring us towards maturity and perfection. We are to glory in it! Best learn graciously – and quickly! But learn we must, if we are to grow and mature in our faith. Remembering that Jesus is with us in all circumstances.

9. THE JEWS ESCAPED UNHARMED through God's miraculous intervention, dividing the waters.

²¹ *Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided,* ²² *and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.*
(Exodus 14:21-22)

New Testament Fulfilment: We are delivered and spiritually separated from the world through our acceptance of the Father's love in sending Jesus and being obedient to His will. The level of our obedience determines the degree of our worldly separation.

¹⁵ *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* ¹⁶ *For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.* ¹⁷ *The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17)*

¹⁸ 'If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.
(John 15:18-20)

¹⁴ Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? ¹⁵ What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.' ¹⁷ 'Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.' ¹⁸ 'I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.' (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

Today's Application: This area is another area that causes problems to Christians. What does it really mean? A separation in terms of behaviour, so that it is obvious to those in the world that we are different. Positively different, that is! We are not to live by worldly standards but abide by those of righteousness. However we must still be in a position to witness to the world so as to fulfil the Great Commission. The greater our level of obedience to the teachings of Jesus, the more understandable this becomes, in practical terms.

10. THE EGYPTIANS FELL INTO GOD'S TRAP.

²³ The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. ²⁴ During the last watch of the night the LORD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. ²⁵ He made the wheels of their chariots come off so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, 'Let's

get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt.”(Exodus 14:23-25)

New Testament Fulfilment: As it is promised will today’s world!

³ First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴ They will say, ‘Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” ⁵ But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. ⁶ By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷ By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. (2 Peter 3:3-7)

Today’s Application: Today we live in the Age of God’s Grace, extending from the time of Jesus until the end of the present age. Because of grace, non-believers are able to scoff and follow their own desires, seemingly without punishment. Which, until we may understand it, seems unfair! We too need to show grace, while at the same time making clear the consequences of ignoring Jesus. For the Day of Judgement will surely come, as has been promised.

11. AND SUFFERED THE CONSEQUENCES

²⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen.” ²⁷ Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the LORD swept them into the sea. ²⁸ The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived. (Exodus 14:26-28)

New Testament Fulfilment: As will the world on the fearsome ‘Day of the Lord.’

¹⁰ *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. (2 Peter 3:10)*

Today's Application: As surely as the waters of the Red Sea destroyed the Egyptian army, the 'world' will be destroyed on the Day of Judgement. This reality should spur us on to share the Way of Jesus with the world, so that as many as accept will be spared the consequences of its inevitable destruction.

12. ISRAEL WAS SAVED and the people's faith (temporarily!) restored.

²⁹ *But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. ³⁰ That day the LORD saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. ³¹ And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant. (Exodus 14:29-31)*

New Testament Fulfilment: But we will permanently inherit a new home and eternal life.

¹¹ *Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (1 Peter 3:11-14)*

Today's Application: We need to rest assured, no matter what happens in this life, that we have the promise of eternal life with Jesus. 'Lord, give me faith to believe!' For with such faith we can 'move metaphorical mountains', and see the Kingdom of the Lord ushered in. Hallelujah!

THE 12 FEATURES OF CROSSING THE RED SEA

A Summary

1. THE WORLD PROVIDED FUNDS FOR THEIR USE:

While we can use funding from the world, we must take care not to let it corrupt our hearts.

2. GOD VISIBLY GUIDED THEM during their journey.

The Old Testament is external, the New, internal. So today our guidance is internal, from the Holy Spirit. We must listen and obey.

3. THEY LOOKED TO BE IN DISARRAY to the Egyptians, and so, were considered an easy target to attack.

The church appears to be in disarray to the world (and us?) because it is to operate on the basis of servanthood, to be the opposite of worldly authoritarianism.

4. THE PHARAOH TOOK ADVANTAGE of the apparent confusion to attack with all his military might.

The world attacks the church with criticism, ridicule, anger and force, which is to be countered with the godly attributes of love and servanthood.

5. THE ISRAELITES WERE TERRIFIED when they saw the Egyptian army and wanted to give up.

Death is simply a transition point in the eternal life we already have. Fully understanding and absorbing this internally overcomes all fear.

6. RELY UPON THE LORD, Moses told the people.

Today we are to rely directly upon the Lord through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our New Covenant guidance is internal, not the Old, external guidance of a prophet, priest or king.

7. GOD GAVE MOSES HIS INSTRUCTIONS.

Our instructions are the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament.

8. GOD MOVED TO PROTECT HIS PEOPLE before the action started.

We are in a spiritual battle. We have the ultimate victory through Jesus, but in the meantime we have to fight the battle, internally of trials and testings and externally with the world. But Jesus is with us always.

9. THE JEWS ESCAPED UNHARMED through God's miraculous intervention, dividing the waters.

We are to be spiritually separated from the world. The greater our obedience to God's will, the greater will be our understanding of this.

10. THE EGYPTIANS FELL INTO GOD'S TRAP.

Unbelievers fall into the trap of believing that, because of grace, God's judgement will never come.

11. AND SUFFERED THE CONSEQUENCES

However judgement is promised for the end of the Age. We are required to share this message of grace and the judgement to come with the world.

12. ISRAEL WAS SAVED and the people's faith (temporarily!) restored.

We have the eternal restoration of eternal life in God's kingdom now, through Jesus. "Lord, give me the faith to believe!"

PRINCIPLE MESSAGE FOR TODAY FROM THE CROSSING OF THE RED SEA

Separation from the World.

As God rescued His chosen people from Egypt through Moses (the Old Testament ‘type’ of Jesus) so the believer is rescued (saved) and separated from the world through belief in Jesus.

The escape however, was only the first step in the people’s journey, just as salvation, a tremendous experience though it is, is but the first step in our walk with Jesus. So the incredible experience the Israelites had, seeing the seas part for their escape and then return to eliminate their dreaded slave masters, symbolises our individual experience today when we come into our individual relationship with Jesus, the New Covenant counterpart of Moses. Of course, Moses was but a man, while Jesus was also God, so ours is the ‘better’ salvation.

However, the Israelites escape was followed by disobedience to God’s plan for them and the consequential punishment of 40 years spent wandering in the desert. God graciously continued to look after them through the provision of manna to eat and preventing their clothes from wearing out.

The next step, both for the Jews and us, was and is to claim our inheritance. This is again illustrated through ‘dividing the waters’ of the Jordan.

¹⁶ For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:16-17)

FROM MOSES TO JOSHUA

The transition in leadership from Moses to Joshua symbolizes a number of different things, but in this context we are looking at Moses, the type of Jesus, passing the inheritance on to Joshua, a type of us – that’s you and me.

MOSES – SUPREME IN ISRAEL: The shadow of Moses sits astride the Old Testament as a colossus.

Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, ¹¹ who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. ¹² For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel. (Deuteronomy 34:10-12)

But He was still a man and one of his failings prevented him entering into the Promised Land. However, He (God actually) was the ‘savior’ of his people, taking them out from the crushing bondage of Egyptian slavery. Hence how he is a picture of Jesus who was to come 1500 years later.

But being human, he was subject to death, and so passed on the leadership to Joshua through the laying on of hands.

⁹ Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses. (Deuteronomy 34:9)

JOSHUA – ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND: God promised to give the Israelites their inheritance under the leadership of Joshua.

²³ The LORD gave this command to Joshua son of Nun: ‘Be strong and courageous, for you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them on oath, and I myself will be with you.’ (Deuteronomy 31:23)

He took The Law Moses had been given by God and applied it during his time of leadership. Even as he was dying, he referred the people back to the revelation Moses had received.

'Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left.
(Joshua 23:6)

Joshua is a picture of us, as Christians. We are to take the Word of Jesus and use it to claim our inheritance, our Promised Land, by expanding His church throughout the world.

2. DIVIDING THE RIVER JORDAN

TYPES AND PATTERNS CONTINUED

To understand the application of this incredible event today, we need to understand who and what the three major players in the story represent now. For the Scriptures are full of patterns and types that relate to today's world.

1. **JORDAN RIVER:** The River Jordan formed both the boundary of and a barrier to, the land of God's promise. Interestingly, it is the lowest lying river in the world. The headwaters at Lake Huleh are only 70 metres (230ft) above sea level and it wends its way for 192km (120 miles) as the crow flies, but twice that with its meandering, through the Jordan Valley to finally enter the Dead Sea at 393 metres (1300ft) below sea level.

While there are several meanings ascribed to the river, for our purposes, it can be looked upon as a spiritual barrier, both a boundary and a place of breakthrough.

As a barrier:

²⁶ But you were unwilling to go up; you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God. ²⁷ You grumbled in your tents and said, 'The LORD hates us; so he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us. ²⁸ Where can we go? Our brothers have made us lose heart. They say, 'The people are stronger and taller than we are; the cities are large, with walls up to the sky. We even saw the Anakites there.' (Deuteronomy 1:26-28)

A boundary:

¹² Then the boundary will go down along the Jordan and end at the Salt Sea. (Numbers 34:3)

And a breakthrough:

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² 'Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. ³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west. ⁵ No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. (Joshua 1:1-5)

- 2. PROMISED LAND:** Before he died, Moses was given the opportunity to see the land that had been promised as an inheritance to the Israelites.

¹² Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Go up this mountain in the Abarim range and see the land I have given the Israelites. (Numbers 27:12)

Starting with Joshua, and ending with Kings David and Solomon, the Israelites occupied most, but not all, of the land that had been promised to them. The reign of King Solomon saw the height of Jewish power and influence in the region. It was a time of peace and prosperity in the land.

²³ King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. ²⁴ The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart. ²⁵ Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift—articles of silver and gold, robes, weapons and spices, and horses and mules. ²⁶ Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem. ²⁷ The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills. ²⁸ Solomon's horses were

imported from Egypt and from Kue—the royal merchants purchased them from Kue. (1 Kings 10:23-28)

For us it represents a picture of God fulfilling His promises. We must understand however, that the promises of Jesus were centred around ‘sacrifice’ rather than ‘prosperity’ as was the case under the Old Covenant. The basic message for us is that God keeps His promises to those who are obedient to His will.

3. **JOSHUA:** As Moses is an Old Testament type of Jesus, so Joshua is a type of us as Christians. For the ‘baton of faith’ was defined by Moses and passed on to Joshua to implement.

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ aide: ² ‘Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. ³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. (Joshua 1:1-3)

In a similar way, Jesus set out and illustrated through His life, the New Covenant principles, then passed on the ‘baton’ to us to live them out through our lives.

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:16-20)

THE STORY ITSELF AND ITS APPLICATION TO TODAY'S CHURCH

Similarly to the story of the crossing of the Red Sea, the entry of the Jews into their promised inheritance under the new leadership of Joshua also has parallels and lessons for today's Church.

1. THE PROMISE: The promise of the inheritance given to Moses was confirmed in detail to Joshua.

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² 'Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. ³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west. ⁵ No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. (Joshua 1:1-5)

New Testament Fulfilment: Today's 'Kingdom' for the Church is not a physical one, although you would sometimes wonder with the emphasis there has been over the years, and still is, on church buildings and the acquisition of assets. It is so easy to slip back into an Old Covenant mindset! Rather, God's kingdom is to be built in the hearts and minds of people.

²⁰ *Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, ²¹ nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)*

Today's Application: This is a difficult concept for us in our humanity to accept, for we perceive success as being reflected in physical assets. As the world conspicuously displays its wealth, so the church through the ages has

tended to do the same thing, most obviously through grandiose buildings, but in other ways too. Yet the real battlefield is for the hearts and minds of people. A victory reflected in our behavior, not in assets acquired.

2. COURAGE AND OBEDIENCE: The Israelites were instructed to follow God's instructions! Courageously!

⁶ 'Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. ⁷ Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸ Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.' (Joshua 1:6-9)

New Testament Fulfilment: Nothing has changed!

⁶ But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast. (Hebrews 3:6)

⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹ and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Hebrews 5:8-9)

Today's Application: It takes courage and character to stand up for what is right and be obedient to God's ways, rather than be swayed by what society in general thinks and does.

3. PREPARE YOURSELVES: The people needed to take supplies with them for the initial journey.

So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: ¹¹ 'Go through the camp and tell the people, 'Get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will

cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.”(Joshua 1:10-11)

New Testament Fulfilment: We must be prepared to take up our inheritance.

¹¹ It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

Today’s Application: We can only mature as Christians by absorbing God’s Word and putting it into action. If we don’t know it, we can’t live it! Even if we know it but don’t live it, we will still miss out on our inheritance.

4. COMMITMENT TO THE CAUSE: The people were 100% behind Joshua.

¹⁶ Then they answered Joshua, “Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. ¹⁷ Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses. ¹⁸ Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey your words, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!”(Joshua 1:16-18)

New Testament Fulfilment: 100% commitment is still required today to attain the full rewards of the kingdom.

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and

will inherit eternal life. ³⁰ But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first. (Matthew 19:28-30)

Today's Application: Those prepared to sacrifice the most for Jesus are the ones who will reap the greatest rewards. It is not about passing glory now, but heavenly glory that will last for eternity!

5. SPIED OUT THE LAND: The invasion was properly planned.

Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. 'Go, look over the land,' he said, 'especially Jericho.' So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there..... ²⁴ They said to Joshua, 'The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us.' (Joshua 2:1, 24)

New Testament Fulfilment: Planning and strategy are still required in order to do the job effectively. It needs to be done in God however.

²³ But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, ²⁴ I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. ²⁵ Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. (Romans 15:23-9)

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' ¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. (Acts 16:6-10)

Today's Application: Good planning is still important but we must always be flexible enough to let God change our plans. We must seek His will first, as planning can easily become a very 'human based' activity.

6. WAITING AND PREPARATION: The people had to wait, receive their instructions and prepare themselves.

Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. ² After three days the officers went throughout the camp, ³ giving orders to the people: 'When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. ⁴ Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it.' ⁵ Joshua told the people, 'Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.' (Joshua 3:1-5)

New Testament Fulfilment: We still have to wait for God's timing, preparing ourselves for His work for us.

⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' (Acts 1:4-5)

Today's Application: Waiting is not something we generally like doing. We want results yesterday! Yet God sees things from a different perspective. For He lives in eternity! We need to prepare ourselves and wait upon His timing.

7. THE PROPHETIC PROMISE: God told the people, through Joshua, what he was going to do.

⁶ Joshua said to the priests, ‘Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people.’ So they took it up and went ahead of them.
⁷ And the LORD said to Joshua, ‘Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses.’
⁸ Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: ‘When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river.’”
⁹ Joshua said to the Israelites, ‘Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God.’
¹⁰ This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites.
¹¹ See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you.
¹² Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe.
¹³ And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap.” (Joshua 3:6-13)

New Testament Fulfilment: Today’s promise is one of inheritance of the kingdom.

³ His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.
⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;
⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;
⁷ and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.
⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
⁹ But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.
¹⁰ Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall,
¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
 (2 Peter 1:3-11)

Today's Application: We are promised a spiritual inheritance of a kingdom within (reflected in the godly character traits mentioned) now and an eternal kingdom with Jesus. Developing the godly nature within separates us from the world and makes us effective witnesses in it. Even though we have been saved, if we don't develop this godly character our calling and election is unsure! This is radical! And the opposite of the 'easy Christianity' so popular today.

8. CROSSING THE JORDAN: The first step in claiming the 'Promised Land.'

¹⁴ So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. ¹⁵ Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, ¹⁶ the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground. (Joshua 3:14-17)

New Testament Fulfilment: A step of faith, trusting God's promise and commands, (represented by the Ark that proceeded them) even in a seemingly impossible situation.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. ² This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³ This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. (1 John 5:1-5)

²⁰ *He replied, ‘Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.’*
(Matthew 17:20)

Today’s Application: God does not hand His promises to us ‘on a plate’. If everything in life and God was easily accomplished, our character would not be developed, nor our faith level strengthened through testing. We must take steps of faith, not simply wait for everything to happen without effort or commitment on our behalf.

9. TO CONSTRUCT A MEMORIAL: Of what God had done for them.

When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, ² ‘Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, ³ and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood and to carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.’ ⁴ So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, ⁵ and said to them, ‘Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, ⁶ to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ ⁷ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.’ ²⁰ And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. ²¹ He said to the Israelites, ‘In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, ‘What do these stones mean?’ ²² tell them, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’
(Joshua 4:1-6, 20-22)

New Testament Fulfilment: Our ‘memorial’ today is of the greatest event in the history of the world – the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross of Calvary.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:1-3)

Today's Application: It is through His sacrifice that we draw our strength and courage to continue in faith, in the faith! The cross remains central to the faith of all true believers. It is the 'living memorial' of our faith.

10. ARK REMOVED, RIVER FLOWED: As the Ark left the river, the waters started flowing again.

¹⁵ Then the LORD said to Joshua, ¹⁶ "Command the priests carrying the ark of the Testimony to come up out of the Jordan." ¹⁷ So Joshua commanded the priests, "Come up out of the Jordan." ¹⁸ And the priests came up out of the river carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD. No sooner had they set their feet on the dry ground than the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and ran at flood stage as before..... ²³ For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. ²⁴ He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God." (Joshua 4:15-18, 23- 24)

New Testament Fulfilment: At the time of the death of Jesus, the Father again displayed His power in several physical forms. Most spiritually significant was the tearing of the Temple's curtain, opening the way to return into His presence through Jesus.

*⁴⁵ From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. ⁴⁶ About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "**Eloi, Eloi,***

lama sabachthani?”— which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” ⁴⁷ *When some of those standing there heard this, they said, ‘He’s calling Elijah.’”* ⁴⁸ *Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink.* ⁴⁹ *The rest said, ‘Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.’”* ⁵⁰ *And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.* ⁵¹ *At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.* ⁵² *The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.* ⁵³ *They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus’ resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.* ⁵⁴ *When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, ‘Surely he was the Son of God!’”(Matthew 27:45-54)*

Today’s Application: During this Age of Grace, it is easy to overlook, to no longer ‘fear’, the all-powerful, righteous and holy God. There is no way we can enter into His perfect presence except through the cleansing, purifying blood of Jesus.

11. CIRCUMCISION AT GILGAL: Again to be circumcised, a process that had lapsed during the time in the desert.

Now when all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the coast heard how the LORD had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until we had crossed over, their hearts melted and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites. ² *At that time the LORD said to Joshua, ‘Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again.’”* ³ *So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth.* ⁹ *Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” So the place has been called Gilgal to this day. (Joshua 5:1-3,9)*

New Testament Fulfilment: Circumcision was the physical sign of separation, of establishing a difference, between God’s people and the

world. Today the difference is spiritual, for our behaviour is to reflect our ‘circumcision’ from the world.

⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For, ‘Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. ¹¹ He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.’ ¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. ‘Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.’ ¹⁵ But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, (1 Peter 3:9-18)

Today’s Application: One of the great problems in the church today is that the behaviour of many Christians is, to the outsider, little different to those in the world. On the other hand, some others have become legalistic and religious, like the Pharisees. Rather, the faith we are to reflect, should be the vibrancy and compassion of Jesus.

12. THE FALL OF JERICHO: The first step in the possession of the land God had promised.

² Then the LORD said to Joshua, ‘See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. ³ March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. ⁴ Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams’ horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. ⁵ When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the

people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in.”²⁰ When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city.²¹ They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.²⁴ Then they burned the whole city and everything in it, but they put the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the LORD’s house.²⁵ But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho—and she lives among the Israelites to this day.²⁶ At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: “Cursed before the LORD is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: “At the cost of his firstborn son will he lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest will he set up its gates.”²⁷ So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land. (Joshua 6:2-5,20-21,24-27)

New Testament Fulfilment: The reward for our faith is to enter the kingdom of God.

⁵ Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? ⁶ But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? ⁸ If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right. (James 2:5-8)

Today’s Application: We possess God’s kingdom, as we become obedient to His will in our life. This is first established through developing the general character of Jesus in our lives, as set out in the Bible, then by obeying the specific, personal will of God for us. So, becoming mature in Christ.

THE 12 FEATURES OF CROSSING THE JORDAN

A Summary

- 1. THE PROMISE: The promise of the inheritance given to Moses was confirmed in detail to Joshua.**
Our promised inheritance today is the kingdom of God.
- 2. COURAGE AND OBEDIENCE: The Israelites were instructed to follow God's instructions! Courageously!**
Courage and character are required to stand up for God amidst an unbelieving world.
- 3. PREPARE YOURSELVES: The people needed to take supplies with them for the initial journey.**
We prepare ourselves by absorbing and acting upon God's Word.
- 4. COMMITMENT TO THE CAUSE: The people were 100% behind Joshua.**
The greater our sacrifice now, the greater our eternal kingdom rewards.
- 5. SPIED OUT THE LAND: The invasion was properly planned.**
Our plans are to be in accordance with God's will, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- 6. WAITING AND PREPARATION: The people had to wait, receive their instructions and prepare themselves.**
We need to prepare ourselves and wait upon His timing.
- 7. THE PROPHETIC PROMISE: God told the people, through Joshua, what he was going to do.**
We are required to build goodly character to fully inherit the kingdom.
- 8. CROSSING THE JORDAN: The first step in claiming the 'Promised Land.'**

We must take step out in faith and be subjected to trials and testings, in order to inherit the kingdom.

9. TO CONSTRUCT A MEMORIAL: Of what God had done for them.

The Cross of Jesus is the living memorial of our faith.

10. ARK REMOVED, RIVER FLOWED: As the Ark left the river, the waters started flowing again.

God is all-powerful and to be feared. We can only enter into His almighty presence through the lifeblood Jesus sacrificed for each one of us on the Cross. God's requirement is 'a life for a life'.

11. CIRCUMCISION AT GILGAL: Again to be circumcised, a process that had lapsed during the time in the desert.

We are to be 'circumcised' from the world through our different behaviour, reflecting the character of Jesus.

12. THE FALL OF JERICHO: The first step in the possession of the land God had promised.

We become mature, fully inheriting the kingdom, through developing the character of Jesus as set in the Word and by being obedient to the personal will of the Father for our lives, as communicated through the Holy Spirit.

PRINCIPLE MESSAGE FOR TODAY FROM THE CROSSING OF THE JORDAN:

Our spiritual inheritance of the kingdom of God is to be possessed one step at a time, through the ‘battles’ of faith and obedience to the Father’s will.

“Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. ¹² I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you—also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow. ¹³ So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.’ (Joshua 24:11-13)

FROM JORDAN TO JORDAN

Between the times the Jordan was supernaturally divided, firstly with Joshua, then by Elijah and Elisha, the glory days of Israel had come and gone. The majority of their promised inheritance had been claimed, and gradually lost. Claimed through obedience, particularly during the days of Joshua and King David, and lost during times of general disobedience by the kings following Solomon.

However, God did not desert His people, but communicated mainly through His prophets, for the kings and priests slid back into the ways of the world. Yes, God always has a 'Plan B' when His people, us included, let Him down.

Remarkably, God repeated the pattern He established with Moses and Joshua, with Elijah and Elisha. As we saw earlier, Moses was a type of Jesus and Joshua, one of us.

Under Moses and Joshua we saw the physical inheritance of the Israelites take place, while the role of Elijah and Elisha was that of restoring a spiritual inheritance.

Once again, in the lives of these two great, yet very human, prophets, we have a picture of Jesus in Elijah, the Church, and ourselves, in Elisha. For Jesus permeates all Scripture, not just the New Testament.

ELIJAH: A picture of Jesus.

- 1. Displayed God's Power** during the time of the worst excesses of any of the kings of the divided kingdom, the reign in Israel of King Ahab and his notorious wife Jezebel.
- 2. Did the Greater Miracles** of the two, but only half the number.
- 3. Is Held in honour, as is Moses,** as is Jesus.
- 4. Ascended to Heaven,** as did Jesus.
- 5. Was to Return,** as is Jesus.

ELISHA: A picture of the Church.

- 1. Displayed God's Grace to Individuals**, as we are meant to.
- 2. Did Twice as Many Miracles**, but not as spectacular, as is the case with us when compared to Jesus.
- 3. Possessed the Land Spiritually**, as did Joshua, and as we are to do.
- 4. He Died** – as we do.
- 5. Has the Hope of Future Resurrection**, as do we.

So let's take a look and see what we can learn from these two chosen prophets of God.

3. DIVIDING THE JORDAN AGAIN

⁶ Then Elijah said to him, ‘Stay here; the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.’ And he replied, ‘As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.’ So the two of them walked on. ⁷ Fifty men of the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan. ⁸ Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground. ⁹ When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?’ ‘Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,’ Elisha replied. ¹⁰ ‘You have asked a difficult thing,’ Elijah said, ‘yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise not.’ ¹¹ As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. ¹² Elisha saw this and cried out, ‘My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!’ And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them apart. ¹³ He picked up the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. ¹⁴ Then he took the cloak that had fallen from him and struck the water with it. ‘Where now is the LORD, the God of Elijah?’ he asked. When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over. (2 Kings 2:6-14)

These twin dividings of the River Jordan are considerably less well known than the two previous occasions. Probably because only two people were involved and but 50 watching!

TWO TYPES OF INHERITANCE

As on the previous occasion, the parting of the Jordan’s waters signified to the people a change in leadership. Firstly, from Moses to Joshua, then from Elijah to Elisha. Interestingly, they represented the two different types of inheritance, physical (of leaders of Israel) and spiritual (of the prophets). They are also symbolic of the difference between the Old and New

Covenants, where the inheritance changed from the physical (in the Old) to the spiritual (of the New).

1. PHYSICAL INHERITANCE: OLD COVENANT: Moses to Joshua

Crossing the Jordan under Joshua was the first step in claiming the Israelites physical inheritance in Canaan. The Old Covenant is built around physical prosperity, so naturally, the provision of a country for the people to live in formed the central, essential part of the promise. As is still the case today for us as individuals, home ownership gives a security of tenure that renting doesn't. The Israelites were thrilled to be taking the first steps into the land they had dreamed of inheriting for so long. This expansion of territory under Joshua and David explains why the people held both in such high regard. For they were the beneficiaries!

2. SPIRITUAL INHERITANCE: NEW COVENANT: Elijah to Elisha

This second crossing of the Jordan occurred at a time of great apostasy amongst the people, a time when they were following worldly rather than godly ways. So instead of all the people witnessing the crossings, only a select group of 50 prophets, those still following in the Lord's ways, were allowed to witness the events.

This spiritual inheritance though, was not simply given to Elisha but had to be claimed, or possessed, by crossing the Jordan. Here however, the return crossing was also made, symbolically taking the spiritual inheritance back to the physical one on the side of the river already claimed by the people under Joshua.

This is a beautiful picture of the New Testament, spiritual inheritance to come, some 850 years later. Here the emphasis changes away from material possessions. In fact Jesus constantly emphasised the dangers of wealth accumulation! Now we have the better spiritual inheritance of God's kingdom within. From a promise of external physical prosperity to the better one, internal spiritual prosperity. Unfortunately, the difference between the two Covenants is not understood by many in today's Church. If you have difficulty in accepting this, read through the four Gospels and understand what Jesus really said.

THE MINISTRY OF ELIJAH

There are a number of similarities between the ministry of Elijah and that of Jesus. As well as some big differences, for Elijah was very human while Jesus was man and God.

Some of the similarities were:

1. Elijah was supernaturally provided for. (*1 Kings 17:4-6*)
2. Elijah supernaturally provided food. (*1 Kings 17:7-16*)
3. Elijah raised the dead. (*1 Kings 17:17-24*)
4. Elijah exposed the 'religious' people of the time. (*1 Kings 18:21-29*)
5. Elijah revealed God's power. (*1 Kings 18:30-39*)
6. Elijah displayed God's control over nature. (*1 Kings 17:1, 18:41-46, 2 Kings 2:8*)
7. God revealed Himself to Elijah. (*1 Kings 19:11-18*)

Of course there were 2 notable similarities to Moses (a type of Jesus) in dividing the waters and living in the presence of God.

In other episodes though, notably his ongoing relationship with King Ahab and Jezebel, his humanity was exposed.

Elisha passed on his mantle to Elijah, as had Moses to Joshua 650 years earlier and as Jesus was to do to us 850 years later.

Of course Elijah was taken up to heaven immediately after he divided the waters. So we need to move on to the life of Elisha to see the similar message for the end time church that God revealed through the actions of Moses and Joshua after their 'water dividing' experiences.

THE MINISTRY OF ELISHA COMMENCES

SOME COMPARISONS WITH ELIJAH

It is generally believed that Elijah's ministry was one of judgement on the nations, while Elisha primarily brought a message of grace to individuals.

Elisha asked for and received, in terms of recorded volume of miracles at least, a double anointing of 14 v 7. However, Elijah's miracles were 'greater', at least, certainly more spectacular than Elijah's were.

It is interesting that the two ministries reflected the twin sides of God's character, love and judgement. Elijah reflected the judgement for disobedience that can be seen through out the Old Testament and will be revealed again at the end of the age on the Day of Judgement. Elisha on the other hand, reflects God's nature of love and grace, the aspects of His character we are experiencing today under the New Testament Age of Grace.

One of the big problems in both the Church and the community is that there is the mistaken belief that because we have only ever lived in the Age of Grace, it will never come to an end. That God is purely a god of love and so there will never be judgement in this age or the next. This inevitably leads to unrighteous living. In the Church, it surfaces as 'easy Christianity', while in the community, God is ignored.

God's full nature is best reflected in the combined ministries of both Elijah and Elisha.

THE JORDAN DIVIDED

On Elijah's final day of life on this earth, he travelled with Elisha to Jericho and then on down to the Jordan. He wanted to cross over out of Canaan, so took his cloak, rolled it up, and struck the water with it. Together the two crossed the river on dry ground.

⁶ Then Elijah said to him, 'Stay here; the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.' And he replied, 'As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.' So the two of them walked on. ⁷ Fifty men of the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan. ⁸ Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground. (2 Kings 2:6-8)

ELISHA'S INHERITANCE

Elijah, knowing what was about to happen, asked his faithful companion what he could do for him, before his departure.

⁹ When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?” “Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,” Elisha replied. (2 Kings 2:9)

Elisha's bold request was not one Elijah to answer, for the decision was up to God.

¹⁰ “You have asked a difficult thing,” Elijah said, “yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise not.” (2 Kings 2:10)

Then Elijah was on his way! In a typical act of grieving for the times, Elisha tore his clothes.

As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. ¹² Elisha saw this and cried out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them apart. (2 Kings 2:11-12)

ELISHA DIVIDING THE WATERS

Fortunately for Elisha, he found Elijah's cloak to replace his own torn one! Then he was then able to divide the waters with it, as Elijah had done shortly before. It served as a sign to those watching that Elijah's anointing had indeed passed to him.

¹³ He picked up the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. ¹⁴ Then he took the cloak that had fallen from him and struck the water with it. “Where now is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” he asked. When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over. ¹⁵ The company of the prophets from Jericho, who were watching, said, “The spirit of Elijah is resting on

*Elisha.”And they went to meet him and bowed to the ground before him.
(2 Kings 2:13-15)*

ELISHA’S MINISTRY AS A PATTERN FOR THE CHURCH TODAY

As mentioned earlier, Elisha’s overall ministry was one of love and grace towards people, the role of the Church today. Looking at some of his recorded activities, we will see the lessons in these events that point the way ahead for us today.

1. JERICHO RESTORED: The first city captured by the Jews when entering Canaan was Jericho. A curse was placed on it.

²⁶ At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: ‘Cursed before the LORD is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: ‘At the cost of his firstborn son will he lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest will he set up its gates.’”(Joshua 6:26)

This curse had lasted until Elisha’s time, for although it had been rebuilt, the water was bad and the land infertile. Elisha’s first act was to restore the land.

¹⁹ The men of the city said to Elisha, ‘Look, our lord, this town is well situated, as you can see, but the water is bad and the land is unproductive.’ ²⁰ ‘Bring me a new bowl,”he said, ‘and put salt in it.”So they brought it to him. ²¹ Then he went out to the spring and threw the salt into it, saying, ‘This is what the LORD says: ‘I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.’” ²² And the water has remained wholesome to this day, according to the word Elisha had spoken. (2 Kings 2:19-22)

New Testament Fulfilment: At the ascension of Jesus, He proclaimed that the gentiles, those of the ‘world’ are now to be brought into the kingdom. Worldwide, ‘lands’ are being spiritually restored.

⁶ So when they met together, they asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ ⁷ He said to them: *‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’* ⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. (Acts 1:6-9)

And after this the Jews, who firstly lost their physical inheritance in Canaan and then their spiritual inheritance through rejecting Jesus.

When they finished, James spoke up: ‘Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. ¹⁵ The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: ¹⁶ “After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, (Acts 15:13-16)

Today’s Application: The gentiles (non-Jews) come from all the countries that in the Old Testament made up the non-godly ‘world’. Unlike the very early New Testament Church, today’s church consists almost entirely of gentiles. However, it is clear, even in the New Testament, that at least a proportion of the Jews will come into the church in the final days. The physical restoration of the state of Israel is a picture of what is to follow in the spiritual.

2. WORLDLY REJECTION: In the days, before ‘PC’ became compulsory, Elisha was laughed at for being bald!

²³ From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some youths came out of the town and jeered at him. ‘Go on up, you baldhead!’ they said. ‘Go on up, you baldhead!’ ²⁴ He turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the LORD. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths. ²⁵ And he went on to Mount Carmel and from there returned to Samaria.

(2 Kings 2:23-25)

New Testament Fulfilment: Jesus was ridiculed.....

¹⁰ The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹ Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. ¹² That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies. (Luke 23:10-12)

And so are we.

¹⁰ Then he said to them: ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. ¹² But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. (Luke 21:10-12)

But judgement will come upon those who mock and reject.

God ‘will give to each person according to what he has done.’ ⁷ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. ⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹ There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰ but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹¹ For God does not show favoritism. (Romans 2:6-11)

Today’s Application: Not everyone will become a Christian! Many of those who don’t will hate those who do! For the way of the world is attractive to many. We are in a battle, having the protection of God in the spiritual. The only way to win a battle is to fight, not retreat! Our weapons though are based on love, not gunpowder!

3. THE WATER AND THE BLOOD: Moses demonstrated to the Israelites God's call upon him to gain their release from Egyptian captivity by changing water into blood, taking water from the Nile and pouring it out on the ground as blood. (Exodus 4:8-9) And, much better known, a further demonstration to the Pharaoh, as one of the 10 plagues. (Exodus 7:14-24)

Here Elijah told the 3 kings in 2 Kings (couldn't resist the poor pun!) to

¹³ Elisha said to the king of Israel, 'What do we have to do with each other? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother.'

'No,' the king of Israel answered, 'because it was the LORD who called us three kings together to hand us over to Moab.' ¹⁴ *Elisha said, 'As surely as the LORD Almighty lives, whom I serve, if I did not have respect for the presence of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would not look at you or even notice you.'* ¹⁵ *But now bring me a harpist.'* While the harpist was playing, the hand of the LORD came upon Elisha ¹⁶ and he said, 'This is what the LORD says: Make this valley full of ditches.' ¹⁷ *For this is what the LORD says: You will see neither wind nor rain, yet this valley will be filled with water, and you, your cattle and your other animals will drink.* ¹⁸ *This is an easy thing in the eyes of the LORD; he will also hand Moab over to you.* ¹⁹ *You will overthrow every fortified city and every major town.*

You will cut down every good tree, stop up all the springs, and ruin every good field with stones.' ²⁰ *The next morning, about the time for offering the sacrifice, there it was—water flowing from the direction of Edom! And the land was filled with water.* ²¹ *Now all the Moabites had heard that the kings had come to fight against them; so every man, young and old, who could bear arms was called up and stationed on the border.* ²² *When they got up early in the morning, the sun was shining on the water. To the Moabites across the way, the water looked red—like blood.* ²³ *'That's blood!'* they said. *'Those kings must have fought and slaughtered each other. Now to the plunder, Moab!'* (2 Kings 3:13-23)

New Testament Fulfilment: Jesus too, symbolically announced His ministry in a similar way when He turned the water into wine at Cana in Galilee. (John 2:1-11) For the wine, as we found out at the Last Supper,

was symbolic of His blood, which we are still to take in remembrance of His blood shed on the ‘awe-full’ cross at Calvary’s hill. (See A Revelation of... The First Miracle of Jesus)

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, ‘Fill the jars with water’; so they filled them to the brim. ⁸ Then he told them, ‘Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.’ They did so, ⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, ‘Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.’ ¹¹ This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him. (John 2:7-11)

Today’s Application: This miracle of Elisa’s (God’s) is an illustration of our ministry today. Moses, the forerunner of Jesus, through God changed the water into blood. Jesus himself changed the water into wine. In Elisha’s case, he did nothing other than tell the Kings what was going to happen. And the water wasn’t turned into blood, but appeared to do so to the Moabites. Which was as effective as the real thing! And the water sustained the victorious army as well.

Today, our ‘miracles’ generally do not appear as spectacular as those of Jesus did. The ‘greater things we do’ though, are greater in number and often in terms of numbers of people reached. The ‘vintage’ wine of Jesus was imbibed by a group of wedding guests, while the ‘illusory’ transformation of water into blood of Elisha defeated one large army and supplied another!

Today, it is simply miraculous that an army of humble servants can confront and defeat the might of the world! By God’s power, not our own. The resurgence of the church in Russia after the collapse of communism has been a classic example.

4. THE OIL OF PROVISION: Elisha provided oil for the widow as financial provision during a time of hardship, after the death of her husband.

The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, ‘Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the LORD. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.’”² Elisha replied to her, ‘How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?’” ‘Your servant has nothing there at all,’ she said, ‘except a little oil.’”³ Elisha said, ‘Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few.’⁴ Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.”⁵ She left him and afterward shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring.⁶ When all the jars were full, she said to her son, ‘Bring me another one.’” But he replied, ‘There is not a jar left.’” Then the oil stopped flowing.⁷ She went and told the man of God, and he said, ‘Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.’ (2 Kings 4:1-7)

New Testament Fulfilment: Jesus told a parable to illustrate the ‘oil of provision’ today.

In reply Jesus said: ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.’³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.’³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.’³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.’³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him.’³⁵ The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’”³⁶ ‘Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?’”³⁷ The expert in

the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:30-37)

Today's Application: The church is to 'love' individuals in need by making practical provision for them. So becoming the oil of testimony of the Holy Spirit, to individuals in need.

5. THE SHUNAMMITE'S SON: A miracle of life, death and restoration.

MIRACULOUS CONCEPTION:

¹⁴ "What can be done for her?" Elisha asked. Gehazi said, "Well, she has no son and her husband is old." ¹⁵ Then Elisha said, "Call her." So he called her, and she stood in the doorway. ¹⁶ "About this time next year," Elisha said, "you will hold a son in your arms." "No, my lord," she objected. "Don't mislead your servant, O man of God!" ¹⁷ But the woman became pregnant, and the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had told her. (2 Kings 4: 14-17)

UNTIMELY DEATH:

¹⁸ The child grew, and one day he went out to his father, who was with the reapers. ¹⁹ "My head! My head!" he said to his father. His father told a servant, "Carry him to his mother." ²⁰ After the servant had lifted him up and carried him to his mother, the boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died. (2 Kings 4:18-20)

RESURRECTION:

³² When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. ³³ He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the LORD. ³⁴ Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy's body grew warm. ³⁵ Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. (2 Kings 4:32-35)

New Testament Fulfilment: Found in the person of Jesus.

MIRACULOUS CONCEPTION:

¹⁸ *This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:18)*

PREMETURE DEATH:

²³ *Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. (Luke 3:23).....*

⁹ *Then he said, ‘Here I am, I have come to do your will.’ He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:9-10)*

RESURRECTION:

⁵ *The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.” (Matthew 28:5-7)*

Today’s Application: The life, death and resurrection of Jesus are to be the cornerstone of our faith. But more than that, they are also our example to follow. We are given ‘life’ through our relationship with Jesus (*Mark 10:29-31*), we are to ‘die’ to our sins on an ongoing basis (*Romans 7:14-20*) and put on the ‘resurrection’ of the nature of Christ (*Romans 13:14*).

6. OVERCOMING THE SPIRIT OF DEATH: Elisha saved his fellow prophets from death by adding some flour to a poisonous stew.

³⁸ *Elisha returned to Gilgal and there was a famine in that region. While the company of the prophets was meeting with him, he said to his servant, ‘Put on the large pot and cook some stew for these men.’ ³⁹ One of them went out into the fields to gather herbs and found a wild vine. He gathered some of its gourds and filled the fold of his cloak. When he returned, he cut*

them up into the pot of stew, though no one knew what they were. ⁴⁰ The stew was poured out for the men, but as they began to eat it, they cried out, ‘O man of God, there is death in the pot!’ And they could not eat it. ⁴¹ Elisha said, ‘Get some flour.’ He put it into the pot and said, ‘Serve it to the people to eat.’ And there was nothing harmful in the pot.
(2 Kings 4:38-41)

New Testament Fulfilment: Jesus saved us from spiritual death on the cross.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. ¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Philippians 2:8-12)

And we have victory over death!

⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ⁵⁵ ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.
(1 Corinthians 15:54-58)

Today’s Application: Even though we may die tomorrow, we still have victory over death! For Jesus has overcome death on our behalf, and in doing so, obtained for us the gift of eternal life, which we are now living,

in the kingdom. But we still tend to look at the natural rather than the spiritual. However, understanding the spiritual will help us become more committed to the Lord in the natural.

7. FEEDING THE HUNGRY: Elisha fed the hungry with ‘multiplying bread’ hundreds of years before Jesus.

⁴² *A man came from Baal Shalishah, bringing the man of God twenty loaves of barley bread baked from the first ripe grain, along with some heads of new grain. ‘Give it to the people to eat,’ Elisha said.*

⁴³ *‘How can I set this before a hundred men?’ his servant asked. But Elisha answered, ‘Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the LORD says: ‘They will eat and have some left over.’”* ⁴⁴ *Then he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the LORD. (2 Kings 4:42-44)*

New Testament Fulfilment: There are two occasions recorded of Jesus feeding the multitudes with minimal resources.

¹⁷ *Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: ‘Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?’* ¹⁸ *Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember?’* ¹⁹ *When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?’* *“Twelve,” they replied.* ²⁰ *“And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?’* *They answered, ‘Seven.’”* ²¹ *He said to them, ‘Do you still not understand?’ (Mark 8:17-21)*

Today’s Application: This has both a natural and spiritual application. In the natural we are to provide food and services of ‘helps’, for the ‘hungry’ on a community basis, out of the resources the Lord has given us.

In the spiritual, bread represents the Word of God, (*John 6:32-35*) made available through Jesus, and commanded to be ‘provided’ to the world. (*Matthew 28:19-20*)

8. THE PRICE OF HEALING: Elisha healed wealthy Naaman – after Naaman had had a few doubts about his ability to do so.

Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy..... ¹³ *Naaman's servants went to him and said, 'My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!''* ¹⁴ *So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy. (2Kings 5:1,13-14)*

Elisha refused to accept a gift in return – for it was God who healed not Elisha.

¹⁵ *Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, 'Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept now a gift from your servant.'* ¹⁶ *The prophet answered, 'As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing.'* *And even though Naaman urged him, he refused.*
(2 Kings 5:15-16)

Elisha's servant Gehazi, didn't have the same understanding, and thought a payment would be 'very nice thank you' to help meet expenses.

²² *'Everything is all right,' Gehazi answered. 'My master sent me to say, 'Two young men from the company of the prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two sets of clothing.'* ²³ *'By all means, take two talents,' said Naaman. He urged Gehazi to accept them, and then tied up the two talents of silver in two bags, with two sets of clothing. (2 Kings 5:22-23)*

He compounded the problem by lying to Elisha and paid the consequences.

But Elisha said to him, ‘Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money, or to accept clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, or menservants and maidservants?’²⁷ Naaman’s leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever.” Then Gehazi went from Elisha’s presence and he was leprous, as white as snow. (2 Kings 5:26-27)

New Testament Fulfilment: Simon the Sorcerer tried a similar thing with Peter and John. He received the same reaction.

¹⁸ When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money¹⁹ and said, ‘Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’”²⁰ Peter answered: ‘May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!’²¹ You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.²² Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. (Acts 8:18-22)

Today’s Application: We must remember that every miracle comes from God. All the glory must be given to Him. No payment can be accepted. The greatest problem area is in a healing ministry. People are generally most grateful to be healed and will readily offer payment for ‘services rendered’. Healing evangelists particularly, need to be very careful in this area.

9. A GOD OF MIRACLES: Making iron float is impossible under natural laws. Yet it happened!

The company of the prophets said to Elisha, ‘Look, the place where we meet with you is too small for us.’² Let us go to the Jordan, where each of us can get a pole; and let us build a place there for us to live.” And he said, ‘Go.’”³ Then one of them said, ‘Won’t you please come with your servants?’” “I will,” Elisha replied.⁴ And he went with them. They went to the Jordan and began to cut down trees.⁵ As one of them was cutting down a tree, the iron axhead fell into the water. ‘Oh, my lord,’ he cried out, ‘it was borrowed!’”⁶ The man of God asked, ‘Where did it fall?’ When he

showed him the place, Elisha cut a stick and threw it there, and made the iron float. ⁷ ‘Lift it out,’ he said. Then the man reached out his hand and took it. (2 Kings 6:1-7)

New Testament Fulfilment: Jesus himself defied the forces of nature to walk on water. It is most interesting that only 9 of the 35 recorded miracles of Jesus related to overcoming the forces of nature. The remaining 26, (74%) related to healing, reflecting the emphasis of His ministry.

*²⁵ During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. ‘It’s a ghost,’ they said, and cried out in fear. ²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: **“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”** (Matthew 14:25-7)*

Miracles too, happened to the early followers of Jesus and still occur today.

¹⁷ Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. ¹⁸ They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ²⁰ ‘Go, stand in the temple courts,’ he said, ‘and tell the people the full message of this new life.’ ²¹ At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. ²² But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, ²³ ‘We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.’ ²⁴ On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this. ²⁵ Then someone came and said, ‘Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.’ ²⁶ At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them. (Acts 5:17-26)

Today's Application: Miracles affecting nature still take place today, almost always in times of desperate need. For miracles are to glorify God and promote His purposes, not to build up the ego of an individual or line their pockets! However the greatest majority of miracles still occur in the area of healing, reflecting God's love of, and to, people.

10. GRACE SHOWN TO THE ARAMEANS: When the Jews could have killed them in the normal fashion of a victorious army of the times. Instead, a feast was prepared for the vanquished!

¹⁵ When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. 'Oh, my lord, what shall we do?' the servant asked. ¹⁶ 'Don't be afraid,' the prophet answered. 'Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' ¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, 'O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.' Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. ¹⁸ As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, 'Strike these people with blindness.' So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked. ¹⁹ Elisha told them, 'This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for.' And he led them to Samaria. ²⁰ After they entered the city, Elisha said, 'LORD, open the eyes of these men so they can see.' Then the LORD opened their eyes and they looked, and there they were, inside Samaria. ²¹ When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, 'Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?' ²² 'Do not kill them,' he answered. 'Would you kill men you have captured with your own sword or bow? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master.' ²³ So he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory. (2 Kings 6:15:23)

New Testament Fulfilment: Grace is being and is to be shown to the people of the world during the current 'Age of Grace' in which we live.

¹⁶ ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”
(John 3:16-21)

Today’s Application: Today mercy, not judgement, is being shown to the world through God’s grace. For Jesus came to give people a last chance to come back to the Father through Him, before the final judgement at the end of the Age. His example, which we are to copy, was one of grace, not condemnation of unbelievers. His condemnation was saved for the ‘religious’ Pharisees and Sadducees. Grace does not mean that everything is acceptable, to believers or non-believers, but rather that we should try and convince others through loving them, not hating or dismissing them. To bring a message of the hope of salvation, including the potential eternal consequences of non-acceptance, not one of condemnation, of peoples’ chosen lifestyle. To show grace, just as Jesus did!

11. OVERCOMING FAMINE IN ISRAEL: Caused by another siege of the Arameans – even after being shown mercy and grace by the Jews! Elisha predicted its seemingly impossible end, and the demise of a skeptic. Both occurred!

²⁴ Some time later, Ben-Hadad king of Aram mobilized his entire army and marched up and laid siege to Samaria. ²⁵ There was a great famine in the city; the siege lasted so long that a donkey’s head sold for eighty shekels of silver, and a quarter of a cab of seed pods for five shekels ²⁶ As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried to him, ‘Help me, my lord the king!’ ²⁷ The king replied, ‘If the LORD does not help

you, where can I get help for you? From the threshing floor? From the winepress?" ²⁸ Then he asked her, "What's the matter?" She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give up your son so we may eat him today, and tomorrow we'll eat my son.' " ²⁹ So we cooked my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, 'Give up your son so we may eat him,' but she had hidden him." ³⁰ When the king heard the woman's words, he tore his robes. As he went along the wall, the people looked, and there, underneath, he had sackcloth on his body. ³¹ He said, 'May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat remains on his shoulders today!' ³³ While he was still talking to them, the messenger came down to him. And the king said, 'This disaster is from the LORD. Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?' Elisha said, 'Hear the word of the LORD. This is what the LORD says: About this time tomorrow, a seah of flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria.' " ² The officer on whose arm the king was leaning said to the man of God, 'Look, even if the LORD should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?' " 'You will see it with your own eyes,' answered Elisha, 'but you will not eat any of it!' " ¹⁰ So they went and called out to the city gatekeepers and told them, 'We went into the Aramean camp and not a man was there—not a sound of anyone—only tethered horses and donkeys, and the tents left just as they were.' " ¹¹ The gatekeepers shouted the news, and it was reported within the palace..... ¹⁸ It happened as the man of God had said to the king: 'About this time tomorrow, a seah of flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria.' " ¹⁹ The officer had said to the man of God, 'Look, even if the LORD should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?' " The man of God had replied, 'You will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat any of it!' " ²⁰ And that is exactly what happened to him, for the people trampled him in the gateway, and he died.

(2 Kings 6: 24-31, 33-7:2, 10-11, 18-20)

New Testament Fulfilment: This passage has a future fulfilment. For the famine and the atrocities committed in it is a picture of the world today. It seems impossible that evil will be overcome. There are sceptics and scoffers. Atrocities are committed. The Church (Elisha) is hated and threatened with death. But the promised day of deliverance will come.

² I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. ³ First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴ They will say, ‘Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” ⁵ But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. ⁶ By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷ By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. ⁸ But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (2 Peter 3:2-13)

Today’s Application: We are living in a world of war and famine, of manmade and natural disasters. The church is often blamed for the problems or simply regarded as irrelevant to the times. Skeptics abound! In many places the church faces increasing persecution. More is promised!

But we, each one, can be strengthened by the promise that the famine and wars will end and God’s kingdom is being and will be established upon the earth, as the picture of Elisha shows and Jesus promised. Hallelujah!

12. THE LAND IS RESTORED: The Shunammite woman, the faithful follower who provided for Elisha and who’s son was brought back to life,

was sent away by Elisha to avoid a seven year famine. Upon her return, the king restored the woman's inheritance.

Now Elisha had said to the woman whose son he had restored to life, 'Go away with your family and stay for a while wherever you can, because the LORD has decreed a famine in the land that will last seven years.' ² *The woman proceeded to do as the man of God said. She and her family went away and stayed in the land of the Philistines seven years.* ³ *At the end of the seven years she came back from the land of the Philistines and went to the king to beg for her house and land.* ⁴ *The king was talking to Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, and had said, 'Tell me about all the great things Elisha has done.'* ⁵ *Just as Gehazi was telling the king how Elisha had restored the dead to life, the woman whose son Elisha had brought back to life came to beg the king for her house and land. Gehazi said, 'This is the woman, my lord the king, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life.'* ⁶ *The king asked the woman about it, and she told him. Then he assigned an official to her case and said to him, 'Give back everything that belonged to her, including all the income from her land from the day she left the country until now.'* (2 Kings 8:1-6)

New Testament Fulfilment: We are to be separated from the world spiritually, living a life of righteousness.

¹⁴ *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?* ¹⁵ *What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?* ¹⁶ *What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.'* ¹⁷ *'Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.'* ¹⁸ *'I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.'* (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

We will come into our inheritance.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:3-9)

Promised by Jesus for those who follow in His ways.

³⁴ *'Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'* (Matthew 25:34-36)

For it is His inheritance in which we share.

¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the

church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:18-23)

The promised day of the Lord will come, no matter how unlikely it may seem now.

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (2 Peter 3:10-13)

Of which John was blessed with a vision in exile on Patmos.

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’ Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ ⁶ He said to me: ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. ⁸ But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.’”
(Revelation 21:1-8)*

Today's Application: “Lord, we live for you and eagerly await your return.”

THE 12 FEATURES OF ELISHA'S MINISTRY AS A PATTERN FOR THE CHURCH TODAY

A Summary

1. JERICHO RESTORED:

Jericho is a type of Israel, destroyed for rejecting Jesus, but to be restored at the end of the age. What took place in the physical in 1948, is yet to be fulfilled in the spiritual.

2. WORLDLY REJECTION:

The church is ridiculed by the world. We are in a spiritual battle, where our weapons are love and servanthood, not gunpowder!

3. THE WATER AND THE BLOOD:

Our miracles today are greater in number (Elisha) than those of Jesus (Elijah) but generally not as spectacular. God remains a miracle worker!

4. THE OIL OF PROVISION:

We are to provide for those individuals in need, sharing what we have been given.

5. THE SHUNAMMITE'S SON:

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus are to be the cornerstone of our faith.

6. OVERCOMING THE SPIRIT OF DEATH:

Jesus has overcome death on our behalf, and in doing so, obtained for us the gift of eternal life, which we are now living, in the kingdom.

7. FEEDING THE HUNGRY:

We are required to provide 'natural bread' to the physically hungry through community service, providing also 'spiritual bread', the Word of God, to the community also.

8. THE PRICE OF HEALING:

All healing comes from God. He must be given all the glory and no payment accepted.

9. A GOD OF MIRACLES:

74% of the recorded miracles of Jesus related to healing, signaling the emphasis of His ministry. The emphasis on the miraculous healing ministry remains the same with us today.

10. GRACE SHOWN TO THE ARAMEANS:

We are to bring a message of the hope of salvation, including the potential eternal consequences of non-acceptance, not one of condemnation, of peoples' chosen lifestyle. To show grace, just as Jesus did!

11. OVERCOMING FAMINE IN ISRAEL:

Each believer can be strengthened by the promise that the famine and wars will end and God's kingdom is being and will be established upon the earth, as the picture of Elisha shows and Jesus promised.

12. THE LAND IS RESTORED:

"Lord, we live for you and eagerly await your return."

PRINCIPLE MESSAGE FOR TODAY FROM THE CROSSING OF THE JORDAN:

Irrespective of the difficulties we face in life, if we are obedient to our Lord's will, we will inherit His kingdom.

⁵ Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? (James 2:5)

12 LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM 'DIVIDING THE WATERS'

These 3 key occasions when the waters were divided, each signaled a new stage in the progress of the Jewish inheritance. From them, we can see parallels in the challenges facing the church and believers today, as we move on to a new stage in God, prior to the return of Jesus.

1. HEARING FROM GOD

a. CHURCH

Surely David, this is foundational to the church, as a matter of course!

Unfortunately, no! Like the Jews, we listen for a while – then go our own way! The reason the wider church is so divided today is that people who have once heard from God, let pride set in and their minds become closed to new revelation. The Lord then has to find another person or group to give His further progressive revelation to.

For example, Martin Luther was given the truth of salvation by faith, rather than works (often a financial contribution to the church!) and so the Lutheran Church was born. The Lutherans quickly believed they had the ultimate revelation. But the Lord wanted to reveal the truth about baptism. The Lutherans wouldn't listen. So he had to find a new group, the Anna Baptists. Then the Anna Baptists..... And now the first two denominations were formed. And grew and grew in number until today we have thousands! Many based on revelations from God.

It is commonly understood that those at the forefront of the previous move of God are the greatest opponents of the next! For pride quickly rears its ugly head. Satan laughs loudly!

Looking at the church today, it would seem that we must have a multiplicity of God's, each with his (or her!) own doctrine! In fact though, we have but one eternal, unchanging God.

³ *How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.*
(Daniel 4:3)

¹⁷ *Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath.* (Hebrews 6:17)

And we only have the one Holy Spirit who guides each and every one of us! And we are to be united in Him.

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.
(Philippians 2:1-2)

Jesus is returning for but one bride!

⁷ *Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. ⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.”* (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) (Revelation 19:7)

To become one in Spirit is the first challenge the church faces today. For Jesus will not return until we do!

b. BELIEVERS

Our first big individual challenge is to ‘hear from God’. For the huge temptation, too often encouraged by leadership, is to go back to Old Testament ways by placing an intermediary between God and us – to let someone else do the hearing for us. Yet this is completely contrary to the way of Jesus. Jesus is the only mediator we need.

⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time. (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

We don't know how to pray? Then the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf.

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. (Romans 8:26-7)

We are to pray directly to the Father

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.' ² He said to them, *"When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. ³ Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴ Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation."* (Luke 11:1-4)

For we are all now 'priests'

⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5)

And will be guided into the truth through what Jesus has done for us.

¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. ¹⁵ All that

belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. (John 16:13-15)

Hearing directly from the Lord is an essential step on our path to spiritual maturity.

2. OBEDIENCE TO ALL GOD’S WORD

a. CHURCH

One major cause of division is that each denomination or grouping has favorite scriptures they base their theology on, while ignoring others that might upset their beliefs, maybe even from drawing them closer to God. Jesus continually condemned the Pharisees for this.

²³ ‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. ²⁴ You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. (Matthew 23:23-4)

I wonder what He would say to us, if He were here today? Timothy faced this problem and confirmed.

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

We must read all Scripture regularly and with an open mind, understanding that ours is likely not the only valid interpretation. Allowing the Holy Spirit to quicken to us new understanding and revelation that expand our horizons. We must see whether our churches dearly held doctrines are biblically based (It’s surprising how many aren’t, instead being man based tradition.) or only built upon parts of Scripture and not others. To be tolerant of others, as well as being open to changing our beliefs.

To encompass all Scripture is the second challenge the church faces today. For Jesus will not return until we are!

b. BELIEVERS

We each have the responsibility to seek the truth for ourselves.

⁷ ‘Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8)

We also have the responsibility to check those who teach us before accepting his word. Me included!

¹¹ Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17:11)

The Word needs to be taught through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. ¹⁴ The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment: ¹⁶ ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ. ((1 Corinthians 2:13-16)

As we come to understand the Word, so we must put it into action, to the level of our understanding.

¹³ *For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.*

¹⁴ *(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, ¹⁵ since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)*
(Romans 2:13-15)

To obey the Word is an essential step on our path to spiritual maturity.

3. OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WILL

a. CHURCH

Once again, we have one God, with one will, worked out in different ways. Contrary to God's will, churches often tend to see each other as the opposition rather than players on the same team. Maybe playing in different positions, fulfilling different roles, but all vital to the team's success.

¹² *The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body*

that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

We are to love each other and live in peace (harmony) with one another.

² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:2-5)

To be obedient to God's will is the third challenge the church faces today. For Jesus will not return until we are!

b. BELIEVERS

Each one is to obey God's will as a slave obeys their master. Of course the difference is that we, in our humanity, have a choice, but in true godliness we surrender our free will back to the Father.

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the

*form of teaching to which you were entrusted. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.
(Romans 6:15-18)*

Our first responsibility is to obey God ‘before’ (double meaning!) men.

¹⁸ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, ‘Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. ²⁰ For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.’ (Acts 4:18-20)

We learn what God’s will for us is through the Holy Spirit living within.

¹⁵ ‘If you love me, you will obey what I command. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. (John 14:15-17)

In so doing we will come into spiritual fulfillment.

⁹ ‘As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:9-11)

Fulfilling God’s will for our life leads us on our path to spiritual maturity.

4. DEVELOPING GODLY CHARACTER

a. CHURCH

How does a church develop godly character? Through the actions of the people in it!

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. ² And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? (1 Corinthians 5:1-2)

Our character is to be different to that of the world.

¹⁸ 'If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. ²¹ They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. (John 15:18-21)

And our different character should be a witness to others.

¹⁶ I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷ 'Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. ¹⁸ On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, ²⁰ for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matthew 10:16-20)

For we are to be the witnesses of the cross to the world.

¹⁴ May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14)

The Lord is returning for His Bride (church) dressed in the pure white linen of righteousness.

⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. ⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.”(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) (Revelation 19:7-8)

Developing a godly character is the fourth challenge the church faces today. For Jesus will not return until have!

b. BELIEVERS

What is the key element of a godly character?

³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”(Mark 12:30-31)

And what characteristics does this require?

*²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.
(Galatians 5:22-25)*

For as we develop character so our hope, our fulfillment in Jesus grows.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces

perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Romans 5:1-5)

Developing a godly character leads us on our path to spiritual maturity.

5. BECOMING LIKE JESUS

a. CHURCH

It's most interesting that the only two churches out of seven in Revelation that Jesus didn't have anything bad to say about, were those that would be regarded as the least successful by many today.

Firstly, Smyrna. A church of the poor, and suffering persecution!

⁸ *'To the angel of the church in Smyrna write : These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. ⁹ I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.*
(Revelation 2:8-11)

Secondly Philadelphia. A small church, trying hard, yet with little apparent influence in its society.

⁷ *'To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. ⁸ I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹ I will make those who are of the*

synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. (Revelation 3:7-11)

Jesus too, wasn't at all like the Jews were expecting in the promised Messiah. So they had Him murdered.

³³ *Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" ³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" ³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" ³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."*

³⁷ *"You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." ³⁸ "What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him. ³⁹ But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?" ⁴⁰ They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion. (John 18:33-40)*

For Jesus came as a servant.

¹¹ *While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. ¹² When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him*

before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you.

¹⁵ You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see. (Acts 3:11-16)

And the church is to follow in His image.

⁴³ *Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,* ⁴⁴ *and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.* ⁴⁵ *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” (Mark 10:43-5)

To become a servant church is the fifth challenge the church faces today. For Jesus will not return until we are!

b. BELIEVERS

As individuals, our challenge is to embrace the characteristics of Jesus within our lives and behaviour.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian,

slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. ¹² *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.* ¹³ *Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* ¹⁴ *And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Colossians 3:1-14)*

As we do so, we are transformed into His image.

¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Doing as Jesus would do leads us on our path to spiritual maturity.

6. THE SACRIFICE OF SERVANTHOOD

a. CHURCH

The principles of servanthood need to be applied in practice as well as in theory, particularly by leadership.

² Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. (1 Peter 5:2-4)

Leadership is to be by example, not through demanding obedience but rather by being a servant to all. This was perfectly illustrated by Jesus, even unto death. After a humiliating death, God exalted Him to the highest place.

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very

nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
(Philippians 2:5-11)

For we are to please God, not men.

¹⁰ Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:10)

Displaying true servant leadership is the sixth challenge the church faces today. For Jesus will not return until we do so!

b. BELIEVERS

The principles of sacrificial servanthood apply to all.

¹⁰ Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10-12)

Servanthood isn't slavishly doing what everyone tells you in the traditional way the world understands it, but rather, showing God's love to others. By being Jesus to them.

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be

complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other. (John 15:9-17)

Serving others leads us down the path to spiritual maturity.

7. LIVING IN GRACE

a. CHURCH

Today we are living in the age where God's grace is paramount, His judgement being saved for a time to come.

¹⁶ *'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:16-18)*

The church's job is to take this message of hope to the world, not only bringing people to belief in Jesus but also training them to be disciples.

¹⁸ *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)*

This is a positive message of God's grace to us during this current dispensation.

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹ Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed. (1 Corinthians 15:3-11)

The Gospel is to be presented in a non-judgmental way.

'Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. ³ 'Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Matthew 7:1-5)

Presenting the Gospel to the world in a way that reflects God's grace is the seventh challenge the church faces today. For Jesus will not return until we do!

b. BELIEVERS

The church can not live in grace unless the individuals in it do also.
For we are the church.

⁵ *What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task.*
⁶ *I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.* ⁷ *So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.* ⁸ *The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor.* ⁹ *For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.* ¹⁰ *By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds.* ¹¹ *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.* ¹² *If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,* ¹³ *his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work.* ¹⁴ *If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. (1 Corinthians 3:5-14)*

Our walk is to be one of grace.

The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. ⁸ *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.* ⁹ *Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.* ¹⁰ *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.* ¹¹ *If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:7-11)*

As we live out the grace Jesus has shown us, so we grow more into His image, progressing along the path towards holiness.

¹³ Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”(1 Peter 1:13-15)

Growing in holiness, through God’s grace, leads us down the path to spiritual maturity.

8. MONEY, MONEY, MONEY!

a. CHURCH

Money is the point at which the church meets the world. The world’s system is based upon money, simply a convenient, flexible medium of exchange for goods and services. While the church needs money to operate, the promotion of the extreme prosperity doctrine – give and you will receive – as a way of attracting money to a church or ministry, is specifically condemned in the New Testament.

³ If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, ⁴ he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions ⁵ and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. (1 Timothy 6:3-5)

The reality of the New Testament is that wealth is seen as an inhibiting factor, often preventing people from entering into God’s kingdom.

²¹ Jesus answered, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’ ²² When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. ²³ Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a

needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁵ *When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?”* ²⁶ *Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”*
(Matthew 19:21-26)

The most common teaching method used in our churches to obtain money is the principle of the tithe – the giving of 10% of a person’s income to the church, as the Jews were required to give to the Temple under Old Testament Law. This requirement however, is not confirmed in the New Testament. In fact Jesus was quite derogatory about it as the primary means of meeting ones obligations to God. While required under the Law, a godly character was important too.

²³ *‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.* ²⁴ *You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.* (Matthew 23:23-4)

However Jesus wasn’t against giving! For He commended the widow’s sacrificial gift. The difference is one between Law and Grace. For the widow gave out of gratitude, not as a legal requirement.

⁴¹ *Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts.* ⁴² *But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny.* ⁴³ *Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.”* ⁴⁴ *They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”* (Mark 12:41-4)

The general principle of proportional giving, with out declaring a fixed percentage, was promoted by Paul in his collection for the poor people of Jerusalem.

² On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. (1 Corinthians 16:2)

It was not a requirement as under the Law, but a suggestion to seek God's will about.

⁷ Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.' ” ⁸ First he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them' (although the law required them to be made). ⁹ Then he said, 'Here I am, I have come to do your will.' He sets aside the first to establish the second. (Hebrews 10:7-9)

For the law is now placed on our hearts and minds, and we are to give out of conviction and love for God.

¹⁵ The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: ¹⁶ 'This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.' (Hebrews 10:15-16)

Encouraging giving on the basis of grace, not law, is the eighth challenge facing the church today. For Jesus will not return until we do!

b. BELIEVERS

We are to be content with what we have as riches may lead us away from God.

But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we

have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Timothy 6:6-10)

Accumulating worldly wealth for security is foolish.

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’ ¹⁴ Jesus replied, ‘Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?’ ¹⁵ Then he said to them, ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.’ ¹⁶ And he told them this parable: ‘The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ ¹⁸ ‘Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’ ²⁰ ‘But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ ²¹ ‘This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.’ (Luke 12:13-21)

Instead, we are to store up treasures in heaven.

¹⁹ ‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)

And we do this by generous giving.

¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

Generous giving leads us down the path to spiritual maturity.

9. MIRACLES TODAY

a. CHURCH

This is an area of considerable controversy, particularly in the Western church, where miracles are generally notable by their absence. This is not the case in Africa, Asia, South America, etc., where the people, through circumstances, are less able to rely upon themselves, or the state, so have no other alternative than to rely upon God.

I have observed in many places that desperation brings reliance upon God, which in turn brings miracles.

⁸ We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. ⁹ Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, (2 Corinthians 1:8-10)

Righteousness too, helps set the scene for miracles to happen.

¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. ¹² Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms

and weak knees. ¹³ ‘Make level paths for your feet,’ so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. (Hebrews 12:11-13)

Very often, miracles are a sign to the enquirer of the power of Jesus. Sometimes we think it unfair to see the unsaved being healed and believers not!

Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. ²

The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. ³ Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. ⁴ When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, ‘This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live.’ ⁵ But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. ⁶ The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god. ⁷ There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably. ⁸ His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. ⁹ When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. ¹⁰ They honored us in many ways and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed. (Acts 28:1-10)

Often miracles take place in meetings.

⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. ⁶ When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷ With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city. (Acts 8:4-8)

¹² The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. ¹³ No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. ¹⁵ As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. ¹⁶ Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed. (Acts 5:12-16)

Ironically, those who are proud, or religious, and the self-reliant, oppose miracles.

The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶ Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. ⁷ They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: 'By what power or what name did you do this?' ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: 'Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' ¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.' ¹³ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. ¹⁵ So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶ 'What are we going to do with these men?' they asked. 'Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these

men to speak no longer to anyone in this name.” ¹⁸ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, ‘Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. ²⁰ For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” ²¹ After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. ²² For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.
(Acts 4:5-22)

And miracles are for today.

¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. ¹² I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. (John 14:11-14)

Recovering belief in the ability of God to perform miracles today is the ninth challenge facing the church today. For Jesus will not return until we do!

b. BELIEVERS

There is a gift of miracles, given to some but not all.

*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸ And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But eagerly desire the greater gifts.
(1 Corinthians 12:27-30)*

Miracles come from God and not through human effort.

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. ² I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? ³ Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? ⁴ Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? ⁵ Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? (Galatians 3:1-5)

The glory must be given to God, for He does the miracles, not us.

¹⁷ Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. ¹⁸ I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— ¹⁹ by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. (Romans 15:17-19)

Even Jesus gave the Father the glory, so how much more should we!

*³² but Jesus said to them, **“I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?”** (John 10:32)*

God does extraordinary miracles through people!

¹¹ God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. (Acts 19:11)

But faith is required on the part of the receiver also.

¹³ ‘Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴ But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. ¹⁵ And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. (Luke 10:13-15)

*And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, ‘**Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor.**’ ⁵⁸ And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith. (Matthew 13:57-8)*

The source of miracles is God, who grants them at His discretion. We must work through Him, thanking Him for all things.

¹⁰ And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. (Colossians 1:10-12)

Believing in the power of God to do miracles today leads us down the path to spiritual maturity.

10. THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

a. CHURCH

This has created considerable dissension in the church over the years. Followers of ‘Replacement Theology’ believe that the church has replaced Israel as God’s chosen people. While this is true in the meantime, Scripture would not appear to support the argument in the longer term. It is true though, that the Jews and Gentiles have been made one through Jesus.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. (Ephesians 2:14-18)

Just because the Jews (natural branches) have been cut off from the root (God) because of unbelief, it does not mean we are to be arrogant in our attitude to them, for they can be added back in again at any time through belief.

¹⁷ If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, ¹⁸ do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹ You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.' ²⁰ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. ²² Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. ²³ And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! (Romans 11:17-24)

Replacement theologians tend to stop at this point. However, Paul goes on to say in the next verses.....

²⁵ *I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. ²⁷ And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." ²⁸ As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, ²⁹ for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. ³⁰ Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. ³² For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. (Romans 11:25-32)*

Paul explained to the Council at Jerusalem that the Jews would be restored after the chosen gentiles had come in, in line with Old Testament prophecy. As God has shown now mercy to the gentiles who believe, so He will with the Jews also.

²⁵ *I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. ²⁷ And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." ²⁸ As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, ²⁹ for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. ³⁰ Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. ³² For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. (Acts 15:25-32)*

In the natural world we know the Jews have been terribly persecuted for 2,000 years, but now have been restored to Israel where they survived against all the odds militarily, since 1948.

¹¹ Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. ¹² But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! (Romans 11:11-12)

But in due time we are to share the promise of Jesus together.

⁶ This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 3:6)

For we owe a debt to the Jews.

¹¹ Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ (that done in the body by the hands of men) — ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:11-13)

It is no good simply preaching Jesus to the Jews, for they have been so persecuted by the church that they are understandably, unlikely to listen. Also, many understand the first two-thirds of the Bible far better than we ever will, for it is their history! We must show them love in practical ways as Paul did when taking the collection from the gentiles for the poor believers in Jerusalem. For we have shared in the Jews spiritual blessings.

²⁵ Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. ²⁷ They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. ²⁸ So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. (Romans 15:25-28)

Supporting and witnessing to the Jews through love until their believers come into the kingdom is the tenth challenge facing the church today. For Jesus will not return until we do!

b. BELIEVERS

Individually we need to show love to the Jews, for the church has persecuted them for 2000 odd years. It is little wonder then, that their attitude towards Christians generally is not particularly positive.

¹¹ *This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. (1 John 3:11)*

We need to give the message of salvation that came from the Jews back to them.

²² *You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:22-24)*

It is not an easy task for they are generally not receptive.

⁵ *They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your*

forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: ²⁶ "Go to this people and say, 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.' " ²⁷ For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' (Acts 28:25-7)

But we need to persevere in order to heal the hurts that have become entrenched throughout history.

³⁶ You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. (Hebrews 10:36)

So that they too, may experience the hope of glory in Christ.

²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:27)

Restoring our relationship with the Jews so that they can experience the Jesus living in us leads us down the path to spiritual maturity.

11. LIVING IN GOD'S KINGDOM NOW

a. CHURCH

The biggest failure and difference of the modern church to the early New Testament one, has been the inability to understand, to believe, and to live out the basic truth that God's people inherit His kingdom, NOW! True believers are living in the eternal life of the kingdom now.

And he who believes in (has faith in, clings to, relies on) the Son has (now possesses) eternal life. (John 3:36a, Amplified Bible)

Jesus confirmed this. The kingdom is not some intangible future benefit, it is current day reality.

²⁰ Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, *'The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, ²¹ nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you.'* (Luke 17:20-21)

This is confirmed in the Lord's (disciples actually!) Prayer, which really has fallen out of favour today. For the kingdom simply consists of Christians doing God's will on earth today!

⁹ 'This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰ your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us today our daily bread. ¹² Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' (Matthew 6:9-13)

The following verses highlight the necessity to 'live out' rather than simply 'believe in' the faith.

¹⁴ For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6:14-15)

The church is to preach and teach righteous living, not 'easy Christianity', for righteousness reflects the kingdom within. It requires a dramatic change from normal human thought and security patterns.

³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6:31-34)

As Jesus (not David!) said;

²⁵ *The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. (John 12:25)*

The church is to stand as one, if the kingdom is to be built.

²⁵ *Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, ‘Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶ If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? ²⁷ And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. ²⁸ But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*
(Matthew 12:25-8)

And is to operate in the power of the kingdom.

²⁰ *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.*
(1 Corinthians 4:20)

Operating in power was not only for the early New Testament church! Is this statement of Jesus conditional? The power is available to those who inherit the kingdom.

¹⁹ *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:19)*

Living the godly life of the kingdom, even through persecution.

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them, saying: ³ ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:1-12)

For we only enter the kingdom by doing the will of the Father.

²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. ²¹ 'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (Matthew 7:20)

This will require a huge change in attitude by those in the church, particularly leadership. Titles and status are to be abandoned if we desire to enter the kingdom.

⁸ 'But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. ⁹ And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. ¹⁰ Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. ¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. ¹³ 'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. (Matthew 23:8-13)

We must commit 100% to God, for many of those who are first now will be last in heaven.

²⁹ “I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”
(Mark 10:29-31)

As the church reaches this level of commitment and righteousness, preaching this gospel of the kingdom to the world, then the end will come. You see, when Jesus returns, is up to us!

¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.
(Matthew 24:14)

Preaching, teaching and living the gospel of the kingdom is the eleventh challenge facing the church today. For Jesus will not return until we do!

b. BELIEVERS

The first requirement to enter the kingdom is to be ‘born again’. It is a spiritual, not a physical rebirth.

Jesus answered him, I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, that unless a person is born again (anew, from above) he cannot ever see (know, be acquainted with, and experience) the kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to Him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter his mothers womb again and be born? Jesus answered, I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, unless a man is born of water and [even] the Spirit, he cannot [ever] enter the kingdom of God. What is born of [from] the flesh is flesh [of the physical is physical]; and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not [do not be surprised, astonished] at My telling you, you must all be born anew (from above).
(John 3:3-7 Amplified Version)

It is through the difficulty we have in separating the physical from the spiritual that we do not understand that, in the spiritual, we have eternal life now.

*I write this to you who believe in (adhere to, trust in, and rely on) the name of the Son of God [in the peculiar services and blessings conferred on Him by men], so that you may know [with settled and absolute knowledge] that you [already] have life, yes, eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 Amplified Version)*

We are granted access now into the kingdom.

¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13)

The problem is, in our humanity, we tend to see the kingdom as being a tangible, future place of existence, but in truth, it is spiritual, not physical. Yes, we still retain a perishable body, but it is not our body that inherits the kingdom.

*⁵⁰ I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.
(1 Corinthians 15:50)*

So in the kingdom, we are to live to please the Spirit, not our old sinful natures.

⁸ The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:8)

In the kingdom we are to develop the spiritual attributes in our life.

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, (Romans 14:17)

Attributes commonly called the ‘Fruit of the Spirit’.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, ¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5-11)

This is not easy, for the ‘world’ does not appreciate or understand spiritual values and may well persecute us because of them.

Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. ⁵ All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. (2 Thessalonians 1:4-5)

For they cannot understand our spiritual motives.

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? (James 2:5)

The lure and acquisition of worldly riches, in fact, has a hugely negative impact on our ability to inherit the kingdom. The results of this are particularly apparent in the Western world today.

³ Then Jesus said to his disciples, *“I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”* (Matthew 19:23-4)

Rather, those who enter the kingdom are reviled by the world.

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.
(Matthew 21:31b-32)

Including the so-called ‘religious’ people who say one thing but do another.

⁴³ *“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.*
(Matthew 21:43)

While we continue to live in an age of God’s grace, a final day of judgement will inevitably come. People scoff at this, for grace has abided with us for so long. Even biblical teachers have become captured by false, human based doctrine. But we are to stand true to kingdom principles until the end.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ² Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³ For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, keep your head in all situations, endure

hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. ⁶ For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:1-8)

At the time of God's judgement we will receive our 'just desserts' of reward or punishment.

But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ God "will give to each person according to what he has done." ⁷ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

(Romans 2:5-8)

Each one, Christian and unbeliever alike, will be required to account for their actions before God.

⁸ If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother?

Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹ It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God." ¹² So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

(Romans 14:8-12)

It is best for us to live a godly life now, for we too will be called to account.

⁶ Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ We live by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:6-10)

This particularly applies to Christians. For once we have had the truth revealed to us, we are 100% accountable for the way we live and any ongoing, deliberate sin in our lives!

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. ²⁸ Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know him who said, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ and again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ ³¹ It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:26-31)

But if we are prepared to judge ourselves now, seeking forgiveness, accepting God’s discipline and living a righteous life, the life of the kingdom, we can avoid judgement later.

²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. ³² When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:29-32)

Yes, judgement begins with the family of God! While it may well be painful now, the outcome is well worth it.

However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And, 'If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?'" ¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.
(1 Peter 4:16-19)

For God's mercy triumphs over His judgement for those who act in accordance with His will.

¹² Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ¹³ because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!
(James 2:12)

This truth of kingdom living is not well understood by today's believers. But if we truly possess God now, living by His Word and following His will for us, we will avoid judgement and enjoy the eternal life we have already inherited.

I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, the person whose ears are open to My words (who listens to my message) and believes and trusts in and clings to and relies on Him Who sent me has (possesses now) eternal life. And he does not come into judgement (does not incur sentence of judgement, will not come under condemnation), but he has already passed over out of death into life. (John 5:24 Amplified Bible)

Primarily we do this by living in love, to both God and others. In this way we become like Jesus. As we live in love, so the fear of judgement and punishment is removed from our life.

*¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. ¹⁷ In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.
(1 John 4:16-18)*

For we will inherit the glorious kingdom that Peter, James and John got a glimpse of during the transfiguration of Jesus.

²⁸ I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. (Matthew 16:28-17:3)

The kingdom that Jesus spoke about in the Garden of Gethsemane just before He died on the cross, for you and for me.

*“Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.
(John 17:1-5)*

For we will have victory over the world, even if at present it seems far away.

¹⁵ *The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." (Revelation 11:15)*

And we will inherit the final, New Kingdom of Jesus upon the earth.
Hallelujah!

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' ⁶

He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. ⁸ But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.' (Revelation 21:1-8)

For the Kingdom of Jesus has conquered, is conquering and will conquer, the kingdom of the world.

¹⁵ *The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." (Revelation 11:15)*

Grasping the vision and living the reality of the kingdom within leads us down the path to spiritual maturity.

12. WINNING THE WAR

a. CHURCH

The times throughout history when the church received its worst reputation, and finally was the least effective, have been when it has used the weapons of this world to promote the furtherance of the gospel.

This first major example was when Christianity became the state religion of Rome in AD350 under the Emperor Constantine. In his enthusiastic adoption of the faith, Constantine responded in the way he was used to, to convert others – by the point of the sword. This was the forerunner of many such efforts over the centuries since, the ‘lowlight’ being the series of Crusades, originating in medieval England in 1096 and extending over nearly two centuries, the eighth and final one commencing in 1270. In the endeavour to regain Jerusalem from the Muslims, the crusaders also chose to take vengeance upon the Jews along the way, successfully alienating both groups from being open to the Gospel, right through to this day.

For the weapons of the church are to be different to those of the world. The ever-compulsive disciple, Peter, was the first one to learn this lesson when he chopped off the ear of the high priest’s servant, Malchus, in an endeavour to stop Jesus being arrested. It didn’t work!

⁵⁰ Jesus replied, ‘Friend, do what you came for.’ Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. ⁵¹ With that, one of Jesus’ companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁵² ‘Put your sword back in its place,’ Jesus said to him, ‘for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. ⁵³ Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?’ ⁵⁵ At that time Jesus said to the crowd, ‘Am I leading a

rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. ⁵⁶ But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples deserted him and fled. (Matthew 26:50-56)

Unbelievably to our human understanding, our weapons are the opposite of those of the world. Incredibly, evil is to be overcome by doing ‘good’!

*²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
(Romans 12:21)*

This is achieved through the meekness and gentleness of Christ, not the harsh authoritarianism of the world.

By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” when away! ² I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. ³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. ⁶ And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete. ⁷ You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he. (2 Corinthians 10:1-7)

Yes, through the very foundation of the Christian faith – loving God and loving others.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. ² This is how we

know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³ This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. (1 John 5:1-5)

This is neither natural nor easy, in human terms, but is what God requires of His church.

³ We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. ⁴ Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; ⁵ in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; ⁶ in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; ⁷ in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; ⁸ through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; ⁹ known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything. (2 Corinthians 6:3-10)

Even to the point of a martyr's death.

¹⁷ 'When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸ and saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' he said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' ¹⁹ 'Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. ²⁰ And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' ²¹ 'Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.''" (Acts 22:17-21)

For this is the battle we are in, like it or not!

And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. ² The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. ³ One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. ⁴ Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, ‘Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?’ ⁵ The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. ⁶ He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. ⁷ He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. ⁸ All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. ⁹ He who has an ear, let him hear. ¹⁰ If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints. (Revelation 13:1-10)

But the church (symbolised by Peter) is built on ‘the rock’ of Jesus and satan cannot overcome it, no matter what illusion of success he may appear to have.

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. (Matthew 16:18)

We to have the victory through the salvation of Jesus (*the blood of the Lamb*), the guidance of the Holy Spirit (*the word of their testimony*) and doing the will of the Father (*they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*)

¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. ¹¹ They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. ¹² Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them!’
(Revelation 12:10-12a)

Until through standing firm in the faith until the end, we, His church, inherits the kingdom of God.

⁵⁰ I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ⁵⁵ ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:50-58)

Overcoming the world through love is the twelfth challenge facing the church today. For Jesus will not return until we do!

b. BELIEVERS

Many new Christians expect, either through wrong teaching or by misunderstanding, that all their problems will disappear, or they will become perfect, once they have committed their lives to Jesus. While

Jesus came and made us ‘positionally’ perfect before God, we still have to work the process out ‘experientially’ in our lives. This process of changing our human nature to match our new spiritual nature, is the lifelong walk towards maturity. Even the great apostle Paul, faced the same problem as you and me.

¹⁴ We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹ So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; ²³ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. (Romans 7:14-25)

Even the best of us have times when we have crises of faith, as Jesus had with the disciples. But we can always take heart because Jesus has overcome the world.

³¹ ‘You believe at last!’ Jesus answered. ³² ‘But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. ³³ ‘I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.’ (John 16:31-33)

And so we are to be an example to others, living lives that reflect God's glory.

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.
(1 Peter 2:9-12)

And we have been given all the power we need in order to overcome satan and his demons.

¹⁷ The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.' ¹⁸ He replied, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. ²⁰ However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.' ²¹ At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. ²² 'All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.' ²³ Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. ²⁴ For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.' (Luke 10:17-24)

However, our prime weapon of warfare is still love, for it is through love that we reflect God to others. By avoiding the attraction of the values of the world, we win the battle over it.

⁹ Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. ¹¹ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him. ¹² I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. ¹³ I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. ¹⁴ I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. ¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:9-17)

We have the victory through Jesus, doing the will of the Father, as Jesus did.

³ This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. (1 John 5:3-5)

And we know what God's will is through listening to our teacher, mentor and guide, the Holy Spirit.

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. ⁴ You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. (1 John 4:1-6)

When we place Jesus at the centre of our lives we overcome the world and inherit the kingdom of eternal life in Him. Hallelujah!

He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. (Revelation 21:6-7)

Placing Jesus at the very centre of our lives leads us down the path to spiritual maturity.

12 REQUIREMENTS FOR RESTORING GOD'S CHURCH TODAY

- 1. To become one in Spirit.**
- 2. To encompass all Scripture.**
- 3. To be obedient to God's will.**
- 4. Developing a godly character.**
- 5. To become a servant church.**
- 6. Displaying true servant leadership.**
- 7. Presenting the Gospel to the world in a way that reflects God's grace.**
- 8. Encouraging giving on the basis of grace, not law.**
- 9. Recovering belief in the ability of God to perform miracles today.**
- 10. Supporting and witnessing to the Jews until their believers come into the kingdom.**
- 11. Preaching, teaching and living the gospel of the kingdom.**
- 12. Overcoming the world through love.**

CONCLUSION:

Unfortunately, today's splintered church has generally moved far from the foundations upon which it was originally based into a compromise with the world in which it finds itself. It is too often run along worldly lines of organization and authority, having lost the vision of the revelations upon which is based, settling gently into human ways of thinking and doing things, then wondering why it has lost its effectiveness.

We need to get back to the basic principles of God, illustrated 'externally' in the 3 episodes of 'Dividing the Waters' in the Old Testament and confirmed 'internally' by, in and through Jesus in the New Covenant we live under today.

We need to change drastically in order to become the united bride, clothed in the white linen of righteousness, for whom Jesus is returning at the end of this age.

Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. ⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) ⁹ Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”
(Revelation 19:7-9)

12 STEP'S TOWARDS SPIRITUAL MATURITY FOR TODAY'S BELIEVER

1. Hearing directly from the Lord.
2. Obeying the Word, including the 'Great Commission'.
3. Fulfilling God's will for our life.
4. Developing a godly character.
5. Doing as Jesus would do.
6. Serving others.
7. Growing in holiness through God's grace.
8. Generous giving.
9. Believing in the power of God to do miracles today.
10. Restoring our relationship with the Jews so that they may experience the Jesus living in us.
11. Grasping the vision and living the reality of the kingdom within.
12. Placing Jesus at the very centre of our lives.

CONCLUSION:

Most believers will pay 'lip service' to these 12 factors as to how to grow in spiritual maturity. The challenge for each one of us, me included, is to make them realities in our life. If it were easy, it would be of little value, either to God or us!

But the call of Jesus is not simply to belief, but to maturity, to commitment, to obedience, even unto death. For Jesus provided the example, even to death on the cross, that we are to follow! The kingdom of God is to be found within! And satan will finally meet his doom!

¹¹ They overcame him (ie satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (Revelation 12:11)