

Has the Era of the Church Age Come to an End?

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CHAPTER 1:
WHAT IS GOING ON?

What is going on? Certainly something strange is happening. On the one hand we see churches everywhere becoming more and more apostate. Yet on the other hand we see a ministry like Family Radio becoming more and more useful to the Lord in sending the true Gospel into the world.

Virtually everyone of us, as we look at the church we attend, and as we look at the other churches in our city, deplore what we are seeing. The worship service has become increasingly a time of entertainment. The preaching seldom, if ever, warns of the immanence of Judgment Day. Church after church feature signs and wonders. Little or no money is available for mission work because of increasing obligations to pay for newer and finer buildings, and greater and greater pastor's salaries.

Perhaps one of the most shocking experiences of the true believer within these churches is the rejection he will experience if he contends too strongly for greater purity in doctrine.

Indeed any spiritually minded believer must admit something drastic has happened and is happening in even the most conservative of the churches.

How can it be then that a ministry like Family Radio appears to be increasingly blessed as it is able to share the true Gospel with an increasingly large percentage of the world's population.

We do know that there are many prophecies in the Bible that indicate that as the history of the world draws to a close the congregations and denominations will be increasingly apostate. For example, Revelation 13 speaks of a time when Satan, called the beast that comes out of the sea, will rule in the churches through false Gospels. In this chapter these churches are called a false prophet that comes out of the earth. These churches have become altogether apostate.

Fact is verse 7 ominously warns "And it was given unto him (the beast) to make war with the saints and overcome them". Likewise in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10 God speaks of the man of sin who can only be Satan, taking his seat in the temple - that is he will rule in the churches that have become apostate.

In Daniel 8:10-14 God speaks of a time when the sanctuary and the host will be trodden underfoot for a period of 2300 days, the saints of the most high shall be given into his hand.

We all are familiar with the prophecy of Matthew 24:24 which teaches that false Christs and false prophets coming with signs and wonders will arise to deceive the very elect.

Indeed these are a sampling of many such prophecies in the Bible. We who love our church because it has been such a comfort to us in the past and even to some degree in the present are not a bit happy to contemplate all of these dire predictions. They shock us to the core of our being. As we look at the congregation we presently attend we would like to believe that these prophecies must be for another time. Surely the present situation cannot be as bad as these prophecies intimate.

However, if we are truly honest with ourselves, and with the Word of God, we know that something dreadful is happening in the churches and congregations of our day. No one can honestly say that all is well in today's congregations.

However, there appears to be a major contradiction between the Biblical prediction of the expectation of an increasingly dead church and the actuality of a robust healthy presentation of the Gospel by means of an organization like Family Radio.

How can we explain this anomaly that plainly is in evidence?

To make the question even more complicated we are aware that in these days the population of the world is mushrooming. The population statistics indicate that about 375,000 babies are born each day.

Even though approximately 145,000 people die each day, the world's population is still growing at the rate of about 230,000 individuals each and every 24 hour period.

This tremendous increase in population has resulted in a world today of more than six billion in population.

Must these six billion hear the Gospel call? Did not Jesus declare in Matthew 24:14 "the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

True, for more than 1900 years God has used the churches and congregations as His means to accomplish this goal. In spite of the spiritual weaknesses and short comings of the church it has been the divine organism employed by God to represent and extend the kingdom of God on this earth. Indeed there are many glorious chapters in the history of the churches as they more or less were faithful to the great commission "Go ye into all the world with the Gospel."

But what of today. How can the churches in their spiritual decline minister the true Gospel. And even if all of the churches were vibrant with the true Gospel how can they physically minister to a world that each hour is 10,000 souls greater in population?

Indeed we must realistically admit the churches of today cannot by any means fulfill Christ's command to go into all the world with the Gospel. Fact is, if we honestly evaluate the totality of the mission

effort that is based on a true presentation of the whole counsel of God, we must admit the situation is hopeless.

But it is not hopeless. God, about 200 years ago, anticipating the present situation, began to make some drastic changes in the world.

After almost 1300 years of history, mankind has discovered, and begun to use, radio waves and all other electronics. Are people more intelligent today than they were a thousand or ten thousand years ago? We know that cannot be. Rather, it is obvious that God prevented these discoveries from happening until it was God's good pleasure to make them available to accomplish His purposes. And once He allowed mankind to discover electro magnetic waves etc., it seems that God is allowing mankind to understand and use more and more of these wonderful ingredients He has built into the creation of this world.

Thus we wonder: is there a correlation that exists between all of these major subjects we have been discussing? Let us review.

1. Tremendous apostasy in the congregations and denominations.
2. Exploding population.
3. Exploding electronic knowledge, resulting in enormous advances in mass communication.
4. Increasing blessing coming to a ministry such as Family Radio as it ministers globally the true Gospel.

Fact is, the Bible does provide a marvelous synthesis of these things. Once we understand the Bible's teaching on these subjects, we should understand how harmonious all of these phenomena are.

CHAPTER 2:
IS THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH
INVINCIBLE?

In Matthew 16:18 God has given the wonderful promise. "I will build my church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." In the minds of many people the church against which the gates of hell cannot prevail is the corporate external church known by such names as the First Methodist Church, Redeemer Lutheran Church, or Second Reformed Church.

It is true that these external corporate bodies (which include - all of the congregations and denominations that believe that the Bible is the Word of God) are holy organisms established more or less according to Biblical rules. For example in 1 Timothy 3 God has given very careful rules for the selection of elders and deacons. But these churches and denominations have no guarantee of length of time of existence. For example in Revelation 2 and Revelation 3 God speaks of seven churches that were in existence at the time the Bible was being finished. Yet a few hundred years later all of these churches had disappeared. Indeed

afterwards for many hundreds of years there was no Christian witness of any kind in the cities wherein these churches had been located. Thus we can be certain that the church Christ has in view in Matthew 16 is not the corporate external church.

What church is it then that Jesus had in view when He said "the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it"? The solution is that there is an eternal church which is made up of all those individuals who personally have become saved. They were given eternal life because Jesus as their Savior had paid for each and everyone of their sins. Therefore, for evermore they had become safe and secure, Matthew 16 very definitely has this spiritual church in view. It can never come under the wrath of God which is the essence of Hell.

Therefore, we can know that the corporate external church known as congregations and denominations have no assurance that they are safe from the wrath of God. As a matter of fact God declared in 1 Peter 4:17 "judgment must begin at the house of God."

Since the true believers within a congregation cannot come under God's wrath, this warning was particularly leveled against the corporate or external body. Even as the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 were judged and were completely removed, so any and every congregation can come under the judgment of God. Because there does not exist at any time in history a perfect church, it is a testimony to the patience and mercy of God that congregations and denominations continue to flourish throughout the New Testament era. In spite of their flaws and defects, God has used the churches during the last more than 1900 years to bring the Gospel to the world. These churches from many different denominations have been the vehicle, the instrument by which the Gospel of salvation has gone into virtually every country of the world. But a serious question must be raised. It is true that God brought the seven churches spoken of in the book of Revelation into judgment by removing them. But isn't it also true that throughout the New Testament era churches or denominations do disappear. But aren't they replaced by other churches and denominations that are more faithful. Worldwide hasn't there always been in existence a core group of faithful churches. For example, even today are there not a sprinkling of faithful churches that are at least as true to the Word of God as many churches were several hundred years ago?

This is true! But there is a larger plan of God that must be looked at.

This plan shows that a time will come when God will no longer use the churches and congregations to bring the Gospel to the world. They instead will come under the wrath of God.

To see this plan we must carefully examine Old Testament Israel. They, without any question, typify the New Testament church

which the Bible speaks of as the Israel of God. (Gal. 6:16)

Old Testament Israel began with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It reached its highest glory during the reigns of David and Solomon.

It was a nation brought out of Egypt, into the land of Canaan under the leadership of first Moses and then Joshua. God bestowed His love upon this nation making it His people. Deuteronomy 7:6-8 beautifully records this fact.

For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

And so Israel continued for hundreds of years under the patient guidance of God. Again and again when they went astray God sent judges or prophets or priests or kings to bring them back to a more obedient faithfulness to God. One problem did persist and became a continuous problem. That was the problem of high places. High places were places outside of Jerusalem where false God's were worshiped. It was already a serious problem when Moses received the law at Mt. Sinai. The golden calf worship was similar to later high place worship. However, until the temple was constructed by Solomon the correct worship of Jehovah God was also observed at high places. But once the temple was built any worship at high places was always the worship of false gods. The division of the kingdom upon the death of Solomon in 931 B.C. stimulated the worship of false gods. The first king of the nation of Israel, which consisted of ten tribes of Israel, built worship centers in Dan and Bethel that featured the worship of calves. This sad condition never changed throughout the history of the ten tribes of Israel. In the nation of Judah, which consisted of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the situation was somewhat better in that many of the kings who reigned were God fearing. Even so with the exception of two kings, Hezekiah and Josiah, to some degree high places were always in evidence in the land.

These high places were obviously an act of rebellion against the law of God. Yet for hundreds of years God tolerated them and especially blessed Judah in spite of them.

But they were not unnoticed by God. In Leviticus 26:27-31 God solemnly warned:

And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; then I will

walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat. And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images and cast your carcases upon the carcases of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you. And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation, and I will not smell the savour of your sweet odours.

Note in this warning God is specifically talking about the high places. This warning was given before Israel entered the land of Canaan.

But how and when would God destroy the high places. Remember in Leviticus 26 God had declared that He had chosen them to be a special people. He had set His love upon them. Surely God would be very gentle with Israel when and if He carried out His threat to remove the high places.

But also remember, God had said I will make your cities waste and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation. Would God really do this. Yes He would. And He did do that.

In the year 709 B.C. disaster struck the ten tribes of Israel. This nation that God loved was entirely destroyed by the Assyrians. Fact is, except for the city of Jerusalem at the same time the nation of Judah was also destroyed. Only because Hezekiah the king of Judah removed all of the high places was Jerusalem spared. How could God bring this horrible disaster on the people to whom He had pledged His love.

But there was more. One hundred years later in the year 609 B.C. the nation of Judah was again struck with disaster. King Josiah, the most God fearing king who ever ruled over Judah was killed in battle when he was only thirty nine years of age.

One hundred years earlier king Hezekiah had destroyed the high places and so Jerusalem was spared at the time the ten tribes were destroyed. But following Hezekiah his son and then his grandson reigned and during their reigns they rebuilt the high places. Thus Judah continued in its rebellion against God.

And then Josiah became king. Truly He was a wonderful king. God declared concerning king Josiah in 2 Kings 23:25: "And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him."

King Josiah's Godly acts were wonderful. The Bible records in 2 Kings 22, and 23 and in 2 Chronicles 34 and 35 all of the righteous acts of this great king. Included among his acts was the destruction of all of the high places.

But it was too late. When God warned in Leviticus 26 He would destroy all of the

high places He gave a time reference when He would do this. He had said in Leviticus 26:33-34:

And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths.

God identifies the time when the land would enjoy its sabbaths as a time of 70 years. He states in 2 Chronicles 36:21, "the land had enjoyed her sabbaths for as long as she kept sabbath to fulfill threescore and ten years."

The Bible shows us that this 70 years began with the death of Josiah in 609 B.C. and ended with the conquering of Babylon by the Medes and the Persians in 539 B.C.

The fulfillment of this prophecy required the death of king Josiah because the year 609 B.C. was to be the beginning of the 70 years that had been prophesied. Indeed now God's wrath began to be poured out upon Judah. Although four more kings would reign they were all wicked. And during their reign first Egypt assailed them and then Babylon began to destroy them. Finally in the year 587 B.C. 23 years inclusive after King Josiah was killed in battle the end came.

And what an end. Jerusalem, the temple, the holy of holies were all destroyed. This terrible end came on the people whom God loved, who had been chosen as a special people. God had carried out His warning that He would destroy the high places. He did so first in 709 B.C. and then completed the task in 587 B.C. Truly God does not give empty or idle warnings.

But how does this relate to the Church and the New Testament era, the congregations and denominations by means of which God has sent the Gospel into all the world during the past more than 1900 years?

CHAPTER 3: HIGH PLACES: A WARNING TO THE CHURCH

What is the future of the churches and congregations that appear to be in great spiritual trouble and what does the Bible have to report concerning the world-wide sending forth of the true Gospel by ministries such as Family Radio.

When we began to consider the plight of the churches and congregations in our day at least four facts became abundantly evident.

1. The eternal church made up of all true believers will never be destroyed.

2. The corporate or external church as represented by the various denominations and congregations that have existed during the past more than 1900 years could be destroyed even as the seven churches of Revelation 2 and Revelation 3 were eventually destroyed.

3. Ancient Israel that was loved by God and protected by God for hundreds of years was finally destroyed. The nation of Israel in 709 B.C., the nation of Judah in 587 B.C.

4. An insistent cause for their destruction was their persistence in maintaining places of worship, called high places, where heathen gods were worshipped.

With this background in view we must ask the logical question - What does the destruction of ancient Israel in 709 B.C. and 587 B.C. have to do with us today. The answer must come to us loud and clear. What God did to ancient Israel has every thing to do with this matter. In Hebrews 13:8 the Bible declares "Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today and tomorrow." Jesus is Jehovah God of the Old Testament. As we view His treatment of ancient Israel we can know how He deals with the New Testament Israel, the churches and congregations that exist all over the world.

The logical conclusion then must be. Since the high places of Israel were a dominant cause for the destruction of ancient Israel, it appears that the churches of today are safe from God's judgment because we don't have high places where heathen gods are worshipped.

But is it true, that our churches are free of high places? The Bible shows us that the churches of today are not at all free of the high places. The Bible defines the nature of the New Testament high places in 2 Corinthians 10:4-6. There we read: for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds: casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

In this very revealing passage God has set forth His plans for the New Testament Church. And as we shall see they are parallel to His plan for ancient Israel. We can readily see this parallelism if we recognize the nature of the Old Testament high places. True worship faithfully identified with a careful following of the laws of God set forth in the Bible. But many in Israel had their own ideas concerning the nature of true worship.

Out of their own imaginations and rationalizations they designed places of worship to gods that they felt should be honoured as Jehovah God was honoured. So they designed and constructed their high places.

In the New testament era it was not fashionable to construct places of worship to false gods. But the New Testament individual has the same kind of thoughts and imaginations as the Old Testament believer. He, too, has opinions as to the proper worship of God that frequently includes

ideas from his own mind rather than from the Bible.

During the Old Testament days it took serious thought as to how to properly design and build a high place in order to make the overall worship scene more complete. In the New Testament serious men have carefully thought about teachings they felt were pleasing to God. They reasoned together in solemn meetings such as church councils, consistories and synods. After prayerful consideration they adopted doctrines which were not always true to the Bible. Some of the erroneous conclusions were even written into and became a part of very prestigious confessions. This was so even though they had arrived at conclusions that were not taught in the Bible. Such conclusions that there can be divorce for fornication, baptismal regeneration, our faith is an instrument that God uses to bring us to salvation, a future millennium, women can pastor a church, universal atonement, our acceptance of Christ as a requirement for salvation, are typical of many doctrines solemnly adopted by churches. But these are high places, in that they have come from the exalted minds of men instead of coming from God.

For over 1900 years God has overlooked these spiritual high places even as for many hundreds of years He overlooked the high places of Israel and Judah.

But remember God had warned ancient Israel that eventually He would destroy the high places. This destruction was completed when Judah began to go into bondage at the time their last good king, king Josiah, was killed in 609 B.C. The destruction was completed in 587 B.C. when Jerusalem and the temple were entirely destroyed, 23 years inclusively after 609 B.C.

Ominously, the passage in 2 Corinthians 10:4-6 which speaks of the New Testament high places also warns of a time when God will destroy the high places. Remember God said "for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God.... having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled." In this very revealing passage God is declaring that punishment will come when the obedience of the churches will have been fulfilled. That is, their work of sending the Gospel into the world has been finished. This coincides with the warning of Revelation 11 that the time will come when the work of the church to bring the Gospel, as typified by the two witnesses, is finished. The two witnesses will be killed. Rev 11:9 declares "and when they shall have finished their testimony the beast that ascended out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them and shall overcome them and shall kill them."

Earlier in Revelation 11 God had explained in verse 4 that the two witnesses are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. Remember in Revelation 1:20 and Revelation 2:1 God had

indicated that each candlestick represents a church. Therefore, when the two witnesses are killed because their work had been finished it meant that the church is dead - the candlestick no longer can give light. That is, God is no longer using the church to bring the Gospel.

Therefore we see clearly that God has predetermined a time during the New Testament era when punishment would come against high things and exalted reasonings of men. This punishment would take place when the obedience of the churches had been fulfilled. We have already seen that the obedience was fulfilled when the work of the two witnesses had been finished.

This identifies with the warning of 1 Peter 4:17, "For the time has come that judgment must begin at the house of God." The event of this judgment on the churches is a terrible blow to them. In a way it is as traumatic and awful as the destruction of ancient Judah by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. Therefore God speaks of this event as a time of great tribulation. In Matthew 24:21 the Bible declares there will be great tribulation such as this world has never known or ever shall know.

How terrible when God's blessings no longer rest on the churches and congregations which only a few years earlier were still God's evangelists to the world.

But now we ask the big question. Has this great tribulation of Matthew 24:21 already begun? We also wonder; if a church removes its high places, can it avoid this judgment? Moreover, how does God bring judgment upon the churches?

CHAPTER 4: THE CHURCH AGE HAS COME TO AN END

The Bible discloses the fact that the last great spiritual event that will occur in this world is that there will be a period of great tribulation which will be immediately followed by the return of Christ and the end of the world. We read in Matt 24:21:

"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

And in Matt 24:29 God declares.

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."

This great tribulation period is divided into two periods of time as seen by the language of Matt 24:22:

"And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."

This great tribulation period is not only described in Matt 24 and Mark 13 but is also

described in the language of Revelation 13, Daniel 7, Daniel 8, and many other scriptures.

It is typified by the 70 year period beginning with the death of King Josiah in 609 B.C and ending with the conquering of Babylon by the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C.

It is a time when God brought judgment upon Judah because they had refused to remove the high places where heathen gods were worshiped. God had warned in Lev 26:30:

"And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you."

He reiterated this warning in Ezek 6: 3,4:

"And say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God; Thus saith the Lord God to the mountains and to the hills, to the rivers and to the valleys; Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken: and I will cast down your slain men before your idols."

Even as the great tribulation of Matt 24:21 is divided into two periods, so, too, the 70 year tribulation period spoken of in Jeremiah 25, 2 Chronicles 28 and other Old Testament passages was divided into two periods. The first period began with the death of King Josiah in 609 B.C. and ended in 587 B.C. when Jerusalem and the temple were completely destroyed by the Babylonians. The second period were the years 587 B.C. to 539 B.C. when the remnant which had not been destroyed by Babylon lived in captivity in Babylon.

The character of the events occurring in the 70 year period from 609 B.C. to 539 B.C. was the total rule of Babylon over Israel. When the Israelites were taken captive into Babylon they had no temple, no holy city, and no priesthood. They were entirely separated from Jerusalem and all the sacred activity that had previously been actively taking place there.

Likewise the character of the great tribulation spoken of in Matt 24 is that Satan has occupied the churches and has become victorious over the saints. In Revelation 13:7 we read:

"And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations."

In Daniel 7:25 God prophesied:

"And he shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time."

In Daniel 8:11,12 the Bible declares:

"Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down. And a host was given him against the daily sacrifice by reason of transgression, and it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practised, and prospered."

In Revelation 11 the Bible speaks of the two witnesses who represent the churches as they bring the Gospel to the world. In Revelation 11:7 we read:

"And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them."

Even as God finally destroyed Judah and Jerusalem in 587 B.C. because it had not removed the high places, so, too, God indicates that the church, too, will be destroyed because it does not remove the high places. In 2 Corinthians 10:4-6 we read:

"for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled."

The high places of the church are the doctrines held and taught by the church which are not true to the Bible. Some of these are imbedded in the Confessions but additional wrong doctrines are also taught. Divorce for fornication is an example of such a perversion of the law of God.

Even as Israel refused to permanently destroy its high places, so, too, the churches and denominations of our day refuse to remove from the Confessions and from their doctrinal teachings those doctrines which are not true to the Bible.

Thus both Revelation 11:7 and 2 Cor 10:4-6 teach that there comes a time when the work of the church is finished (Rev 11:2) its has been fulfilled (2 Cor 10:6), and then follows judgment upon the church. This is so even as God's judgment came upon Old Testament Israel and Judah.

It is true that during the 322 year duration of Judah from the death of Solomon in 931 B.C. until the death of Josiah in 609 B.C. God tolerated and over looked the high places.

Likewise throughout the New Testament era God has overlooked and tolerated the high places in the churches. Even though many churches and denominations insist that the Bible is the only infallible Word of God, they cling to a number of doctrines of men rather than submit entirely to the truth of the Bible.

As we have seen, the great tribulation of Matt 24 was typified by the destruction of Jerusalem in the period 609 B.C. to 587 B.C.. Therefore, we can expect that even as Judah or Israel were destroyed because they would not remove the high places, so, too, the New Testament Israel as it is found in the churches throughout the world will also be destroyed during the great tribulation.

This destruction of the churches is made evident by the declaration of Revelation 11:7:

"And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them."

It is seen in the language of 2 Corinthians 10:6:

"and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled."

2 Thess 2:3,4 speaks of it in this way:

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

In Matt 24:15,16 God gives the warning:

"When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand,) then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains" (flee to God Ps 12:1).

The very solemn question every believer must face is, Has the period of great tribulation in Matt 24:21 begun. If we believe we are living in that time of history is there clear evidence that this is so?

While a number of Scriptures detail the character of the great tribulation, there are two that are especially in evidence so that we need have no doubt that we have arrived to that final event.

In Matt 24:24 God declares the character of the great tribulation. There we read:

"For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."

Never before in all of church history has there been such an interest in signs and wonders, miracles, such as we see today. All over the world there is an intense interest in this kind of activity. This evidence alone assures us that we are living in the period of the great tribulation.

A second evidence is the world wide evidence of people falling backward. The churches that practice this miracle call it "being slain in the Spirit."

This miracle was foretold in Revelation 13. The whole chapter is describing the great tribulation period. In verse 13 we read:

"And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men."

Satan, of course, cannot literally call down fire from heaven. This is proven by the contest between the 450 prophets of Baal, who were Satans emissaries, and Elijah. But God gave Satan a demonstration that showed that causing someone to fall backward was equivalent to calling down fire from heaven.

In 2 Kings 1 we read about the wicked king of Israel who sent a captain with 50 men with a command to Elijah that he was to come to the king. Elijah caused fire to come down and destroy these men. Likewise in Revelation 20 we read about the nations from the four quarters of the earth surrounding the camp of the saints, and fire from heaven came down and destroyed them.

There is another incident recorded in the Bible when Satan wished to conquer the kingdom of God. That occurred when Jesus came out of the Garden of Gethsemene. There stood the emissaries of Satan, the temple servants, together with Judas who was in filled by Satan and they desired to bind Jesus and have Him crucified. At that moment Jesus following the example of Elijah or of God in Revelation 20:10 should have called for fire to come down and destroy these wicked men.

But Jesus had to be bound and taken to be crucified. This was an integral part of the atonement. However, to show that He had the power to call down fire from heaven and destroy them, when He answered them Jesus caused all of these wicked men to fall backward to the ground.

Satan, therefore, was an eyewitness to the fact that causing people to fall backward to the ground is equivalent to calling down fire from heaven.

Thus, this miracle of people falling backward to the ground which is occurring all over the world is clear evidence that we are now in the great tribulation period of Revelation 13 and Matthew 24.

There is another startling evidence that shows us that we are in the second part of the great tribulation. Remember Matt 24:22 declared:

"And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."

In Rev 7 the Bible teaches that after the 144000 from 12 tribes of Israel have been sealed on their foreheads there would be a great multitude that no man can number that would come out of great tribulation into salvation.

We can be certain that the 144000 are the complete fulness of all those would become saved by the activity of the churches during the New Testament era. But as we learned from Revelation 11 and 2 Corinthians 10 there would come a time when the work of the churches was finished. As we have seen this coincides with the beginning of the great tribulation.

But after this there would be a great multitude saved. We read in Revelation 7:9 :

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands. "

Verse 14 teaches us that these who are clothed with white robes are those who come out of great tribulation. How can this be? Significantly at this time in history when the world's population is exploding, God has provided means by which the true Gospel can be heralded forth all over the world. This is particularly true as the Gospel is sent out by radio, by satellite, by Internet. Never before in the history of the world can a whole continent come under the umbrella of the Gospel.

Because we witness this phenomena by a ministry such as Family Radio which in no sense is under the authority of the church and which tries to be as faithful to the Bible as possible, we can know that we are in that time of the great tribulation. The next event will be the return of Christ and the end of the world. And that brings us to a very real but very troublesome question. If we can still find or are still a part of a church that is reasonably true to the Bible, should we remain there. Does the Bible give us clear instruction concerning this very important question. Fact is, what are we to do if we could find a church where it appears that each and every doctrine they hold and teach is faithful to the Word of God.

To answer this question we must re-examine God's commands to ancient Israel when Babylon had destroyed Jerusalem. In Jeremiah 29 God gave express commands that no one was to remain in Jerusalem. In verses 16 - 19 we read:

"Know that thus saith the Lord of the king that sitteth upon the throne of David, and of all the people that dwelleth in this city, and of your brethren that are not gone forth with you into captivity; thus saith the Lord of hosts; Behold, I will send upon them the sword, the famine, and pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. And I will persecute them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be removed to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse, and an astonishment, and a hissing, and a reproach, among all the nations whither I have driven them: because they have not hearkened to my words, saith

the Lord, which I sent unto them by my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but ye would not hear, saith the Lord."

This passage plainly declares that God's judgment is upon all those who refused to go as captives into Babylon.

Fact is some did remain and their leaders were murdered. Following this the remnant went into Egypt where they were under the judgment of God.

In other words it was God's plan that no one was to remain in Jerusalem. The only way they could come under the blessing of God was to be as captives under the care of Babylon which represents the whole kingdom of Satan. But God would watch over them utilizing Babylon to give them protection. They could receive no help or guidance from Jerusalem:

Significantly God declares in Luke 21:20-24:

"And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled."

Please notice that God is not saying that when we experience Jerusalem is surrounded by armies. Rather it is saying that when we see Jerusalem surrounded by armies. Jerusalem or Judea represent all of the New Testament churches and denominations. When we see, as we do see, Satan's massive attack on churches all over the world we are to depart out.

This is language that identifies with the great tribulation. In this language God is commanding the same thing He commanded Jerusalem in Jeremiah 29. Get out of Jerusalem (the church). No longer are you to be under the spiritual rulership of the church.

This command is given because God is finished with the era of churches being used of God to evangelize.

We are to flee to the mountains even as Lot was told to flee to the mountain when God was ready to bring judgment on Sodom (Gen 19:17). The mountain or mountains are a reference of God being our help (Ps 121:1, Ps 125:1).

Significantly, in Revelation 11, where God speaks of the work of the church being finished He speaks of Jerusalem (the churches) as Sodom and Egypt. (Rev 11: 8).

Significantly, too, as He addresses the subject of the great tribulation, He says, "Remember Lot's wife". She refused to flee and ended up under judgment. Those who attempted to remain in Jerusalem in 587 B.C. came under the judgment of God.

Remember we saw this warning in Jeremiah 29: 16-19.

The message should be clear. We must remove ourself from the church.

In the context of "Remember Lot's wife God also declares in Luke 17:31:

"In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field let him likewise not return back."

The housetop is identified with bringing the Gospel. In Luke 12:3 we read:

"Therefore, whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops."

The house identifies with the church. But as judgment comes on the church the true believer is to stay outside the church bringing the Gospel to the world. God speaks to this sad situation in the language of Isaiah 3:6-8:

"When a man shall take hold of his brother of the house of his father, say, Thou hast clothing, be thou our ruler and let this ruin be under thy hand: in that day shall he swear, saying, I will not be a healer; for in my house is neither bread nor clothing: make me not a ruler of the people. For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen: because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory."

Because the church era has come to an end the churches have become dead as the church of Sardis long ago became dead. (Rev 3:1). The churches of today have had their candlestick removed even as the church of Ephesus of Rev. 2 was warned that God would remove their candlestick if they did not return to their first love. The church has ceased to be an institution or divine organism to serve God as His appointed representative on earth.

It is no wonder that it is almost impossible to find a church today that will modify its Confessions to make them more faithful to the Bible. Remember the Bible says that it is God who works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure. Therefore, if a church no longer has a candlestick it means God is not working in that church. The elders and deacons are being guided by their own minds rather than by the Holy Spirit.

In Like 21:5,6 the Bible says:

"And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, He said, as for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

These temple buildings represent the churches and congregations God would build throughout the New Testament time.

Those who come into this spiritual temple are gold, silver and precious stones, and wood, hay, stubble, (I Cor 3:12). That is they are both true believers and those who appear to be true believers and actually are not. Thus each congregation is an integral part of that great temple.

But Jesus declares that there will be a time when there will not be left one stone upon another. That is the temple will be totally destroyed. It will no longer exist.

But suppose a congregation believes that it can remove all of the high places. It will endeavor to be as faithful to the Bible as possible.

It then is insisting that it is still a tiny part of the temple that still exists. But Christ said "there will not be left one stone upon another". Thus this congregation is effectively saying they are more holy than God. That congregation should realize that no church can still be a part of the temple. But there is a command that God gives to the post - church believer. It is found in Hebrews 10:25 where God commands:

"not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

Significantly the Greek word translated "assembling" in this verse is only found in one other place and that is in 2 Thess 2:1 where it is the word "gathering together." But this gathering together consists only of true believers because it is a "gathering together unto Him" as Christ comes on the last day. Thus, it is a word that identifies only with true believers. As the end of the world approaches few true believers are found inside the churches because the era of the church as an institution used of God has come to an end.

True, the Sunday Sabbath is still God's Holy day. It is a day that continues as a day for spiritual activity. But this day no longer focuses on the church as an external institution. Rather it focuses on the eternal body of believers which is also called the eternal church. It is the church over which the gates of Hell cannot prevail (Matt. 16: 18).

Now the big question. What are we to do now that we have this information concerning the church.

If the church age has come to an end, what are the believers to do who are members of churches.

Obedience to the command of Luke 21:20-24 can be accomplished in various ways. If a person or family is a member of a church they can withdraw their membership and fellowship on sundays with whomever there may be who are of like mind. Such withdrawal may initiate a move by the church to excommunicate. For that individual that is not a trauma because he has become convinced that the church era

has come to an end and the church no longer has any divine authority.

If the individual or family are simply attending a church and are not members they can stop attending that church but continue to fellowship outside of the church with individuals of like mind.

If a congregation decides to be obedient to this command they can reorganize their congregation from a church congregation, to become a fellowship of believers. The elders will no longer be elders. The deacons will no longer be deacons. The Pastor will no longer be pastor. In other words no individuals will have spiritual rule over the congregation. Those members of this congregation who disagree with this decision to disband would have to find membership in another congregation.

In any case the decision to withdraw altogether from the church as an institution is a very personal one. No teacher of Family Radio or any one else has the authority to command this. All passages like Jeremiah 29 and Luke 21:20-24 should be looked at carefully and prayerfully and then each one should make his own decision. This is so because now that the church as a corporate institution has no spiritual authority, each person must answer directly to God.

ADDENDUM

We have learned that in God's predetermined plan for the world that we have finally come to that time which God calls the time of great tribulation. It is the time when the work of the corporate external church has been finished. It is no longer being used of God to do the work that had been assigned it to do as its principle endeavor. That work is to evangelize the world. For more than nineteen hundred years, even though the churches and congregations have had many imperfections of doctrinal failures, God has used them as a divine organism, as a God blessed institution to spread the Gospel to every area of the world.

But now the time has come when the era of the church age has come to an end. The time has come for others to complete the task of world evangelization. And simultaneously with the end of the church age God has brought His judgment upon the churches. For more than 1900 years God has tolerated the wrong doctrines even as He tolerated the high places of Old Testament Israel. But now God has loosed Satan and through his deceptions churches all over the world have become apostate, following the desires of men rather than those of God. Satan has been allowed to marshal his forces to surround Jerusalem and destroy it. We have learned that the terms Jerusalem and Judea refer to the corporate external church.

Remember the true believers are instructed in Luke 21:20 to depart out of Jerusalem when this time would come. Thus we have

learned that the time has now come when we must leave our churches and congregations even though we are to continue to gather together to fellowship with other true believers (Hebrews 10:25).

That this command is to be obeyed by every believer is underscored by the language of Luke 21:5,6 where God declares that in the temple there would not be one stone left upon another stone that would not be thrown down. We learned that according to 1 Corinthians 3 the temple is the corporate church that God had been building for more 1900 years.

But the question must be raised; If a church earnestly tries to remove all of its wrong doctrines (its spiritual high places) and if it still has true believers within it, why cannot it continue as a viable God blessed congregation. In answer to this question at least two answers must be carefully considered.

The first answer is that if God declares there is not to be left one stone upon another. This means that God is declaring that it is His intention that there is not to be any churches left to represent God's kingdom. If a church insists that it is still recognized by God then it is still trying to have a small part in the temple of God. The believers (the stones) in that church are still in place in the temple of God. But that cannot be because God declares there will not be left one stone upon another. This means that God's usage of the churches and congregations has come to an end.

The second answer has to do with the nature and purpose of the church. The primary purpose of the church is to evangelize. Preaching should be such that first of all those who attend the church, including the children, might hear the true Gospel and that God would bless the Word in the lives of those who are the hearers. In this manner a great many who are a part of that church might become saved. Additionally it was to send out missionaries both locally in their cities but also into all the world. As this was faithfully done God's program was to bless these activities so that all of His elect could become saved.

But then we read Amos 8:11:

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord."

The book of Amos is speaking of the very time in which we are now living. And this verse is very pertinent to this time. God is speaking of a famine that is to come. It is not a famine of bread and water. Spiritually bread identifies with Jesus who is the bread of life. Water has to do with the true Gospel. Thus God is declaring this is not a time when there is a famine of the declaration of the true Gospel. That is, in the churches that exist today there may still be Pastors that faithfully bring the true Gospel to their

congregations. There may still be missionaries sent out by these faithful churches who are still faithfully bringing the Gospel to the lost of the world.

However, it is the next phrase that is so ominous. "a famine of hearing the Word of God." Why is that so ominous. We must remember there are two very important ingredients in God's plan of saving the elect. First of all they must be under the hearing of the Word of God. Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 8:17).

Secondly God must apply that faithful Word to the hearts of those He plans to save. God opened the heart of Lydia (Acts 16:14). That is, if God is going to save someone He must give that person spiritual ears to hear the Word spoken.

Jesus, for example, as the perfect preacher declared the Gospel for three and a half years. Yet at the end of His ministry there were only 120 believes in Jerusalem and a little more than 500 in Galilee. And many of these were already saved before Christ began to preach. Jesus tells us why this was so. In Matthew 13:13,14:

"Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, by hearing shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall not see, and shall not perceive."

For three and a half years there had been the most faithful preaching possible, but God was not applying that Word to the hearts of those who were hearing it. But when Peter preached one sermon at Pentecost there were about 3000 who were saved. Obviously it is not the faithful preaching alone that God uses a means to save people. It also requires that the Holy Spirit must apply that Word to the hearts of those God plans to save.

The Bible approaches this question from a different vantage point in 2 Thess. 2:3-12. There God is speaking of the time when the man of sin will take his seat in the temple of God and will be worshiped as God. The man of sin can only be Satan. He is called a man because he is typified by the king of Babylon. Isa 14 prophecies that the king of Babylon who is also called Lucifer would desire to be like the most High (Isa 14:14). It also declares that he wanted to sit, that is reign, upon the mount of the congregation (Isa 14:13).

This desire of Satan (Lucifer) was fulfilled during the time of the great tribulation even as 2 Thess declares that the man of sin would sit (reign) in the temple of God.)

Returning to 2 Thess 2, we read verse 7 which warns:

"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way."

The word "letteth" is an old English word that would better be translated "restraineth". The word "way" in the phrase "taken out of the way" is altogether incorrect. It is a Greek word that is found many times in the Bible but never is it translated as "way". It is most commonly translated "midst".

Many Bible scholars have correctly seen that the "he" who now restraineth must be the Holy Spirit. "The mystery of iniquity now worketh" tells us there has always been sin or iniquity in the temple (the New Testament churches). But this mystery of iniquity has been restrained by God binding Satan (Rev 20:2).

However, the time was to come when this restraint who can be none other than the Holy Spirit, would be taken out of the midst. The question is, which midst is the Holy Spirit removed from to allow Satan to rule in the churches and congregations.

Obviously, the only possibility is that the Holy Spirit would be taken from the midst of the temple.

In 1 Corinthians 3 the Bible discusses the building of the temple. Within it are gold, silver and precious stones (the true believers). But also within it are wood, hay, and stubble (those who believed they are saved obviously are not saved).

In 1 Corinthians 3:16 God speaks of the temple being made of many individuals:

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

The word "ye" in this word is plural. That is, the temple consists of many individuals who together are the temple. The verse continues by declaring "the Spirit of God dwelleth in you".

Again, the word "you" is a plural word indicating therefore that the Spirit of God indwells the congregations as they are being used of God to evangelize.

However, 2 Thess 2 indicated there will be a time when the Holy Spirit will be taken out of the midst. We must understand then that the Holy Spirit will be taken out of the temple. That is, He will remove Himself from the congregations and denominations that had become a part of the temple of God.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is to guide the work of the church. More importantly He is to apply the Word of God as it is faithfully preached to the hearts of those whom God has elected to salvation.

However, if the Holy Spirit is no longer working in the church it means no one can become saved as the result of the preaching in that church. This is so, because God is no longer present to apply the Word to the hearts of the unsaved. Effectively the candlestick has been removed. This is so even though there still is plenty of spiritual bread and water. There is still faithful preaching. That is why the believers are

commanded to come out of Judea and Jerusalem.

Now we can understand more plainly verse 19 of Matthew 24 where we read:

" And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!"

The terrible truth is that children born in that congregation may be under the hearing of good preaching. But if the Holy Spirit is not in the midst of that congregation they will not become saved. That family has a serious problem that can only be remedied by leaving the congregation. We can now understand the sad verses recorded in Lamentations 2:11,12 where we read:

"Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people; because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city. They say to their mothers, Where is corn and wine? when they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city, when their soul was poured out into their mothers' bosom."

These sorrowful words are part of a lament that the Holy Spirit spoke through Jeremiah as Judah was experiencing the judgment of God following the death of King Josiah in 609 B.C.

"Where is the corn and wine". Corn and wine are words pointing to the Gospel, Jesus is the bread of life. He has provided His blood (the wine) for our salvation. But now there is no corn and wine, no salvation possible. This is because there is a famine of hearing the Word of God. The Holy Spirit is no longer working in the congregations.

The true Gospel may still be faithfully preached. Those who are saved may experience blessings. But what about the infants and the children. If the Holy Spirit is not applying the Word of God by giving these children spiritual ears they will remain spiritually dead. How awful this is. This is a frightening truth that parents must face. If they truly love their children and are praying for their salvation they must consider this problem very seriously.

One can argue; but God will save them if they are elect. True, but God's elective plan is God's business. We are to be obedient to God's commandments. We never want to set up our own rules. We are to be obedient to God's commands. He tells us the Holy Spirit has been taken from the temple and we are to come out of it. Therefore if we have a concern for the salvation of

our children we should want to obey God's command to flee from the temple. Wonderfully it is still the day of salvation; but it is God who sets up the plan through which He will work to save.

Remember we read in Amos 8 that there would come a time of a famine of hearing the Word of God. Thus even though the

Word of God is faithfully preached, if God does not give spiritual ears to the hearers of that Word, they cannot be saved.

This solemn truth bears repeating. There may still exist congregations in which true believers are still hearing faithful preaching by which they are blessed because God previously had opened their spiritual ears to the Word of God. But any children or adults that are not saved cannot be saved if God will not open their spiritual ears. In that church there will be a famine of hearing the Word of God. Likewise the missionary that is sent out by that church will see no true fruit on his labors. No matter how faithful his preaching may be there will be a famine of hearing the Word of God.

Now we can understand why God commands us to depart out of Jerusalem. It is for our own spiritual safety and the spiritual welfare of our children that we are to depart out.

Significantly we learn the same lesson from Acts 28. In that chapter Paul is a picture of all who have been cast out of the churches and congregations. In this chapter as in chapters 22-27 of the book of Acts the churches and congregations are typified by the Jews who do not want to hear the whole counsel of God. There is a New Testament church in Rome at the time Paul is there and its members have full knowledge of Paul. Yet in Acts 28 the church is not mentioned at all. This is so because spiritually God is using that occasion as a portrait of the time of the great tribulation when the church era has ended.

In Acts 28 we read that Paul preached from morning till evening the Word of God. And no preacher had better knowledge of the whole council of God than Paul who was the scribe whom God used to give as so many of the New Testaments books.

Yet with all of this faithful preaching what was the result? While some believed (literally were being convinced) (vs. 24) the Jews who heard him agreed not amongst themselves (vs. 25) and had great reasoning amongst themselves (vs. 29). That is, they did not accept these teachings they were hearing as the Word of God that should be implicitly obeyed. Rather they were testing what they heard by their own human reasoning. That is they were making their own minds the final authority. In other words God had not opened their spiritual ears.

That this is so is indicated by vs. 25-27 which declare:

"And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, go unto this people, and say, hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their eyes have they

closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

This principle that during the great tribulation God can give commands that will be plainly declared but will not be heard because God does not give spiritual ears is illustrated at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.

At that time God had commanded all those left alive in Jerusalem to go as captives into Babylon. Jeremiah 38:2 records:

"Thus saith the Lord, He that remaineth in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live; for he shall have his life for a prey, and shall live."

However, Babylon allowed some of the poor of the land to remain in the land of Judah (Jer 39:10). But then a number of them were killed, even as God had warned them that this would happen if they did not go into Babylon as captives. They then came to Jeremiah asking him to find out from God what they should do. The context shows they did not want to go to Babylon as captives. They either wanted to remain in Judah or go to Egypt for safety.

God answered Jeremiah by declaring that they could remain in Judah but they were not to go to Egypt (Jer 42:9-22). The answer of these Jews to this command of God shows that God's command made no impact whatsoever on them. God had not given them spiritual ears to hear and obey this latest command from God. Instead they accused Jeremiah of lying (Jer 43:2,3) and deliberately disobeyed God by going into Egypt (Jer 43:5-7). This is clear evidence that God can speak clearly but that does not mean that He will give ears to hear what He speaks.

The problem is that of a famine of the hearing of the Word of God. Returning to Acts 28 we learn that the Jews who represent the churches and congregations do not have spiritual ears to hear. On the other hand we read in Acts 28 of Paul freely preaching to the Gentiles. That must be understood to indicate that even though Christ is no longer using the churches to bring in the elect, He is still saving all over the world. But it is done so with God no longer using the corporate external church to bring the Word. He is still using believers, but these believers are no longer a part of the corporate external church.

We must remember that while the corporate, visible, external church is under the judgment of God, the invisible, eternal church of which every true believer is a part cannot be harmed in any way. It continues until the end of the world and goes on into eternity. The true believer can never lose his salvation. The gates of Hell can never prevail against the invisible, eternal church.

There are those who wish to maintain that the phrase "until I come" as we find it in a number of New Testament verses proves that the corporate external church must continue to the end of the world. For example, we read concerning the Lord's Supper that as often as ye eat the bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come." (I Cor 11:26). When God uses the phrase "till He come" it appears that it was God's intention that this ordinance was to be observed until the return of Christ at the end of time.

To understand this concept we must look at the Old Testament where God records parallel situations. For example in Leviticus 6:12-13 God commands:

"And the fire upon the altar shall be burning in it; it shall not be put out: and the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the brunt offering in order upon it; and he shall burn thereon the fat of the peace offerings. The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out."

This is similar to many other commands of the Old Testament wherein God expected that the daily sacrifices and daily lamp stands were never to cease. That is they were to continue until Christ would come as the fulfillment of all of those ceremonial laws.

However, Israel violated every one of these commands at a time when they ceased to observe every one of them. But their violation did not occur because they wanted to stop obeying these commands. They violated these commands because God Himself interrupted the temple service by totally destroying Jerusalem and the temple in the year 587 B.C. God destroyed Jerusalem and the temple as a judgment on Judah. This judgment occurred because they had not removed the high places.

Likewise the New Testament commands which should be obeyed within the churches and congregations until He comes can no longer be obeyed because God has brought judgment upon the institution of the church. Thus God has effectively ended the possibility of the observance of the New Testament ceremonial laws - water baptism and the Lord's supper.

Incidentally please note that circumcision in the Old Testament was a ceremonial law pointing to the need of having one's sins cut away. So, too, water baptism is a ceremonial law pointing to the need of having our sins washed away. Likewise the Passover, the burnt offerings, the blood sacrifices were all Old Testament ceremonial commands pointing to Jesus who was the lamb of God who was sacrificed. Likewise the Lord's supper is a ceremonial law pointing to the death of Christ by which we receive eternal life, and pointing to the marriage feast of the bride and the lamb which signifies the completion of our salvation. The church made a high place of these observances by calling them "Sacraments." This word

Sacrament implies that some spiritual work is being performed in the life of the one observing the physical act. Thus it actually makes the Gospel a works-grace Gospel. This is altogether contrary to the true Gospel. The word "sacrament" is not even found in the Bible.

Isn't it wonderful how harmonious the Bible is. When the Holy Spirit has opened our eyes to truth we are greatly encouraged as we discover the harmony that exists all through the scriptures concerning that truth.