

CLEANSING IN LAMPSTAND CHURCHES

Peter Hay, prepared for the Sunday morning word, 11 September 2022

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The elect are the bride of Christ

Today, we will look at a subject that is associated with the amazing understanding that we have come to in this last season – that we are the bride of Christ, the heavenly Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven.

A most essential or fundamental condition of our citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem, which is the church, is to be joined to the process through which we are being delivered from sin and uncleanness.

It is an amazing reality that, having been born again and baptised into Christ, we are raised and seated with Christ in heavenly places, being built, as the elect, into the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem, for as long as this process for sin and uncleanness is active in our lives.

The church is being built, today

The Lord, through the prophet Isaiah, proclaimed and described what the operation of this process, specifically pertaining to the church.

‘In that day [That day is *now*. The day that the Lord was talking about is ‘today’] seven women shall take hold of one man [that sounds a bit daunting], saying, “We will eat our own food and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by your name, to take away our reproach.”’ Isa 4:1.

These seven women represent the fullness of what should be a chaste church, the bride of Christ. Where you see the number 7 in the Scriptures, it is talking about the fullness of something.

These seven women *should* be the church. It should be the fullness of the church, taking hold of one Man, Christ.

We are betrothed to one husband, Christ

In this regard, the apostle Paul said to the Corinthians, ‘For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband [that one husband is the ‘one man’ that Isaiah is speaking about today], that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ [as the fullness, or ‘seven’, of what the bride should be].’

A messenger is coming, saying to the church, ‘I am jealous over you, to prepare you as a bride who is ready for one Man, Christ.’

‘But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve [deception coming from another word, deceiving a woman; in this instance, Eve] by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

‘For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit [familiar spirits] which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted – you may well put up with it!’ 2Co 11:1-4.

He was saying, ‘If you entertain these things, you will be deceived.’

A vicarious gospel is not a gospel of participation – an alternative gospel

These different gospels that Paul spoke about here, that are causing deception and corruption to this seven of churches, who should be the bride taking hold of Christ, are epitomised by the belief that Jesus has vicariously delivered believers from the consequences of their sin.

He has paid the full penalty and reproach for our sin, vicariously, and our sin has been dealt with by Him on our behalf. That would be the epitome of this alternative gospel.

That’s why these seven women, who are taking hold of Christ, are saying, ‘Let us be called by Your name, to take away our reproach.’

Can you see that these seven women are laying hold of Jesus, saying, ‘Let us be called by Your name, to take away our reproach, even though we are eating our own food and dressing ourselves in our own apparel. We are going to do what we want, because we know that You are going to take away from us our reproach.’

That would be a vicarious gospel, wouldn’t it? The important point for us to understand, and I’m sure we are familiar with this, is that alternative gospels are not the theologies that we would hold to.

That is not primarily what we are talking about here, because most of us would be very

comfortable with the thought that a vicarious gospel is other than a gospel of *participation*.

The alternative gospels are demonstrated by the way in which we live, and the way in which we think about our lives. That is where those gospels are evident.

They are not the theologies, primarily. They are actually demonstrated by how we live and how we think about our lives.

This is, for example, presuming upon the salvation of God while we continue to walk according to the dictates of our own heart and by the sight of our own eyes, as if truth is inherent to us, and our perspective.

Corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ

Or, it is being a church attendee and a hearer of the word, but not a doer of the word. James said, 'We deceive ourselves.' Jas 1:23.

That sounds like our *minds are being corrupted from the simplicity of Christ*, having been deceived by the serpent. 2Co 11:3.

You can be sitting here, listening to this word, and hearing it, but not being a doer of it.

You are like the woman who is laying hold of Christ, saying, 'I'll eat my own food and dress myself in my own way, only You take away my reproach' - deceiving yourself.

Can you see that the gospel is not just, 'I believe in a vicarious gospel.' The gospel is the way I think about myself and how I live.

Isaiah's prophecy reveals a common mindset among leaders and congregants of the church - this is the 'seven' of the church, the whole church in the world - who presume upon the freedom to choose the word that applies to them or to interpret its implications according to their own understanding.

That would be stating, 'We will eat our own food.' As the word is being proclaimed, it would be picking and choosing what we think applies to us.

Or, as we are hearing it, we are saying, 'This means "this" for me', instead of allowing the Spirit to bring illumination and conviction regarding how we are to respond to the word.

That is, 'we will eat our own food'.

Being the origin of our own life and expression

Furthermore, they presume to be *the origin of their own life and expression*. This is symbolised by the assertion that they will wear their own apparel.

When the Scriptures refer to apparel, or garments, it represents a person's *mandate for priestly service*.

To present themselves as a living sacrifice, which is a spiritual service of worship, they are presuming to be the source of their own life and Christian expression. Their expression is, therefore, not the communication of faith, which is according to their sanctification as a son of God.

If we are 'dressing' ourselves, the way in which we are participating in life is not according to the faith that we have received in what we have heard, which should be enabling the works that belong to our sanctification as a son of God.

Those are the two alternative characteristics of this 'seven' of churches, who have been deceived, even though they are trying to lay hold of Jesus.

Those left in Zion - choosing the lampstand church

Thankfully, the Lord continued, through Isaiah, 'In that day [the same day that seven women take hold of one man - *today*] the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious; and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing for those of Israel who have escaped.' Isa 4:2.

'And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion [Zion is the mountain of the Lord's house - the heavenly Jerusalem] and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy [or sanctified] - everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem.' Isa 4:3.

I don't know about you, but when I read this passage, my heart rejoices in this. This is an amazing statement, and a great encouragement to us, because 'the branch' of the church refers to *the lampstand church*.

Remember, the lampstand in Moses' tabernacle was fashioned in the form of an almond branch, or almond branches.

When it refers to 'the branch of the Lord', it means the lampstand church that belongs to the Lord, or that is growing from Him.

Choosing is the key, isn't it? Those who choose to belong to a lampstand church remain in the

mountain of the Lord's house. They are called 'holy', meaning 'sanctified'.

In other words, they are sons of God who are born in the city, and are finding deliverance from the uncleanness that would otherwise exclude them from the city.

The word of Christ is polarising in His church

This is a key point.

There is a 'seven' of the church, but not all those who are identified as being part of the church will remain in the mountain of the Lord's house.

Something is coming to cause a separation so that people will depart from that city, and from the mountain of the Lord, not choosing the lampstand church.

They are not choosing, and they want to go out. That is the effect of the word of the gospel that Christ Himself is bringing to His church. It is polarising people.

The word is coming, and it demands that every person make a response to it. And, today, the Spirit is saying, 'Choose the branch that is glorious.'

Choose it. Love it. Run into it - so that you remain in Zion. The word is 'remain'. There are many people in Zion at the moment, and He is coming to cleanse His city, and He is wanting everything that offends out.

This is the polarising effect of the word of the cross.

Touching resurrection life

Now, significantly, the names are recorded among the living in Jerusalem.

That is what the Lord said. 'Everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem.' These are those who are touching *resurrection life* in their mortal bodies. This is 'the way of the living'.

This means that if you are recorded among the living in Jerusalem, your name has not been blotted out of the book of life. Your name is written in the book of life.

We receive the fruit of the tree of life as we participate in the *agape* meal

John tells us, in the book of Revelation, that the book of life is the tree of life. Your name is written in the trunk of the tree of life.

The capacity to fulfil the will of God, written in that book for you, is being fed to you by the very word that is polarising you in, if you will receive it; if you will love it; if you will embrace it; if you will allow it to do its work in your life.

This is the fruit of the tree of life that we are receiving as we participate in the *agape* meal.

The condition of those who are choosing the branch of the Lord, which is 'beautiful and glorious' and, by that means, are remaining in the city, is that they accept that the word that is coming is the word that brings the process of cleansing to their life.

That is the fundamental condition of our connection to a lampstand church.

Our connection to the lampstand church is our participation in the process of cleansing

Now I will make an unequivocal and unapologetic statement.

The condition of a *person's connection to a lampstand church* is not their identification with a particular denomination, including Restoration Fellowships International.

You are not part of a lampstand because you are joined to a church nominated as RFI. The connection to any denomination is not the mark of a lampstand church participant.

Our connection is *our participation in the process of cleansing*, which the Lord has provided for His people, and which is provided irrespective of what denomination a person attends.

Cleansing is the key.

Filth and bloodshed comes from a deceived Christian mindset

The Lord first identified these seven women taking hold of Jesus, saying, 'We will eat our own food and wear our own clothes; only take away our reproach.'

In contrast to that, there is a lampstand church. Those who are choosing that, are remaining in the city. Their names are being written, or established, in the book of life, and they are being fed the fruit of the tree of life.

Then the Lord said, 'When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgement and by the spirit of burning.' Isa 4:4.

The washing and the purging is happening by a spirit of judgement and by a spirit of burning.

If you are choosing a lampstand church, you are choosing to accept that when the word is coming to you, it is coming in a spirit of judgement and a spirit of burning.

That is what you are choosing, so that you are part of a branch that is beautiful and glorious.

So, when the Lord has washed away the filth, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgement and the spirit of burning, 'Then the Lord will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering.

'And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain.' Isa 4:5-6.

That sounds like the Father taking His seat, and setting His tabernacle over Mount Zion, which fills the whole earth, doesn't it?

'The filth and bloodshed' that the Lord is coming to cleanse from His city – this is not the ones outside the city; this is His city, the daughters of Zion; that's who He is cleansing from the filth and the bloodshed - are the fruit of Christian practices based on eating one's own food and clothing oneself.

He is saying, 'This is the way that they speak, and I am coming to purge that filth and that bloodshed.' That means that the filth and the bloodshed has come from the sentiment or perception that we can eat our own food and dress ourselves.

If you want to know where the filth and bloodshed comes from, it comes from that Christian mindset.

Filth encompasses all disobedience to the word of present truth

When the Scriptures are talking about 'filth', it encompasses all of the uncleanness resulting from disobedience to the word of Christ. 'Filth' is all of the myriad of disobediences.

Filth is described as all of the behaviours, attitudes and expectations of those within a community of faith, which are contrary to the culture of godliness defined by sound doctrine.

It is disobedience to the word of sound doctrine which defines the culture that belongs to the city. And you and I have to learn that culture. That culture is not inherent within you.

You have another law within you, and this word is to purge you of that law, so that the culture of love becomes the culture of your life.

That is the purging, or cleansing, of filth.

Bloodshed is the backbiting tongue in the church

Now, what about 'bloodshed'? 'Bloodshed' is the effect of the murderous and backbiting tongue that persists in the church.

Bloodshed is talking about taking someone's life. It is a murderous and backbiting tongue.

We note that the Lord said through the prophet Ezekiel, 'In you', talking about this community of faith. 'In you are men who slander to cause bloodshed.' Eze 22:9.

'Slander' is making false or uninformed statements for the purpose of causing damage to a person's reputation.

We do that, particularly to the messengers, so that we don't have to obey their word. We do it to alleviate the conviction that we feel, by demeaning or disqualifying the messenger who has spoken it.

That is 'bloodshed'.

The Lord said that Jerusalem is 'thick with the guilt of bloodshed' - how we speak about one another; our offhand comments about the word of those who proclaim it.

We think that it is benign in our conversation, but the Lord listens to what we are saying. And He is saying, 'You are killing My messengers.'

Remember that Stephen said to the Jews, 'Which one of the prophets did your fathers not murder, and now you are just like them?' Act 7:52.

This was the word of the cross coming to them. We know that it was the word of the cross, because it pierced them open; it cut them to the heart.

Purged by a spirit of judgement and burning

Can we hear that our conversation has an effect? It has an effect on us; it has an effect on others; and, ultimately, we are killing the messenger who is

coming with glad tidings of good things - our inheritance as a son of God.

He is coming to cleanse, to purge that bloodshed, to purge the way that we speak.

So the Lord washes away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purges the blood of Jerusalem by the spirit of judgement, and by the spirit of burning.

The question is: what does that mean? What is the spirit of judgement and spirit of burning that is purging us, so that we are being kept, or finding our rest, in the heavenly city?

In brief, the spirit of judgement and burning is the effect of Christ's eyes, which are as a flame of fire.

We meet Christ eye to eye, and heart to heart, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, because it is the gospel preached by the Holy Spirit coming down from heaven.

We meet Christ eye to eye through the ministry of the Holy Spirit as the word of the cross is proclaimed from presbyteries that are in the right hand of Christ.

His winnowing fan is in His hand

The separating, or polarising, effect of this ministry is a key implication of baptism with the Holy Spirit. This is an amazing point! Baptism with the Holy Spirit is not just about having spiritual gifts.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit connects us to Christ, so that, as this process is being outworked, we are not being taken out of the city.

The thing within us that offends is being taken out of the city, and we are being gathered as wheat. That is the outcome of the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

That is why we pray in tongues, recognising our weakness. Otherwise, we pray out of self-centredness.

And I'm going to demonstrate sometime that that way of praying is called an 'image of jealousy'. It is wickedness.

We have to accept that that is a weakness within us, and that we need to pray according to the Spirit, so that we are joined to that process, and it is doing its work in our life.

This separating effect across the whole world is actually *gathering us in*.

John the Baptist highlighted this relationship between *the eyes of Christ*, which are being ministered to us through the proclamation of the word by the Holy Spirit through messengers, and *the baptism in the Holy Spirit*.

John the Baptist said, 'Jesus Christ will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand.' Luk 3:16-17.

What is also in the hand of Christ? There are seven stars; seven presbyteries. That word is being proclaimed, which is having a separating effect, like a winnowing fan, not just in the church, but in the whole world.

His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and will *gather* His wheat into the barn.

But He also will *burn up* the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Can you see that this is a spirit of judgement and a spirit of burning?

Choosing a cleansing process as part of a lampstand church

At another time, we will consider this principle of cleansing and its connection with those who 'sigh and cry' for the abominations done in the temple. This is a key.

Those who sigh and cry for these abominations are the ones who, when He is coming with the spirit of judgement and burning, are being gathered into His storehouse, as those who are the sons of God inheriting the kingdom.

Today I will focus on the fact that this period of washing and purging, through a spirit of judgement and burning, belongs to the lampstand age. It belongs to *now*.

And if you are identifying and choosing a lampstand church, you are *choosing that cleansing process*. That is what we are asking for.

If you have been illuminated, and you are confessing that the branch is beautiful and glorious, it is because that purging and cleansing work is being done in your life.

We need to accept that this cleansing initiative is part of our Christian experience; our weekly, daily, Christian experience, as those who have chosen to be part of a lampstand church.

Do not despise the fiery trial

If you have chosen that, when you face fiery trials, they will not be strange to you, because you have chosen them! And that is exactly what Peter said in his first letter.

'Beloved [addressing fellow sons of God], do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial [a spirit of judgement and a spirit of burning] which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.' 1Pe 4:12-13.

That sounds like, 'the branch of the Lord is beautiful and glorious; the fruit of the earth excellent and appealing for all of Israel who are left', doesn't it?

Don't think it strange, as though this is some 'unheard of' thing. You are *choosing* this so that, when He appears, you may also 'be glad with exceeding joy'.

So, why are we choosing that? 'For the time has come for judgement to begin at the house of God.' 1Pe 4:17.

This judgement will fall upon the entire world. The work of this purging effect is happening now, every time He comes to speak in His church, for the purpose of gathering us in.

So, don't despise the fiery trail or think it strange. It is the initiative of the Lord to cleanse and to purge you.

Disobedience to the word of the Lord is the beginning point of all uncleanness

'For the time has come for judgement to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?'

If it is beginning with us first, what will be the end for those who do not obey? It's not a good end!

'Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved [the righteous are the sons of God], where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.' 1Pe 4:18-19.

Can you accept that you are to fulfil the will of God in the midst of your difficult circumstances?

You are not finding deliverance out of them, as though your ability to fulfil the will of God requires 'relief' from that.

You are actually fulfilling it *in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings*, just as He did!

The Lord is coming to us through His word, firstly in judgement. This is why it is so important for us to learn 'the fear of the Lord' as His eyes come to test us. Psa 11:4-5.

This initiative of the Lord continues, in this period of lampstand churches, until the Father takes His seat and spreads His tabernacle over His people; at which point there is no more crying or tears.

The point that we read from Peter is that those who are unclean are that way because of their disobedience to the gospel of God.

That is true for the whole world, but that is also the reason why we are unclean and are needing this process. Disobedience to the word of the Lord is the beginning point of all uncleanness.

The principle of sending away

The Lord deals with the uncleanness of His people through the principle of 'sending away'.

In the coming weeks, we will spend some time talking about, and understanding, this principle of 'sending away.' I want to bring a focus, in this session, to demonstrate how and why the Lord causes this sending away in order to *bring refining*.

What are the abominations that cause this 'sending away' principle that we need to be cleansed from?

This principle was exemplified in the Lord's judgement upon the nation of Judah because of their disobedience to the word of the Lord which came through the prophets. The prophet Jeremiah proclaimed specifically to the nation of Judah that they would be taken captive from Jerusalem to Babylon, for a period of 70 years. As well, the Jerusalem of that time would be destroyed.

Explaining the reason for this exile, the Lord said, through Jeremiah, 'You have not listened to Me.' He continued, "I sent you prophets, rising early in the morning, day after day after day. But you would not listen to me," says the Lord, "that you might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands.'

God's dealing with the independent and disobedient disposition of Judah

Think about the statement, 'We will eat our own food. And we will wear our own apparel.' This is the initiative, or the mandate, for our own priestly service.

He said, 'You did not listen to Me, which would have defined how you should have participated, that you might provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands, to your own hurt.' Jer 25:7.

This is an extraordinary statement! He was saying, 'I was coming to proclaim the word to you, so that you would not be hurt. But your disobedience is causing you to be sent away, and you are reaping the fruit of your own disobedience to your own destruction, and to your own pain.'

The stages of the sending away

The exile of the people of Judah, and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem, happened in three actual waves. One would think that, after the first wave, the people would 'take the hint' and say, 'We need to think about this situation! We appear to be in big trouble here! Nebuchadnezzar is slaying us!'

Three waves later, however, the ultimate end was the complete destruction of the entire context of worship for the nation - gone, like that! Three waves of exile happened. The first deportation of the Jews to Jerusalem occurred about 605BC.

This is an interesting one, as this was when Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were taken to Babylon. They were part of the first wave of those under the spirit of judgement and burning. It is amazing! They were under that spirit of judgement and burning. They were blossoming, however, as they allowed that word to deal with them.

Eventual destruction of the temple – the context for worship of the nation

I will give another hint as to the nature of 'sighing and crying'. Daniel was the exemplar, being completely *obedient* in the state of captivity.

The next deportation - the second wave - occurred in 597BC. Among these exiles was a young man named Ezekiel, who was of the family of the priests. Babylon was the place where he was commissioned as a prophet.

In this scenario, we see a first wave, followed by a second wave of exile. The third wave, then, was the

actual destruction of Jerusalem during the reign of Zedekiah. This occurred in approximately 586BC. This should have been a period of time when, under the assault of this foreign world kingdom, there was some sense of repentance.

In reality, however, they became progressively worse after each wave. This process consolidated, or 'polarised', them to their abominations, so that there was no remedy for them anymore.

Ezekiel's vision of the Lord coming as a fire of burning and cleansing

Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the Lord came to the prophet Ezekiel, who was a part of the second wave. He said, 'I am going to show you what is happening in Jerusalem while you are in Babylon.'

Ezekiel recounted the vision that he received as he sat in his house, with the elders of Judah before him. He was in 'a presbytery meeting', and this is the vision that he received.

'Then I looked, and there was a likeness, like the appearance of fire.'

We remember, from Isaiah, that the Lord was coming to purge His city with a spirit of judgement and a spirit of burning. Ezekiel's vision described that what he was seeing had the appearance of a fire.

'And from the appearance of His waist and downward, [it was] fire; and from His waist and upward, the appearance of brightness.' Eze 8:2.

The appearance of fire and brightness

That is an intriguing description, 'the appearance of brightness, like the colour of amber.' He saw 'flames from the waist down, and the appearance of brightness [or amber] from the waist up.'

'The appearance of fire' reveals that the Lord was coming for *the purpose of cleansing and purging*. As I said, this is the spirit of judgement and burning in operation.

Remember, the appearance from the waist up was 'brightness'. The Hebrew word that is translated as 'brightness' is used in only one other instance in the entire Bible. There are, of course, many words which imply 'brightness' in the Scriptures. Only two, however, use this particular Hebrew word.

In this instance, Ezekiel saw that the appearance of the Son of Man is 'brightness'. The only other

reference to this particular appearance of 'brightness' is in the book of Daniel. In that statement it reads, 'Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.' Dan 12:3.

The brightness of the stars in the right hand of Christ as part of the spirit of judgement and burning

The brightness that Ezekiel saw from the waist up, to the top of Christ refers to wise people who, through their testimony, shine like brightness. They are like 'many stars'.

That, of course, includes the stars that are in the right hand of Christ. These are the presbyteries that belong to a lampstand church.

It says 'many stars', however. These are the same stars that Abraham looked up to see when the Lord said, 'Do you want to know what your inheritance will look like, Abraham? It will look like the stars in the heavens for number.'

Here, He was referring all of us - we will be part of this communication that is like the firmament coming in a spirit of judgement and a spirit of burning.

Ezekiel's vision of abominations in the temple

The hand of the Lord then 'took [Ezekiel] by the lock of [his] hair; and the Spirit lifted [him] up between heaven and earth, [bringing him] in a vision to Jerusalem.'

Now, teenagers, I don't know about you, but that is a very graphic picture! Can you imagine someone grabbing you by 'the noggin' and lifting you up between heaven and earth, and carrying you several hundred kilometres by your hair? That sounds a bit painful, doesn't it? Sometimes, as the Lord is illuminating things, it does feel as though He has taken us by the hair and lifted us up, to get us out of the mire of our circumstances.

Ezekiel was lifted up and transported to Jerusalem, to the door of the gate of the inner court of the temple. There, the Lord showed him scenes of 'abominable idolatry' in the house of Israel.

Four aspects of abomination in the temple

The really interesting thing about this prophecy is its progressive nature. There were four actual things that the Lord showed Ezekiel as He lifted him up between heaven and earth. He said to

Ezekiel that the first one that he saw was an 'image of jealousy.'

He then said, 'Ezekiel, I am going to show you even greater abominations than the image of jealousy.'

In the second instance, He showed Ezekiel a room of people who were worshipping creeping things, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, as carved images on the wall. These were 'abominations done in darkness'.

Following this, He said, 'I am going to show you even worse abominations than that, Ezekiel!' The third image that He uncovered was women in the temple, weeping for and worshipping a god called *Tammuz*.

He then said, 'I am going to show even worse abominations than *that!*' In the final image, He showed him some men who were standing at the door of the tabernacle with their back to the ark of the covenant, worshipping the sun.

The progressive nature of abomination in each of Ezekiel's visions

The point is that each of those abominations that the Lord showed Ezekiel, as He was proceeding with the spirit of burning and judgement, became progressively worse.

First, an image of jealousy; then abominations done in darkness; then the worship of *Tammuz* by women; and then men worshipping the sun.

Ezekiel saw the progressive nature of this vision. Before we start to break open what these abominations looked like, it is important to note that the Lord said to Ezekiel, 'I am showing you the abominations that are done *in the house of Israel.*' Why is that such an important statement for us to comprehend?

The house of Israel

The first point to note is that, hundreds of years before this time, Israel had been separated from Judah. Israel comprised the northern ten tribes of the nation, whereas Judah was a composite of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

Because of the idolatry of the northern ten tribes of Israel under the kings, the whole of Israel had been scattered by the Assyrian kingdom - they were taken captive, and they were never to return to the land. They were fully *scattered* to the ends of the earth. Hence, there was no longer any Israel.

The vision concerning Judah also concerns the heavenly Israel throughout history

The nation that was left in the land was called Judah.

So why did God not say to Ezekiel, 'I am going to show you what's done in the house of Judah?' The point is that, in addressing the house of Israel, and lifting up Ezekiel from the earth - between 'heaven and earth' - He was showing Ezekiel the abominations that were being done in the house of *the heavenly Israel* - the house of the heavenly Jerusalem - from that time, right through to its end.

Do we see the point that this is the same as Isaiah saying, 'in that day'. He was saying that the abominations which Ezekiel saw in the house of Israel apply to us, today. They are still the issues for which the Lord is coming among us, to cause us to be cleansed from.

The first image – an image of jealousy

We will leave the first image today, and plan to look more closely at the second and third images: the 'abominations in the dark' and 'the worship of *Tammuz*.'

Remember that the first is 'an image of jealousy'. It will require a fair level of explanation, including a series of content points underpinning it, in order to really understand its implications.

The second image – 'abominations done in the dark'

The second image speaks of the 'abominations done in the dark'. We know that the Lord brought Ezekiel to the door of the court and instructed him to dig a hole into the wall, where he found another door. This is classic imagery. As directed by the Lord, Ezekiel was to enter through this other door.

'So, I went in and I saw, and there - every sort of creeping thing.' If you don't like creeping, crawling things, this would be a terrible place to be.

'Every [type] of creeping thing, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed [on the] walls [of this room that he had gone into].' So, all the creeping things, all these abominable beasts, were portrayed - which literally means 'carved' - onto the walls of this room.

'And there stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and in their midst stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan. Each man had

a censer in his hand, and a thick cloud of incense went up. [They are praying in this place].

'Then He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the room of his idols? For they say, 'The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land'."'

Presuming to minister in the house of the Lord

Ezekiel was being shown those who *presumed* to minister in the house of the Lord.

Rather than using the term 'ministering', these were people who should have been 'firstfruits'. They should have been worthy houses. T

They presumed to minister in the house of the Lord but, in secret, they participated in activities that were unclean. The 'creeping things' and 'abominable beasts' that Ezekiel saw were classes of 'fauna', or living creatures, which God specifically identified as being unclean and unsuitable for consumption or eating.

When we think about 'eating', we consider the particular word (or information) from which we obtain sustenance. This image, however, didn't refer simply to the eating of things such as witchetty grubs. These were unclean things that were unfit for human consumption.

Ezekiel perceived this consumption - the eating of unclean things - as viewing images that were portrayed, or carved, on the walls of the habitation of this leadership group. These individuals had their habitation and they believed that their house was being built on this temple. This was where they believed they resided.

Our prayer affected by our attention to 'unclean images'

In the darkness of their own house, however, their prayers were actually directed to these creeping things, displayed as pictures on their walls. As a result, the *prayers* of these leaders were affected by the variety of 'unclean images' and 'media' that they 'consumed'.

When considering the term 'unclean', we think about all the different types of creeping, crawling things in existence. These, however, referred to all the different types of 'creepy-crawly', unsavoury images and 'food' that you and I have access to, through things that are being portrayed on our

'walls', through different media, different devices, and different means of communication.

The point is that this activity was affecting their prayer. The prayers of these leaders were affected by the variety of 'unclean images' in 'media' that they consumed. Thus, the content of their prayers was the expression of their imaginations which were informed by these images.

The forms of media which have influence in our lives

The images were not just 'unsavoury' or 'immoral images' that they were looking at - that is obviously unclean. In our case, this actually refers to the consumption of an over-amount of movies, television, real estate listings, the stock market, online advertising, and so on.

All of these forms of 'media' were affecting their view of what their life should be. As a result, they were praying and believing for blessing *according to those images* that were shaping their view of life.

And God said, 'This is an abomination done in the dark.'

Hence, we need to think carefully about the volume of 'creeping, crawling things' that have access to our lives, through the images that are being portrayed on our 'walls'. There was, however, an even worse abomination than this.

The third image - 'women weeping for Tammuz'

'And He said to me, "Turn again, and you will see greater abominations, [than] they are doing".'
Eze 8:13-14.

So, immediately, 'Yikes! This must be pretty bad.'
Greater abominations that they are doing

'He brought me to the door of the north gate of the Lord's house; and to my dismay, women were sitting there weeping for *Tammuz*'

On first looking at this, I had no idea who *Tammuz* was. In Babylonian mythology, *Tammuz* was the god of fertility, who possessed powers for new life in nature. It was believed that *Tammuz* died annually and was reborn out of death, year by year, representing the yearly cycle of the seasons and crops.

A fertility god with presumed powers of new life

From this, we see that, in Winter, the thing died and was no longer there. Then up came the new life in Spring. The women would pray to and worship *Tammuz* as the one who was said to bring life out of Winter, out of the void, or the desolation, of the land. This was what the women in the temple were weeping for: for *Tammuz*, a fertility god, who possessed powers for new life.

Tammuz was one example of what some anthropologists have categorised as 'a dying and rising god.'

That sounds a bit like Jesus, doesn't it? These 'dying and rising gods' are actually represented across almost all civilisations, which is an amazing point in and of itself. Several Bible commentators have associated *Tammuz* with the worship of the Greek mythological figure, *Adonis*.

Delving into romantic mysticism

The concept of this 'dying and living god' brings about a move into the romantic. The expression of these women in the temple, of devotion towards this figure, was a perverted love which, in other cultures, motivated sexual promiscuity.

It is important to note that, as Ezekiel saw these abominations taking place, these idols being worshipped in the temple, the people were not building other places to worship these idols or travelling to other places. They were worshipping these idols *in the temple of God!*

The implication is that they believed that the customs they were fulfilling, as those who belonged to the temple, were what God wanted. The Lord was saying, however, 'Your religious practices in this temple are nothing more than the worship of other gods.'

These women did not believe that they were actually worshipping *Tammuz*. The men who were worshipping 'the sun god' did not think they were actually doing so. The men who were praying to these creeping, crawling things, actually thought they were participating in the culture of normal worship in the temple.

Our need to recognise the presence of false practices in our own worship

We have to recognise that this was a strong delusion which belonged to those who were connected to the temple; the sanctuary.

This is why we need to receive this light, which comes in judgement, to illuminate to us where our practices are exactly like those in Ezekiel's vision.

In the case of the women who believed that they were worshipping God, He was replied that what they were weeping for was actually *Tammuz*, a heathen idol. This is confronting, isn't it? It is a strong delusion!

The women whom Ezekiel observed at the door of the gate of the Lord's house evidently identified themselves as belonging to the house of the Lord. They were, however, weeping for a so-called 'dying and living god' whom they believed would empower their capacity to cultivate or bring forth life in their own image and likeness.

A woman's desire to bring forth life in her own image and likeness

They were praying for God to energise, or enable, the bringing forth of fruit in their own image and likeness. Their worship in the temple was not motivated by *the love of God*, but by a deep void within their own hearts.

This is the outcome of the Fall. In this regard, their weeping reflected the sorrow which, God said, would be the portion of all fallen women. Remember, this was what the Lord said to the woman. 'I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire [their strong desire] will be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.'

Desire born out of envy

This sorrow was the same sorrow that Rachel demonstrated when, because of *envy*, or this 'strong desire', she demanded of Jacob, 'Give me children or I die!'

This was worship from the void within them, seeking multiplication, or for God to bless them in order to fulfil their own desire. If that is seen as the basis of worship in the house of the Lord, in reality, it derives from the worship of *Tammuz*.

Our plan is to develop the understanding in preparation for the NBS.

The point to note is that these women were not joined to a process through which they were being delivered from this basic, carnal drive. As a result, they endeavoured to engage the Lord as One who would bless them by satisfying their 'romantic aspirations' for their life and families. They were

yearning for Christ to minister consolation for the loss associated with 'unfulfilled desire'.

Christ's encouragement toward a culture of true mourning

Jesus addressed this desire as He made His final journey to the cross, which was 'the true temple. He was bleeding and in the process of dying; and yet He was still physically carrying His cross. In this moment, the women of Jerusalem were weeping for Him.

'And a great multitude of people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him [weeping for Him]. But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!'" '

'Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" ' For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?' Luk 23:27-31.

He was saying to them, 'If you don't turn and weep for yourselves and your children, you will be desolated with this place upon which judgement has already been proclaimed.'

There has to be a change from the motivation of a religious practice, driven by the desire within us, to a fellowship in Christ's offering and sufferings, by which a new motivation becomes the culture of our houses. We will continue this conversation in the weeks to come.