

PROPHECIES of THE DECLINE AND RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH

“It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.” Rev 13:7-8.

Why has God allowed this to happen? We are not told in the Scriptures, but I believe that it was for our personal spiritual growth. Throughout the history of Israel, when the nation was at ease, the people backslid, and began to worship the idols of the surrounding nations. It seems that to keep us growing in the Lord, we must have trials and sufferings that continually turn our minds and hearts back to God. I believe that the second reason is that God wants us to be overcomers by learning to cast down strongholds by the word of our testimonies, and wielding the power and authority of the name of Jesus Christ. He has allowed Antichrist to take control of the Church, to the end that the Church is able to overcome and destroy Antichrist and his works forever.

THE DECLINE OF THE CHURCH

Prophecies like the ones below from the Old and New Testaments depict the departure of the Holy Spirit and the glory of the Lord from the Church. Although some of these prophecies are addressed to Israel or Judah, they are types of the Church, particularly the end-time Church. At the time of these prophecies, Israel had been conquered by Assyria, and had ceased to exist as a nation.

The Glory of the Lord Left the Church

The following prophecy by Ezekiel is a figurative account of the glory of the Lord leaving the temple, which in this case symbolises the Church. In effect, it depicts the glory of the Lord departing from the Church, a state already in evidence.

“Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple when the man went in, and the cloud filled the inner court. Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and paused over the threshold of the temple; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the Lord's glory... Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight.” Ezek 10:3-6, & 18-19.

The Valley of Dry Bones

In the Thirty Seventh Chapter of Ezekiel, the Lord pictures the spiritless church as a valley full of dry bones.

“The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry.” Because the Church has rejected

the Holy Spirit, His presence and ministry have been withdrawn, leaving the Church as dry and powerless as the valley of dry bones.

The Two Witnesses Lie Dead In the Street

The Two Witnesses are first mentioned in the Fourth Chapter of Zechariah, pictured as two olive trees dispensing the oil of the Holy Spirit into the Church. The meaning of this figurative picture is disclosed in the Eleventh Chapter of Revelation, where the olive trees are identified as Moses and Elijah, symbolising the word of God and the voice of prophesy, telling us their ministries would be imparted to prophets and teachers throughout the Church age, enabling them to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit. Tragically, we are told in the Eleventh Chapter of Revelation that their ministries would suffer severe opposition from Antichrist, and be brought to an end.

“When they finish their testimony, the beast [Antichrist] that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them [destroyed their ministry]. And their dead bodies [their ministries] will lie in the street of the great city [Jerusalem, signifying the Church] which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves [prophetic truth is still there, but seldom visited]. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.” Rev 11:7-10. People rejoice because they are not convicted and challenged to change.

A Famine of Truth

Amos prophesied that the end-time Church would suffer from a famine of truth. **“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord God, “that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.”** Amos 8:11.

Many dissatisfied church-goers are venturing from fellowship to fellowship, vainly seeking truth, or the latest word from the Lord. But notice from Paul’s warning to Timothy below, that it is not so much from a shortage of the truth itself, but a shortage of listening ears that are open to really hearing and receiving the truth.

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” 2 Tim 4:3.

THE RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH

The Lord will Enter Into the Conflict

At first this prophecy by Zechariah pictures the Church despoiled, half of her members going into captivity, or taken captive by Antichrist’s deceptions, but the

remnant who the Lord has preserved will not depart from the truth and will be used by the Lord to destroy the working of Antichrist.

“Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem [the Church]; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished [taken out of their ordained role]. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Zech 14:1-2. Then we are shown that the Lord will enter into the conflict.

“Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east.”

What is the significance of the Lord’s feet standing on the Mount of Olives? The feet of the Lord standing on the Mount of Olives does not mean that He will be there in His physical presence, but in the power of His Spirit. We have this example of God standing on the rock at Horeb.

“And the Lord said to Moses, “Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.” Ex 17:5-6.

Previously we were shown by Ezekiel that the glory of the Lord would leave the Church, but now we are shown that at the end of the age the glory of the Lord will return to the Mount of Olives, the place of His departure, and then fill the temple, or Church.

PROPHECIES OF REVIVAL AND RESTORATION

The Glory of the Lord Returns to the Church

Previously in this study, we saw a picture of the glory of the lord departing from the Church. Now in the Forty Third Chapter of Ezekiel, we are told that the glory of the Lord will return and fill the whole temple, or Church.

“Afterward he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory...And the glory of the Lord came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple.” Ezek 43:1-5.

The Dry Bones Come to Life

Earlier in this study, the vision of the valley full of dry bones, represented the state of the end-time Church. Now, in this time of restoration, we see that by the power

of the Spirit, these bones are restored to life, and filled with the breath of the Holy Spirit. **“Again He said to me, “Prophecy [speak by the inspiration of the Spirit] to these bones [the dead Church], and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’ Thus says the Lord God to these bones: “Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.” So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them. Also He said to me, prophesy to the breath [the Holy Spirit], prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, thus says the Lord God: “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” “So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.” Ezek 37:4-14.**

This is an instruction to the end-time prophets to speak under the inspiration of the Spirit to the Church, exposing her deadness, and turning hearts to repentance. Church members must be informed of God’s plan to pour out His Spirit on the Church, and they must be prepared spiritually to receive His infilling. Secondly, end-time prophets are told to pray to the Holy Spirit, asking Him to fulfil God’s purpose in breathing life into the Church, paving the way for revival and restoration.

The Two Witnesses are Revived

Previously we saw that when spiritual darkness shrouded the Church, the two witnesses were left lying dead in the street. When the glory of the Lord returns and enters the Church, the two witnesses are revived, and their ministry of prophetic teaching is restored.

“Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here [receive spiritual power from heaven].” And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them [the reinstatement of their ministries will be obvious to those who had opposed them].” Rev 11:11-13

The Lord will Send Forth the Latter Rain

The former rain of the Spirit fell at Pentecost. In agriculture the early rain is needed to precipitate the early growth of the crop. The latter rain is needed towards the end of the crop cycle to fill out the heads of grain, ensuring an abundant harvest. Joel prophesies that the Lord will send forth the latter rain of the Spirit at the close of the church age to ensure an abundant harvest of lost souls to the Lord.

“Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God for He has given you the former rain [at Pentecost] faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you — the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. The

threshing floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. “So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you; and My people shall never be put to shame. Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am the Lord your God and there is no other.” Joel 2:23-27.

THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL FLOW OUT FROM THE CHURCH INTO THE WORLD

In the Forty Seventh Chapter of Ezekiel we are presented with another picture, this time showing us water, symbolising the Holy Spirit, flowing out from the Church, eventually flooding the whole land with its healing and restoring power.

“Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple...”

At first the water came up to his ankles, then his knees, his waist, and finally a river in which he had to swim. This shows us that the outflowing of the Holy Spirit will be gradual, but finally growing in its intensity to overpower all in its path.

“And when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the water came up to my ankles. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water came up to my knees. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water came up to my waist. Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed.”

Everywhere the water flows, all that it touches will be healed, until it reaches the sea, or nations of the world, and they too are healed, meaning that all false religions will be exposed by the Spirit of truth, and many souls converted to the Lord.

We are told that there will be very many fish, or unsaved souls, and many fishermen, or evangelists, with places to spread their nets, or fruitful outreach centres, and their ‘nets’ will be full.

There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. It shall be that fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be places for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many.

Unfortunately there will be places entrenched in Antichrist’s false doctrines that will not respond to the Holy Spirit’s ministry. **“But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt.”**

Along the banks of the river there were all kinds of trees that provide spiritual food for the hungry in all seasons. Trees are sometimes used in the Scriptures as symbols for men with ministries, as in this reading from Isaiah, **“That they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.”** Isa 61:3.

“Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.” Ezek 47:1-12.

A Parallel Reading from Revelation 22

In the Twenty Second Chapter of Revelation, John presents an almost identical vision of the fruitfulness of the Spirit filling the Church. Although the Spirit flows from the throne of God, in John’s vision, the Spirit flows from the street of New Jerusalem, which is the ‘Bride of Christ.’

“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants [members of the bride] shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.” Rev 22:1-5.

There is a general conception that the Bride of Christ consists of the whole Church, but Christ’s Bride is made up of a select group within the Church. In the following reading of the marriage of the Lamb, there are two groups, His wife, or the Bride of Christ, and the ‘called’ wedding guests invited to the supper.

“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife [the Bride of Christ] has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints [actual righteous works done in union with Christ, without the flesh]. Then he said to me, ‘Write: Blessed are those who are called [or invited] to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’” Rev 19:7-9.

The members of the Bride have accepted God’s refining hand in putting to death their carnal natures. They have been brought to oneness with Jesus by their union with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection as new creations, thereby enabling Him to reign and bear fruit through them without the interference of their flesh.

The Bride is to initiate the Outflowing of the Spirit

It is the Bride who has the responsibility of preparing the way for the outpouring of the Spirit. In the vision of the dry bones, there was two commands that prepared

the way for the revival of the dry bones. The first was to prophesy to the dry bones. Using their ministries of prophetic teaching, they will reveal truth to the beleaguered Church members to repentance, and inciting them to desire the Holy Spirit. The second command was to prophesy to the Spirit, asking Him to come from the four winds and breathe life into the bones. The Bride is the only one equipped for this purpose.

The Spirit and the Bride say “Come!”

The bridal members prepare the way for the Church to be filled with the Spirit, but it is also the will of the Lord that the whole Church be engaged in the ministries that follow. The Holy Spirit and the members of the Bride beckon us to be filled with the Spirit, and be involved with revitalising the Church.

“And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.” Rev 22:17.

There is no demand for recipients to have attained a certain level of maturity, only that they have an unquenchable desire to receive the Spirit, and be a dedicated servant of the Lord in this time of restoration. Jesus says, **“Let him take the water of life freely.”** This empowerment cannot be earned by good works or moral purity, only by the grace of God.

We have an example in the Lord calling seventy disciples to go out before Him, by ministering with miraculous power as a demonstration of things to come. These were young disciples, and yet they were anointed with the power of the Spirit to perform miraculous acts of healing.