



# *The Church*

## **FROM JUDGMENT TO RESTORATION**

**John Holland  
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**THE CHURCH**  
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# **THE CHURCH FROM JUDGMENT TO RESTORATION**

The Church has begun to feel the effects of a judgmental shaking for “the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of the things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.” Heb 12:27. The things that have been initiated by man, and glorify man, will not survive the shaking. Only the things of the Spirit will remain, for they cannot be shaken.

To precipitate this shaking, God has withdrawn His restraining hand on the power of Antichrist, to bring the hidden apostasies that have plagued the Church out in the open. Far from being against God’s will, Antichrist’s attack on the Church, commonly referred to as the battle of Armageddon, is actually initiated by God Himself.

This is not a military battle with the armies of the world under the control of Antichrist surrounding Israel, or the Christians of the world gathered at Jerusalem. It is a spiritual battle between Christ and Antichrist - between the truth of the doctrine of Christ, opposed by the deceptions and lying wonders of Antichrist. Never before has the very existence of the Church been so threatened by heresies, lying signs and wonders, New Age Philosophies, eastern mysticism, false prophets and teachers, and so forth.

God has actually initiated this confrontation so that,

- (i) The Church may be refined and restored. Restoration, as its name implies, means to restore to its original state - in this case the pattern of the early Church.
- (ii) Antichrist and all his deceptions may be brought out in the open and destroyed by the light of truth.

This book deals with these issues by outlining,

- The present state of the Church and its need of restoring.
- A revelation of Antichrist and his operation in the Church.
- The pattern of the early Church.
- The nature of God’s judgment on the Church.
- The restoration of the Church.

John Holland  
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## SECTION 1

# THE PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST IN THE CHURCH

### Chapter 1

#### THE PRESENCE OF ANTICHRIST IN THE CHURCH

The real identity of Antichrist is a critical issue for the Christian church. Many believers down through the centuries have imagined Antichrist to be a world figure of unimaginable evil who will suddenly appear on the world scene at the close of the age. Accordingly, it is said that this person will gain awesome authority and power, enabling him to autocratically control the church and all worldly governments. Speculation as to his identity increases as the time draws near, and as new figures appear on the world scene.

It is largely because of the misconception that Antichrist is a figure to appear at the close of the age, that the church has failed to recognize his presence and influence in her midst here and now. The apostle John advised the young church that "**the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, ..is now already in the world.**" (1 John 4:3). And again "**..as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come.**" (1 John 2:18).

The apostle was not referring to an event due to occur at some time in the future. Instead he was warning these first century Christians that the enemy who had been prophesied to come ('**which you have heard was coming**'), was already in their midst ('**even now many .. have come**').

#### WHO IS ANTICHRIST?

John lists three identities whose influence was already evident in the New Testament church - "**the Antichrist,**" "**the spirit of the Antichrist,**" and "**many antichrists.**" Who then are these three identities?

#### *"the ANTICHRIST"*

The bible uses several names when describing this identity and his evolution through spiritual history. From reading and comparing Revelation 13, where he is called "**the first beast,**" and Daniel 7, where he is called "**another horn, a little one,**" it is possible to chart his progress and development. Antichrist is present from the very emergence of the Babylonian empire, throughout the Persian, Greek, and Roman empires, to the Papacy of Rome, from where his influence has contaminated all of denominational Christendom.

In studying these wide-ranging biblical references, it becomes apparent that Antichrist cannot be a physical man, subject to the law of mortality. Instead he is a spiritual entity, a lieutenant of Satan, whose presence has been recorded at different times over several thousand years. Revelation 17:11 uses a range of tenses to describe him as "**the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.**"

The task of the spiritual entity called "the Antichrist" is to impose false religious authority. This is in direct contrast to the mission of Christ and His church, which is to restore the righteous authority of God the Father. Right from the earliest mentions of him, Antichrist is reported to have

a spiritual intent that is particularly directed **"against the Most High.. [and] the saints of the Most High.."** (Daniel 7:25).

### ***"the SPIRIT of the ANTICHRIST"***

Once again the apostle John is referring to a spiritual entity. He warned that **"every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and now is already in the world."** (1 John 4:3). The **"spirit of the Antichrist"** is called **"another [or second] beast"** in Revelation 13, and has been given power and authority by **"the first beast"** (who is Antichrist) to create a false church or **"image of the beast."** His main task is to deceive, and so he is also called **"the false prophet"** in Revelation 16 and 19.

Through his deceptions, the spirit of Antichrist brings believers into unknowing worship of Antichrist through acceptance of those things he has introduced into the church. Those captivated by his influence have imparted to them a deceiving spirit - a **"spirit of the Antichrist"** - which does not of itself rob them of their salvation, but greatly impedes their spiritual progress.

### ***"many ANTICHRISTS"***

After declaring in his letter that **"even now many antichrists have come"** (verse 18), John goes on to say, **"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us."** (verse 19). It is clear from these two verses that in using the phrase **"many antichrists,"** the apostle is actually referring to people who were once members of their Christian fellowship. However, these same people had at some stage allowed themselves to be completely overtaken by **"the spirit of the Antichrist,"** becoming his manifest vessels of deceit and destruction.

There have been **"many antichrists"** throughout the history of the church, and there may well be one who gains much authority and power at the end of the age. But he will not be the Antichrist.

When the apostle Paul told the Thessalonian church that **"the lawless one will be revealed,"** he was prophesying of a time of complete revelation of Antichrist as a spiritual entity. The entire corrupting influence of **"the first beast"** in the church and throughout the world will finally be exposed. Visible then will be Antichrist's whole spiritual empire and his throne on earth - where he, through many antichrists, has posed as head of all Christendom - **"oppos[ing] and exalt[ing] himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."**(2 Thessalonians 2:4).

## **WHY HAS ANTICHRIST'S PRESENCE ESCAPED ATTENTION ?**

The success of Antichrist in eluding detection by the church has much to do with the nature of his deception. We can gain greater insight into this by considering the elements of his name.

The prefix 'anti' has two root meanings. The first of these is 'against' or 'opposed to,' which is the most commonly accepted definition. The second rendering, less common but equally valid, is 'instead of.' The joining together of these two produces the composite meaning of being 'opposed to' by being 'instead of.'

In other words, Antichrist opposes Christ by seeking to replace Christ. He does this through a process of counterfeit designed to undermine the Lord's position in the church.

This is part of an overall stratagem by the powers of darkness to undo the righteous works of God. At some time in spiritual history it became apparent to Satan that he could not destroy the church by physical persecution alone. He has therefore contrived to create a counterfeit to deceive the saints - a counterfeit trinity - and through them, a counterfeit church.

## **THE COUNTERFEIT TRINITY**

Scripture declares the existence of a Holy Trinity. For example, Jesus commanded us to baptize "**.. in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ..**" (Matthew 28:19).

Scripture also declares the existence of a False Trinity. "**I saw three unclean spirits coming out of the mouth of the dragon (Satan), out of the mouth of the beast (Antichrist), and out of the mouth of the false prophet (or spirit of the Antichrist).**" (Revelation 16:1). The members of the Satanic Trinity are continually striving to undermine and subvert the positions of their opposite numbers in the Holy Trinity.

### ***GOD has been counterfeited by SATAN***

Satan has always coveted the worship due to God from all of His creation. It was he who said in his heart "**I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars [or 'angels'] of God; .. I will be like the Most High.**" (Isaiah 14:13,14). To this end, Satan has diverted worship away from God in several ways and directed it towards himself.

#### *Through Idolatrous Worship*

The essence of idolatry is the worship of those things that are created, rather than worship of the Creator Himself. By lauding those things initiated or created by man, such as statues, pictures, buildings, religious titles, vestments, and liturgies, we are in fact honoring Satan, who is the inciter of all false worship.

#### *Through Occultist Practice*

The nature of occult is submission to something or someone concealed in mystery and secrecy. To be involved in any occultist practice - whether it is consulting astrologists and horoscopes, submitting to hypnotism, divining water or metals, being initiated into sorcery and Satanism, dabbling in spiritualism and ouija boards, wearing lucky charms, or listening to heavy music - is to worship the demon spirits behind those activities, and so worship Satan himself.

#### *Through New Age Philosophies*

Eastern Mysticism promotes the belief that man has within himself vast reservoirs of power, which only need to be unlocked and released for him to have all that he desires. The ultimate delusion is, "**You are gods**" (Ps 82:6) - and its origin lies in him who would be God. This age old ploy to replace God by man comes from Satan, and so to accept humanistic philosophies and engage in New Age practices is to honor Satan from whom they originated.

### ***CHRIST has been counterfeited by ANTICHRIST***

#### *By Usurping Christ's Headship*

This is a serious business. The Scriptures make it absolutely clear that God the Father "**raised [Jesus] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and**



**gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.** (Ephesians 1:20-23).

Despite Christ having God-given authority to rule the church, very little actually remains under His control. So much of what is accepted in the church today has been initiated at the direction of man rather than Jesus. The church staggers under the burden of man-made denominations that are governed by various ecclesiastic councils. Church leaders are rarely recognized and appointed after waiting on the Lord, but instead elected by popular vote, or at worst, through an institutionalized process involving conspiracy and intrigue.

Christ "**Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body ..**" (Ephesians 4:11-12). However Christ's gifts of leaders to His body have been ignored and replaced by 'ministers of religion' with worldly academic qualifications. Local churches, which should be autonomous and governed by a team of mutually submitted elders, are instead managed by professional clergymen (and women). These are in turn subject to a hierarchy of similarly qualified peers at regional, national, and even international level.

#### *By Preaching Another Christ*

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church that he feared for them "**lest somehow, as the serpent deceived 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 which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you may well put up with it.**" (2 Corinthians 11:3-4).

The church has lost her "**testimony of Jesus Christ.**" (Revelation 12:17). Too often the pulpit presents a false vision of the Lord. His commandments are liberalized and His holiness demeaned. Sceptics cast doubt on His virgin birth, His sinlessness, His miracles, and His resurrection. The Word of God says "**Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come ..**" (Revelation 12:10). But this is denied, or projected forward to a supposed millenium reign sometime in the future. Just as Paul warned, the church has "**a form of godliness**"(2 Tim 3:5) but is denying the power and glory of her risen Lord.

#### *By Practicing Lawlessness*

Jesus forewarned His followers that "**Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but [only] he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'**" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Prophesying, deliverance and the performance of miracles all have a sound basis in Scripture and in the practice of the New Testament church. Nevertheless, only Jesus has God's authority to commission and initiate. Those who ignore Christ's headship in ministry and engage in lawlessness are in reality manifesting the works of Antichrist, who is called "**the lawless one**" in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 & 9.

#### *By A Crossless Christianity*

Paul wrote "**.. we preach Christ crucified ..**" (1 Corinthians 1:23). The cross of Christ should be the focal point of all belief, all teaching and preaching, and all ministry. Now however, it is possible to attend church services for months on end, listening to moralistic sermons on social issues or extravagant promises of unlimited blessings, and never hear the cross mentioned. The

failure to teach the power of the blood of the cross has left the church vulnerable to spiritual attack and unable to cast down Satan's strongholds. And the failure to teach the training and discipline of the cross has left church leaders anchorless and unable to resist the wiles of Antichrist.

### ***The HOLY SPIRIT has been counterfeited by the SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST***

#### ***In Worshipping Another Spirit***

The Holy Spirit is Christ's representative here on earth. Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would not act on His own initiative, or speak on His own authority. He said that "**when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.**" (John 16:13-14).

The Holy Spirit therefore always honors Christ's position as head of the church, only moving and speaking as Christ directs Him. But now, because of an idolatrous longing for power and blessing, many Christians have made 'the Holy Spirit' the head. It is common for zealous people 'wanting more' to 'call down the Spirit' and then blindly accept whatever happens next as being of God. However the Holy Spirit never acts independently of the Lord, or glorifies Himself. So the spirit that 'comes down' in these cases is not the Holy Spirit, but the spirit of "**the lawless one .. with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception ..**" (2 Thessalonians 2:9,10).

While the first apostles were completely reliant upon the Holy Spirit in their ministries, it was Jesus Christ who remained the focal point of their preaching and teaching. "**And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs.**" (Mark 16:20).

#### ***In Ignoring The Holy Spirit***

The early Christians were continually receptive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. As a consequence they were intimately connected with the Lord, receiving His directions, and His commissioning and anointing through His Spirit. In contrast, conventional denominational churches have little communication with the Holy Spirit, relegating Him to an impersonal 'it,' who has been guardedly read about, but kept at a distance.

The Holy Spirit has been pushed into the background because the spirit of Antichrist has successfully implanted the mark of humanism in the church. Undue honor is therefore given to what is of man - man-initiated programs and 'ministries' and man-sustained institutions and 'movements'. Paul called these works of man "**wood, hay, [and] straw,**" to be consumed by "**the fire [that] will test each one's work.**" Only the "**gold, silver,[and] precious stones,**" or things of the Spirit, will stand when the fire of God's judgment tests all things.(1 Corinthians 3:12-13).

### **ANTICHRIST HAS CREATED A FALSE RELIGION**

Antichrist has spawned a great many false religions over the centuries - all of which deny the divinity of Christ and the saving power of His cross. However in this case we are looking at an all-embracing religion - one which affects everyone on earth. It does not have a doctrinal basis. Nor does it involve the conscious worship of a spiritual entity.

This religion is far more expansive than the worship of false deities or involvement in false doctrines because it captivates the whole world. It is the religion that exalts man. It entices man to seek fulfillment as man, without reference to God.

Through the pursuit of wealth and possessions, through ambition and lust for power, and by the constant seduction of the intellect and senses, mankind is enticed into its net. Sport, sex, fashion, entertainment and the arts, are all used to entice him. So pervasive is this world religion that man has come to believe its elements are evidence of his social evolution.

Few realize that there is a corrupt spiritual force behind this system, or that it is imposed by the spirit of the Antichrist to bring man into bondage. An angel had to open the apostle John's spiritual eyes before he could recognise its source and widespread influence. **"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters [a symbol of the nations], with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."** (Revelation 17:1-2).

Most of mankind has been caught up in the world religion of Antichrist and his Harlot. Their hearts and minds have been turned away from God to self. This is the 'religion of man', or 'humanism', and those who have yielded to its lure have received upon themselves **"the mark of the beast."**

## **ANTICHRIST HAS CREATED A FALSE CHURCH**

Just as the Holy Spirit is the instrument used by God in creating a church that is the image of Jesus Christ, likewise the spirit of Antichrist is used by Satan to create a false church in the image of Antichrist.

In the seventeenth chapter of Revelation, the apostle John was given a vision of the false church. **"So [the angel] carried [John] away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And [he] saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns."** (Revelation 17:3).

Here the false church is symbolically presented as a woman (the Harlot), riding a beast (Antichrist). The apostle was told the **"seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits."**(v7). The heads have a double significance. As the **"seven mountains,"** they are a readily recognizable reference to the 'seven hills' of Rome - the geographical center of the Roman Catholic Church.

The **"seven mountains"** are also referred to as **"seven heads."** These seven heads have alternative significance in subsequent verses. They are said to be **"seven kings [or world empires]. Five have fallen, one is [the Roman Empire was in existence at the time of John's writing], and the other has not yet come .. And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition."** (Revelation 17:10-11). The beast, or Antichrist, is identified with the eighth kingdom, which emerges out of and has its origins in the preceding seven. In this way the beast is again linked to the Papacy of Rome, on which the false church, or Harlot, sits.

The Roman Catholic Church is Antichrist's fully emerged expression of the false church. The Papacy, or Vatican, is his throne on earth, and it is from here that he has used the **"many antichrists"** of 1 John 2:18 to **"blaspheme [God's] name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven,"** giving them **"a mouth speaking great things [or pompous words] and blasphemies."** (Revelation 13:6,5).

## ***NAMES describing the CHARACTER of the HARLOT***

Further insight into the nature of the false church, or Harlot, is gained by studying her composite name. John tells us that **"on her forehead a name was written:**

**MYSTERY,**

**BABYLON THE GREAT,**

**THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS**

**AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."** (Revelation 17:5)

She is called **'Babylon the Great'** because she embraces and incorporates within herself the pagan rites and idolatrous practices of ancient Babylon. She is called **'The Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth'** because of her gross idolatry. Harlotry in biblical terms is the forsaking of God, and turning instead to worship pagan gods and idols.

The list of unscriptural doctrines and pagan practices that have been introduced into the Roman Catholic Church from ancient Babylon and other sources is an extensive one. It includes the idolatrous worship of Mary, the accompanying false doctrines of her 'immaculate conception' and 'assumption into heaven,' and the blasphemous proclamation of her as 'mother of the church.' The kingdom of Antichrist is propagated through such beliefs as 'apostolic succession,' the primacy of 'the holy see,' and the 'infallibility of the pope' in all doctrinal matters. And millions continue to be brought into demonic bondage by the 'sign of the cross,' 'stations of the cross,' 'holy water,' 'rosary beads,' 'worship of the host,' 'observance of feasts and fasting days,' 'reverencing images and relics,' 'prayers for the dead,' 'canonization of saints,' 'dedicated virgins,' 'confession to a priest,' and many others.

The Harlot is also called **'Mystery.'** Like all the ancient pagan religions, Roman Catholicism enshrouded herself in a cloak of mystery. The 'secrets of the faith' were withheld from all but those who were initiated into them, creating a void between those who 'knew' (called the clergy) and those who did not 'know' (the laity). All but the initiated elite were discouraged from reading the Bible; services were conducted in a foreign language and according to a rigid liturgy; while all interpretation and religious teaching remained the preserve of the priesthood.

However it would be wrong to assume that the Roman Catholic Church is the only expression of the Harlot, or false church. True, she is Antichrist's masterpiece - with a vast membership encompassing the globe, enormous wealth in physical assets, and a politically influential pontiff who claims headship over all Christendom. But she is also **'the Mother of Harlots'** and her apostasy is found in every denominational church.

When the Reformers left the Catholic Church, they did not fully divest themselves of the taint of the Harlot. Evidence of this is found in their continued adherence to the distinction between clergy and laity; unscriptural appointment and recognition of church leaders; undue reverence towards buildings, furnishings, vestments, liturgy, and tradition; and preoccupation with ceaseless 'good works' to sustain and maintain man-made programs and institutions. The garments of humanism and worldliness are just as comfortable in the environment of the 'reformed churches' as they ever were in Rome.

**THE WHEAT AND THE TARES**

The institutional church is so overcome by the mark of humanism that she is not even aware of the foul apostasy in her midst. This is not really surprising if we recall Christ's likening of the counterfeit to tares growing amongst wheat. He said **"The kingdom of heaven is like a man [Christ] who sowed good seed in his field; but while men [the church] slept, his enemy [Antichrist] came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way."** (Matthew 13:24-25).

Tares look so much like wheat that it is not until just before harvest that the black grains of the tares appear and the weed is clearly identified. Similarly it is not until the time of harvest at the end of the age that Antichrist and his deception will be finally revealed to all. **"For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed."** (2 Thessalonians 2:7-8).

In Jesus' parable, the owner of the field told his servants not to pull up the tares before harvest in case they also damaged the wheat. Just as the wheat and the tares growing together in the same field are so nearly identical as to be difficult to tell apart, so too the doctrines of Christ and the tares of apostasy coexist in the church. The Lord in His wisdom has therefore decreed that both remain together until the end of the age, lest in the process of casting out the tares of apostasy we damage some of the wheat.

But then, at the time of harvest, the Lord Himself will separate the tares from the wheat. It is His work. **"The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire."** (Matthew 13:41-42).

It is already possible to discern the black grain of the tares appearing and the darkness of apostasy spreading throughout the church. Already the bundling together of the tares is taking place, as those under the power of Antichrist band together in rejection of the call to holiness and total surrender to Christ and His cross. And right now the world-wide 'ecumenical' movement gathers momentum, pursuing its ultimate goal of 'uniting' all denominations under the skirts of Mary 'the queen of heaven' and the pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church.

## **THE CHURCH HAS BEEN OVERCOME BY ANTICHRIST**

It is conventional wisdom to minimize Antichrist's influence in the Christian church, and those who sound a warning are frequently ridiculed. Nevertheless the Bible books of Daniel and Revelation contain clear prophecies that the saints (i.e. the church) would be subject to an all out assault by Antichrist - AND THAT THEY WOULD BE OVERCOME.

The prophet Daniel writes that he "**was watching; and the other horn [ie Antichrist] was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them .. He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall attempt to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a *time and times and half a time*."** (Daniel 7:21,25).

The apostle John writes that he "**saw a beast [i.e. Antichrist] rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns .. And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue *for forty-two months* .. And it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them."** (Revelation 13:1,5,7).

The symbolic period of time mentioned in both references is 3.5 years, and is variously rendered in the Bible by the derivatives 'a time and times and half a time' (or  $1+2+1/2=3\text{and}1/2$ ), or 'forty-two months' or 'one thousand two hundred and sixty days'. It always signifies a period of tribulation for God's people at the hands of false religious authority, and in this case is equivalent to the length of the Church Age.

## **COME OUT OF HER MY PEOPLE**

We are entering into a climactic time in spiritual history. The Christian church is about to suffer a purging judgment in preparation for her restoration. The 'two witnesses', (who are the Word of God and the Spirit of Prophecy), are now standing 'on their feet' to sound God's

warning. (Revelation 11:3,11). **"Come out of her [i.e. 'Come out of the Harlot or false church], My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities."** (Revelation 18:4-5).

## **IN SUMMARY**

Having failed to destroy the church with physical persecution, Satan has embarked on a strategy of deception. He has created a counterfeit church which preaches **"another Jesus"** by the working of **"a different spirit"**. (2 Corinthians 11:4). Satan's strategy has been so successful that the saints have been overcome and the church brought into bondage by the spirit of Antichrist.

Nevertheless the Scriptures are adamant that the church will be restored and that Christ the Lord will return to **"a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle .. holy and without blemish."** (Ephesians 5:27). The following chapters are directed towards examining this process of restoration as revealed in the Word.

## SECTION 2

# RESTORATION OF ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

## Chapter 2

### RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH CONFIRMED BY THE PROPHETS

#### KEY BIBLE READING

**"But these things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, who heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." [Acts 3:18-21].**

The Key Bible Reading records part of an address given by the apostle Peter to a large crowd in Jerusalem, shortly after the ascension of Christ. In his speech, Peter declares that God's promise of restoration has been faithfully proclaimed "by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."

#### INTERPRETING RESTORATION PROPHECIES

Many of the Old Testament prophecies of restoration are addressed directly to 'Israel', 'Jacob', 'Mount Zion', 'Judah', or 'Jerusalem'. The question then arises as to whether these terms, and therefore the whole prophecy that follows, should be interpreted literally or in a figurative sense. In other words, do the prophecies relate only to the Old Testament Israelites, or are they also relevant to the Christian church.

A strictly literal interpretation is appropriate in those circumstances where the language used in the prophecy is obviously not figurative. This is the case where the prophecy refers to detail that has one clear and specific historical application.

For example, in the following prophecy the prophet Jeremiah refers to particular commercial procedures and then links them to specific geographical areas. These details had a particular and immediate relevance to the Jews in Babylonian captivity. For these people, resumption of normal business activities in their homeland must have seemed impossible, but the specific details of its application are included to convince them otherwise.

**"For thus says the LORD: 'Just as I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will bring on them all the good that I have promised them. And fields will be bought in this land of which you say, "It is desolate, without man or beast; it has been given into the hand of the [Babylonians]." Men will buy fields for money, sign deeds and seal them, and take witnesses, in the land of Benjamin, in the places around Jerusalem, in the cities of Judah, in the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the lowland, and in the cities of the South; for I will cause their captives to return,' says the LORD." (Jeremiah 32:42-44).**

In addition, any strictly literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy must not contradict truths and principles presented in the New Testament. In this context it is useful to look at two examples which ignore this premise.

(1) Many interpret the various Old Testament prophecies concerning a future Messianic kingdom on earth in a literal manner. They visualise the nation of Israel physically restored to a position of political prominence, with Christ reigning from the city of Jerusalem and exercising authority over all nations **"with a rod of iron."** (Psalm 2:9).

But Jesus said to Pilate **"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight [like soldiers], so that I should not be delivered [up] to the Jews;"** (John 18:36). Christ's kingdom, which is manifest here and now through the true church, is a spiritual kingdom. To expect a physical rather than a spiritual kingdom is to fall into the same error that ensnared most of the Jewish people at the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. They rejected Jesus because they believed that only a physical kingdom could vindicate Israel in the sight of the world.

(2) Similarly, a strictly literal interpretation of the prophet Ezekiel's vision of a restored temple and sacrifices leads many people to expect the temple in Jerusalem to be restored, with the 'church' officiating at all of its rituals and offerings. However such a view is rejected by New Testament teaching.

**"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect .. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins .. [but] we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."** [Hebrews 10:1-4].

The clear New Testament teaching is that by Christ's perfect sacrifice, we have been redeemed, made righteous, and sanctified forever, to the end that we stand before God **"holy and blameless and above reproach in His sight."** [Col 1:22]. To suggest that a restored temple and further sacrifices are needed is a rejection of the efficacy of the blood of Jesus.

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT IS OUR INTERPRETER**

Even when following these guidelines, the most appropriate method of interpreting prophecy is not always clear. There are some prophecies for example, that are addressed to Israel or Judah, but have been only partially fulfilled in their history. In these cases it would appear that there remains a final and more complete fulfillment at the end of the age. There are also prophecies, which although addressed to Jerusalem or Zion, have a parallel application to the church.

The crux of the matter is this - **"no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."** (1 Peter 1:20-21). As a result we must continually look to the Holy Spirit as our ultimate guide to the interpretation of Scripture. This need for the direction of the Holy Spirit is even more critical in those cases where we adopt a figurative interpretation of prophecy. While this approach often opens the door to new depths of spiritual revelation, it can also have the effect of exposing us to the danger of deception.

## **OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES OF RESTORATION**

In the Key Bible Reading, Peter asserts that God's promise of restoration had been **"spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."** The following Old Testament prophecy given by Haggai is one such example. Although the Book of Haggai has a clear



application to the Jewish people of the time (who were engaged in the physical restoration of Jerusalem after their Babylonian captivity) this part of the text is declared to be directly relevant to Christ's church by the New Testament writer of Hebrews.

The prophet writes "**For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations [a reference to Christ the Lord], and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of hosts. 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts.'" (Haggai 2:6-7).**

Part of this prophecy is quoted by the author of the Letter to Hebrews, who applies it to the refining of the church at the end of the age. "**[B]ut now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven**.' Now this, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are [man-] made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:26-29).

There are a number of other examples of restoration prophecy in the Old Testament which have an application "**in the latter days**". The following selection has been drawn from the prophets Isaiah, and Joel. Each excerpt is notable for its use of figurative language, as well as elements within which are yet to be fulfilled. In each case the prophecies look forward to a risen and ruling Christ who reclaims His dwelling-place in absolute holiness.

**"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it." (Isaiah 2:2).**

**"Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you ... The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the cypress, the pine, and the box tree together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary; and I will make the place of My feet glorious." (Isaiah 60:1-2,13).**

**"The LORD also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the LORD will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again. And it shall come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; a fountain shall flow from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Acacias." (Joel 3:16-18).**

## **RESTORATION CONFIRMED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The apostle Peter confirms the continuing validity of the Old Testament prophecies on restoration in his address in the Key Bible Reading. He also outlines various stages that need to take place on the path to restoration.

First his audience was charged to "**Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out**." In this Peter was assuming that an individual's repentance would automatically result in personal salvation and forgiveness of sins.

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