

THE PAROUSIA OF CHRIST

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THE PAROUSIA OF CHRIST

TWO PHASES OF CHRIST'S MINISTRY TOWARDS THE CHURCH

The activities of the Lord Jesus Christ in his Parousia, is directed towards his people (the church). He comes to carry out a work in the midst of the church in preparing her for full union with him.

We are shown in the scriptures that there are two phases in the ministry of Christ towards the church: the first advent, and the second phase which is fulfilled at the time of his Second Advent. Two scriptural passages, which when examined together help us to readily see this are Isaiah 61-62, and Luke 4:16-21. We reproduce below some parts of these passages.

Isaiah 61:1-3:

**1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is
upon me; because the LORD hath**

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anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *them that are bound*;

2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;

3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

Luke 4:16-21:

16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was

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written,

18 The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

20 And he closed the book, and he gave *it* again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

In Luke 4:16-21, the Lord Jesus Christ was reading from Isaiah 61. After reading from the first verse, however, he stopped his reading in the middle of the second verse which says, "*to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God.*" We have reasons to believe that this was a deliberate action on the Lord's part. What the Lord actually did was to quote the portion of Isaiah 61:1-3 that was to be fulfilled under his ministry during the first

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advent. The remaining part of the scripture which were to have fulfilment in the time of his Second Advent was deliberately left out. The day of vengeance of God was to be associated with the time of his Second Advent, the time of the end even though Israel was to experience a measure of that divine vengeance in AD 70 (Isaiah 63:4). It was not a phrase that fitted into the ministry he came to fulfil in his first advent. So, Isaiah 61:1-3 covers not only the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ in his first advent but that which he comes to do among his people in his Second Advent. Verse 2b of Isaiah 61 to verse 6 of Isaiah 63, relates particularly to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ towards his people in his Second Advent. He comes to proclaim the day of vengeance of God, even the year of his redeemed (Isaiah 63:4), to comfort all that mourn (that includes the whole of the human race, for creation is groaning and travailing under the bondage of corruption: Romans 8:22 and Revelation 1:7 assures us that all the kindred of the earth are yet going to mourn because of him. But the Lord will come to accomplish the restitution of all things: Acts 3:21). He did not comfort *all* that mourn in the days of his flesh, but he will accomplish that total restitution in the time of his Second Advent.

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He comes in the Second Advent to appoint to them that *mourn in Zion*, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness: that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified. And through these ones, the Lord is to build the old wastes, to raise up the former desolations, to repair the waste cities, even the desolations of many generations (Isaiah 61:4).

SYMBOLISMS OF THE FEASTS

Another way we can understand the activities of the Lord in the midst of his people in this time is to look at the Old Testament feasts. From 1 Corinthians 5:7, we know that these feasts typify the Lord Jesus Christ in the redemption that he purchased for man on the cross. He is the Lamb of God whose flesh man must eat and whose blood man must drink to have life (John 6:35-58).

There are seven feasts God commanded the children of Israel to observe (Leviticus 23). These are the feast of *Passover* (verse 5), the feast of *unleavened bread* (verse 6 & 7), the feast of *firstfruits* or the waving of the sheaves (verses 9-14), the feast of *Pentecost* or the feast of weeks (verses 15-22), the feast of *trumpets* (verses 24 & 25), the feast of *atonement* (verse

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27-32) and the feast of *tabernacles* (verse 34-36). These seven feasts were divided into three blocks. The feasts of Passover, unleavened bread and the firstfruits took place within the same time period (in the first month) and hence constitute the first block. This first group of feasts are collectively called the Passover (sometimes they are also called the feast of unleavened bread: Mathew 26:2; Luke 2:21, 22:1; John 2:13, 6:4; Exodus 23:15). The fourth feast, the feast of Pentecost, takes place in the third month; fifty days from the day the feast of firstfruits is celebrated. Actually, the word Pentecost means fifty. This is the only feast fulfilled in the third month. Hence it individually constitutes the second block. The last three feasts (the feast of trumpet, atonement and tabernacles) takes place on the seventh month and hence constitute the third block. The three feasts are collectively called the *Feast of Tabernacles* or the *Feast of Ingathering* (Exodus 23:16). Thus every male among the Israelites was required to gather unto the Lord three times in the year (in the first, third and seventh months). And none was to appear before the Lord empty (Exodus 23:14-20).

These seven feasts can be understood to mean our progressive experience of the redemption that Christ secured for us on the cross. Each

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feast symbolizes a definite experience in redemption. And the seven feasts may be looked upon as the journey of the believer from the point of salvation to the experience of the fullness of redemption in Christ.

The feast of Passover answers to the experience of salvation that comes when a person believes on the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin and becomes a new creature. At that point in time, the person is translated from the power (kingdom) of darkness (symbolized, in a sense, by Egypt), into the Kingdom of God's Son. That constitutes the beginning of days unto the believer (Exodus 12:2). Old things pass away, all things become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

At the point of salvation, the power of sin over the individual is broken. He receives a capacity to live unto God in newness of life, loving, desiring and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness (which is symbolized in the unleavened bread: 1 Corinthians 5:6-8). In addition, the believer passes from death unto life (1 John 3:14; John 5:24). He experiences a raising up from the dead (this raising up is the first element in the experience of resurrection). He is quickened in his spirit, who was once dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). And in appreciation of the grace of God in salvation, he

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offers himself unto God in consecration, in the service of his (God's) will, as one that is alive from the dead (Romans 6:13). He begins to bring to God the sacrifices of praise, thanksgiving and adoration, acceptable unto God through our High priest the Lord Jesus Christ, bearing fruit which endures unto life eternal. This is the fulfilment of the feast of the firstfruits (the waving of the sheaves) in the life of the believer.

All the above (which all happen in the same season) constitute various elements associated with the celebration of the feast of Passover (in its three divisions – Passover, unleavened bread and firstfruits) by the believer in Christ Jesus. To what extent these things are true in a believer's life, to that extent, he has celebrated (and is still celebrating) the feast of Passover.

The feast of Pentecost answers to the coming of the Lord to indwell the believer in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It opens up the believer to the supernatural manifestation of the life, graces and power of the Holy Spirit as they are revealed in the 23 manifestations of the Spirit revealed in the bible (the 9 gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12, the 9 fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23, and the 5 ministerial gifts of the Spirit shown in

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Ephesians 4:11). The believer, upon baptism with the Holy Spirit, is to know, enjoy and grow in the experience of these gifts and graces of the Spirit. He is to be open more and more to those realities as he learns to live and walk in the Spirit. Thus, by the baptism with the Holy Spirit, the believer is made capable of knowing God, experiencing him and serving him in a far greater dimension than is possible under the experience of Passover.

The feast of Pentecost is called the feast of harvest (Exodus 23:16). This is because the baptism with the Holy Spirit enables the believer to reap the harvest of the Spirit nature, graces and glories. It is the baptism with the Holy Spirit that opens up the believer (in a very real way) to the riches of the divine inheritance. But the harvest that the believer reaps with the Holy Spirit baptism if adequately utilized is only a firstfruit (Exodus 23:16; Leviticus 23:15-22). It is not yet the full harvest. It is not the fullness of the nature, riches and glory of the divine unto which the believer has been called. This is why the bible speaks of the firstfruits or earnest of the Spirit: Romans 8:23, 2 Corinthians 5:3. The full harvest is to be experienced at the "*end of the year*" under the feast of ingathering.

We know that in the main, the church as a body has experienced Christ in the Passover and in

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the Pentecost, but the fulfilment of the feast of Tabernacles in the church is something that belongs to the time of the end. Typical for the Jews, the feast of tabernacles constituted the most glorious of all the feasts. It was in that feast that the people were commanded to rejoice before the Lord with great rejoicing (Deuteronomy 16:13-15). But that feast was to take place at the end of the year harvest in the seventh month, which month marked the end of their religious calendar. So also for the church, we are told in Mathew 13:39 that the harvest is at the end of the church age (translated as the end of the world by the King James Version).

Leviticus 23:4 shows that each of these three groups of feasts has its times and seasons. And each can only be celebrated when the times and seasons set in. There are times and seasons which God has set in his own power in relation to the work of redemption (Acts 1:7). And men may experience a certain aspect of the power of redemption in Christ, only when the time which God has set for that experience to be ministered to men has set in. We are also shown that when the times and seasons set in for each feast to be celebrated, it is to be first proclaimed. It is the proclamation of the feasts that enables the Lord's people to enter into their enjoyment.

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Since the antitypical fulfilment of the feasts is entered around the redemption that is in Christ, it is expected that for each feast to be fulfilled towards men, the Lord Jesus Christ himself must be present. This is the thought in Acts 3:20. The Father sends Jesus to men according to the times and seasons of God to fulfil something in the plan and purposes of God in redemption towards men. Thus, we can say that *each of these three classes of feasts is associated with a definite coming of the Lord to his people.*

For the feast of Passover and the feast of Pentecost to be fulfilled in the church, the Lord Jesus Christ had to come in his first advent. The bible says "*but when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law*" (Galatians 4:4). He came to die upon the cross, to be sacrificed as the Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7). After three days, he was raised up from the dead and became the firstfruits of them that slept (1 Corinthians 15:20). And fifty days after that waving of the sheaves in resurrection, when the day of Pentecost was fully come (Acts 2:1). He came to the people in the outpouring of the Spirit. And, since then, he has been coming to the church, to individuals in Passover and in Pentecost through the power of his word and of the Spirit.

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Similarly, the fulfilment of the feast of ingathering is to be associated with the Second Advent of the Lord. He came in the Passover, he came also in Pentecost, and he will come to the church again in tabernacles. But that coming is in the "*seventh month*", at the end of the year (Exodus 23:16) - the end of the church age. The long gap between the first advent of Christ, which ended with the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost and the Second Advent are seasons of refreshing which the Lord continue to shower upon his people.

It is for the above reason that the prophetic scriptures always associated the Second Advent with the sound of the trumpet (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 1 Corinthians 15:25, Mathew 24:31, Revelations 10:7, 11:15). The feast of trumpets is the first feast in the feast of ingathering. The proclamation of that feast is what announces the beginning of the seventh month, the time of the great harvest.

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The Symbolism of the Rain

We have seen earlier that the presence of the Lord among his people (the coming of the Lord to his people) is symbolized in the outpouring of rain (Hosea 6:3). This speaks of the release of his word and the power of his Spirit making Christ known in and through his people. The Holy Spirit makes Christ known to men, first in his words, then in the experiences of his life, grace, power and glory. He leads men increasingly into all truth and gradually builds up the life and glory of Christ into man until he comes to perfect knowledge in the things of God and to the full stature of Christ. He gradually makes his abode in us as we open unto him, until we become a perfect and glorious tabernacle of the immortal God.

In the picture of the rain, we are also shown in the scriptures that there are two dispensations in the activities of the Lord towards the church. He comes as the *early rain*, and again, he comes as the *latter rain*. We know from our world that the early rain is usually associated with the sowing period. The rain prepares the ground for the seed to be sown and waters that which has been sown, causing it to germinate, to take root downward and shoot forth heavenward (2 kings 19:30, Isaiah 37:31, Colossians 2:7). The latter rain, on the other hand, is associated with

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the harvest. The rain comes to enable that which has been sown, nourished and grown to a “*large*” measure under the early rain, to quickly mature and to bear fruits in large measures. It also enables the fruits to be fully developed and ripened, ready for the farmer to reap and gather into his barn. This actually is the picture shown in James 5:7-8 even though we know that the scripture can be applied to the believer as the husbandman who must sow the seed and seek God for both the sowing and harvesting rain in order to reap the full benefit of the blessing of God’s word. God is the husbandman. He has planted his vine in the earth. The seed sown is the word of God bearing the life of the divine One. The seed has been sown and watered by the early rain. And God waits patiently for the precious fruits of the earth. God knows he must have long patience for it and his patience has taken about two thousand years until he has given not only the former, but also the latter rain. These *precious fruits of the earth* are men and women who will be raised up in the full glory of the Lord, manifesting his life, glory and power in all fullness. Isaiah 53:10-11 says: *he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied.*

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The coming of the Lord to his people in the early rain is associated with the fulfilment of the feasts of Passover and Pentecost; while the coming of the Lord in the latter rain is associated with the feast of tabernacles (ingathering or harvest). The early rain given is what brings the church to the *earnest of the divine inheritance*, while the latter rain fully given brings her into the *fullness of the inheritance*. Full spiritual maturity (both in our knowledge of God, of his plans and purposes and in our spiritual ministries), perfection of life, the redemption of the body, glorification with the Lord Jesus Christ in the fullness of immortality, are things that *cannot* be realized under the early rain (in the celebration of the feasts of Passover and Pentecost), even though they are contained in the divine inheritance unto which God has called the church. Paul, with all the glory he manifested under the early rain, said concerning himself and others like him in the early church *“for we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.... for now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”*

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The Symbolic Harvest of the Old Testament Age

We know that the Old Testament age was setup by God to accomplish some purpose in the divine plan of redemption. One major purpose for that age is the preparation of a people to receive the Messiah and the message of salvation and of the kingdom which the Messiah was to bring in his first advent. God spent over a thousand years preparing the Jews through and unto whom (specifically) the Messiah would be revealed. Galatians 3 and 4 assures us that the law covenant which God introduced was to prepare the hearts of the people, to show them in shadows, the redemption that was to come through the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God that was to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

We are shown that at the closing period of the Old Testament age, God sent forth his Son; he came to do two things. First, to introduce the new covenant, which was to be sealed by his blood, and to open the door of the Kingdom (John 10:22). Secondly, He came to reap the harvest of God's activities in the Old Testament age, and thus, wind up that order of things.

That there was a work of harvest that the Lord Jesus Christ came to carry out *among the Jews* in

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his first advent, is clearly revealed in John 4:35-38; Matthew 9:36, 10:1-42 and Luke 10, among other scriptures. God had sown and watered. Now, it was time for the harvest. And God sent forth his son to seek the desired fruit from that plant of the Lord which the Jewish nation was.

Before the manifestation of his Son, God had, first of all, sent to the people a messenger who was to prepare the way of the Lord. John came calling the people to return unto the Lord and bring forth fruit meet for repentance. There is one that was to come after him, who would come to gather in the harvest. He would gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he would burn with unquenchable fire (Luke 3:16-17). Not many in Israel however profited by John's ministry even though the multitude appeared to have been moved by his message and the anointing upon him. Majority did not give heed but a remnant (a very small fraction of the people) was prepared by the ministry of John to recognize, receive and follow the Messiah. And, throughout the three and a half years of his ministry in the days of his flesh, only a *small remnant* became his disciples indeed.

Unto this little flock he said "*fear not, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*" (Luke 12:32). It is this little remnant that was

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gathered into the Lord's barn for a further work of redemption. Among them the Lord laboured, teaching them the hidden things of the kingdom revealing to them things which to others are spoken in parables (Matthew 13:9-17, 34-36; Mark 4:34). And after he had given up his humanity, for forty days after his resurrection, he was in the midst of this same people, teaching and breathing upon them, preparing them for the work God was to do in the coming age. And it was those who tarried among these same disciples who received the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost and who went forth declaring the gospel with power.

That harvest of the Old Testament age lasted forty (40) years (from the time the Lord began his ministry to AD 70). The harvest ended with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Old Testament temple, and the carrying of the Jews captive into all the nations of the earth. That was the final event that led to the full close of the Old Testament age.

He Shall Come In Like Manner

What we have seen concerning the activities of the Lord among His people in the first advent are shadows of things that shall be fulfilled in a greater manner among his people in his Second Advent. In particular, those activities of the

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Lord among the faithful remnant in those forty days after his resurrection are typical of activities of the Lord among those of his people who respond to the voice of his words at the time of his Second Advent.

Notice that in those forty days, after his resurrection, the Lord, though present with, and among the remnant, was a Spirit being, invisible. On some occasions, particularly during the initial period, in order to prove to them the fact that he is now alive, he had to appear to them in human form. He even had to appear to doubting Thomas in a body that was pierced (John 20:26-29)! But he was no longer a human being; this is why he could appear and disappear at will.

Again, at the time he was finally to ascend to the right hand of the Father, it was only the faithful remnant who witnessed the event. Majority of God's people were ignorant of all that was going on in those forty days. They knew not. Unto these faithful remnant the promise was made that the Lord shall come in like manner they saw him go to heaven (Acts 1:10, 11).

The scriptures agree with the above testimony that the appearance of the Lord in his Second Advent to carry out the work of full redemption,

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shall be to the faithful among his people only. Hebrews 9:28 says *“and unto them that look for him, shall he appear a second time without sin unto salvation.”* Philippians 3:20 says *“for our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”* In John 14:21, the Lord himself said, *he that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.* Isaiah 59:20 says *“And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD.”*

Only a faithful remnant among God's people shall effectively partake of the Lord's Parousia and receive the fullness of redemption, entering into the glory of the manifestation of the Sons of God. These ones shall be under the cloud of glory of the divine presence (Acts 1:9 says a cloud received him out of their sight. Remember, also 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Revelation 10:1). They shall also have the privilege of experiencing personal divine visitations in which the Lord reveals himself to them in a very real way. These divine visitations

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or appearances will strengthen them in their convictions regarding the Lord's presence and activities, and of his power to bring them into the fullness of the divine glory. It will also prepare them to receive that glory. Isaiah 33:17 says concerning this faithful remnant, "*thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off*".

Like the harvest of the Old Testament age, the harvest of the church age will be for a *prophetic* forty years. It will reach its peak at the time of the manifestation of the sons of God, and terminate in the trampling under foot of the holy city (Revelations 11:2). That tribulation is the event that will lead to the final close of the church age.

May the Lord cause us to be among those who are alive and remaining (1 Thessalonians 4:17), that company of persons who have been enlightened by the light of his Parousia and who are eagerly seeking the fulfilment of the promise of full redemption in their lives. Amen and Amen.

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THE CONDITION OF THE CHURCHES

Much of what we have done in our meditation on the day of Lord and the first part of the Parousia of Christ, is to establish that there is a work that the Lord Jesus Christ comes to do in the church in the first phase of his Second Advent. And this work relates to the perfection and glorification of the overcoming church. We also saw that the work is a secret work and the awareness, import, meaning and purpose of the presence of Christ in the earth during that period is not known to majority of the human race, even many who have known the Lord in salvation.

We begin this second aspect of our meditation on the activities of the Lord in the Parousia by looking again at the parable of the Lord in Matthew 13:24-30, and the interpretation given in verse 36-43. We reproduce the text below for the reader's benefit.

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24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

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While it is not our intention in this volume to examine this parable in details, it is important to agree, first of all, that the parable relates to the *kingdom of heaven* (the church). It has nothing to do with the unbelieving world. When the Lord said the field is the world (verse 39), the reference is not to the planetary earth or to the unbelieving world, but rather the reference is to *the church world*. The seed of Christ is sown in the church world and not in the unbelieving world. The seed is sown in the life, the field, of his people as individuals and as a corporate body. It is in God's own kingdom (the church: the kingdom of heaven over which Christ is Head), that both the wheat and tares are found (Matthew 13:41) at the time of the end. This is a truth that must be solemnly noted. From the parable, we are shown very clearly that at the end of the church age (at the time of the great harvest) the church is to be found in a backslidden condition. There is a kind of mixture which originally was not in her but came in "*after men slept.*" The Lord accommodated this mixture even though it does not agree with his will and purposes found in her. It would be a mixture of truth and error, of light and darkness, of practices that accords with the word of God together with evil practices, of believers who fear the Lord and have yielded their hearts unto him and

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professed believers whose hearts are far from the Lord (even though they mention his name). It is in this positive state, where it is difficult to separate between them that love the Lord and them that love him not (Malachi 3:18), where evil (error) appears to triumph over good (truth) (Malachi 3:15), where the light of the truth and spiritual arrangement God originally gave to the church through the apostles can hardly be seen, that the church is found. Isaiah 59:4, 9-15 says

4 None calleth for justice, nor *any* pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.

9 Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, *but* we walk in darkness.

10 We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if *we had* no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; *we are* in desolate places as dead *men*.

11 We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment, but *there is* none; for

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salvation, *but* it is far off from us.

12 For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions *are* with us; and *as for* our iniquities, we know them;

13 In transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood.

14 And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter.

15 Yea, truth faileth; and he *that* departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw *it*, and it displeased him that *there was* no judgment.

Note that Isaiah 59 is written in the context of the coming of the Lord (verses 16-21 confirms). The passage show the situation found among God's people before his coming. The scriptures were fulfilled, in a measure, in fleshly Israel, before the first advent of Christ. But the greater fulfilment is to be found in the church (the

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spiritual Israel) just before the Second Advent of Christ.

This same picture is shown in the book of Malachi - note that this book was the last recorded witness of God to his people before the coming of the Lord in his first advent. The fear of the Lord was no longer in the midst of his house, even among his servants (Malachi 1:6-9, 2:9). His servants despise his name, haven taken his honour unto themselves. The name of the Lord is profaned among the heathen on account of the things that are done in his name (Malachi 1:11-12). The law of truth is no longer in the mouth of many of God's people. The priests have caused many to stumble (Malachi 2:6-8). Brethren deal treacherously with their brethren (Malachi 2:10), the proud appears too happy, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered (Malachi 3:14-16). The way of consecration and holiness is lightly esteemed. Because iniquity abounds, the love of many had waxed cold (Matthew 24:12).

When the Son of man comes in his Second Advent, he no longer finds faith in the earth (Luke 18:8). Faith, which we may understand to mean the whole scope of the word of truth and the responds it is supposed to create in the

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believer towards God have been corrupted. God's people waiteth for light, but behold obscurity (obscurity is from the Hebrew word *choshek*. It typifies misery, destruction, death, ignorance, sorrow, wickedness among other words.

Joel 1 shows that the destruction of truth and the life, graces, power and glories of the Spirit from the church was a gradual process. That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten (verse 4). The tares gradually took over the field of the Lord's planting, until all was leavened (Matthew 13:33)

This apostasy in which the church is found at the time of the end (which is both personal and collective) was long prophesied in scriptures. Paul tells us in 2 Thessalonians 2 that the Day of the Lord shall not come except there comes a falling away (apostasy) first. In those scriptures, he showed us that rebellion and idolatry in God's temple (the church as a body and the believer as an individual) is to become institutionalized. In other words a system of organized religion is to eventually emerge in the church world that would overthrow the place

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and headship of Christ in and among his people and set up men in the place of Christ. Verse 15 shows that error, evil practices are what were to lead to the emergence of that situation. We are also shown that there is a strong delusion that would come upon the “*nominal church*” (all among God’s people who reject truth and take pleasure in unrighteousness) which would cause them to believe a lie. That strong delusion would eventually cause the “*nominal church*” to install a man as head, as lord and king.

The Lord Jesus Christ himself, prophesied about this apostasy in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21) not only prophesied about the close of the Old Testament age but also the close of the church age and the Second Advent of Christ. This is evident from verses 32-51 of Matthew 24. In those prophecies, the Lord employed the principle of the double application of prophecy to talk of things that were to find their fulfilment, in varying forms of intensity, in both time periods.

During the close of the Old Testament age, there was the judaistic temple (a physical structure which God allowed to represent his dwelling place under that order of things). And while the disciples were still carried away by the beauty and outward splendour of the temple, the Lord

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told them that the temple would be destroyed, under divine judgment, by the gentiles. He told them, “*there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down*”. But, the Lord revealed that before that destruction, there was to be the setting up of the *abomination of desolation* in the holy place. That was to be the height of the profanity of the temple. And he told the disciples, “*when ye see these things, let them which be in Judea flee to the mountains...*”

For the Jews, this setting up of abomination of desolation took place physically. But, we know that the prophecy, like the many other things mentioned in Matthew 24 goes beyond the Old Testament temple. These is a spiritual temple, it is the church (1 Corinthians 6:19). And, at the closing period of the church age, in the height of her apostasy, there is to be the setting up of the abomination that maketh desolate in this holy place. But, like the Jewish temple, a very grievous judgment is going to come from God upon the apostate church, which judgment will bring to a *complete end* of the order of things we now see in Christendom.

We know that the apostasy that Paul talked about in 2 Thessalonians 2 (and which the Lord referred to prophetically in Matthew 24:15)

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started “*while men slept*”, after the passing away of the apostles of the lamb (Matthew 13:25). We also know that it began in Rome the capital city of the then world Empire and culminated in the emergence of a religious organization called the “*Roman Catholic Church*” (this religious body called in the prophetic scriptures “*the mother of harlots*”: Revelation 17:5). We also know that the abominations introduced into the Christian faith by this woman later became generally accepted in the world, and they form the basis for most of the traditions (doctrines and practices) that are now associated with the church world (the reformation notwithstanding).

There are three prophetic names that are used to describe the church world in her condition of apostasy. These are Babylon, Sodom and Egypt. These three words are names of physical cities that actually existed at one time or the other in human history. But they were all cities which, at one time or the other, held God’s people in bondage preventing them from worshipping the Lord in the way and manner he has prescribed (Sodom like Babylon and Egypt, held God’s people, symbolized in Lot, in bondage). The church is a spiritual city, the city of the Lord, the mountain of his holiness (Psalm 48:1) a city set upon an hill (Matthew 5:14). But rather than

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show forth and uphold the testimony of Jesus Christ in her doctrines, teaching and practices, she is given to another, she loses her status as the city of God, and becomes a city that is opposed to God, his testimony and his worship. And rather than be in the land of promise where they are serving God's interest according to the due order, the Lord's people are said to be in a spiritual captivity.

In Isaiah 1:10-11, Jerusalem, the city of God, because of her unfaithfulness to God and her great wickedness was addressed as Sodom and Gomorrah. So also in Revelation 11:8, the spiritual Jerusalem, in her condition of total apostasy, is likened to Sodom and Egypt. Here the Lord is being crucified afresh and pierced by the very persons that profess to belong to him (Zechariah 13:6, Hebrews 6:6). Then, in Revelation 17, the apostate church, in her full union with the world, is pictured as an harlot woman, mystery Babylon, who have made the nations drunk with the wine of her fornications. Jeremiah 51:7, 9 assures us that what later became Babylon was once a golden cup in the hands of the Lord. And God would have healed Babylon, but she could not be healed.

The above names are used to show certain things in the nature of the apostasy (the falling

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away) that was to take place in the church. Sodom pictures gross immorality, moral failure and worldliness which reflect itself in a mad rush for material acquisitions, self-centeredness and idleness. Egypt, on the other hand typifies religious captivity, idolatry, pride, erroneous doctrines, teachings and emphasis, the craze for titles, the burning desire to make a name for one's self, to be worshipped. While Babylon combines these two group of vices symbolized in Sodom and Egypt, it is worthy of note that these same vices that are found in seed forms in the words of the Lord to the churches in Revelations 2 and 3.

Babylon is a land of graven images. Jeremiah 51:7 says every founder (and president) is confounded by the graven image. Babylon has destroyed God's temple (testimony) in the earth. She has converted the vessels of the Lord's temple to serve the wine of her fornications. There, God's people are held in a spiritual bondage, being made to sing the Lord's song in a strange land. There, like in Egypt of old, the vital spiritual lives of the saints are being exploited to build the Empires of men, the wonders of Egypt.

The first name of Babylon is mystery. What you see is not what is. The spiritual eyes need to be

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enlightened with eye salve to really see Babylon as she is (Revelation 3:18). And when we see, we cannot but wonder with a great wonder (Revelation 17:6). When Ezekiel was carried by the Spirit of the Lord to the temple in Jerusalem, little did he know of the state of the spiritual life of Israel, oh, he must have seen the temple, magnificent in its appearance, everything dazzling with beautiful stones, and religious sacrifices going on day in day out. But when he looked more closely, behold a hole in the wall. And the Lord said unto him, "*Son of man, dig now in the wall*". And when he digged, behold, a door. And, in that encounter, the Lord showed him three different penetrations into the abominations that were practiced in the midst of God's people. For the people say, "*the LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth*". And at the end of the encounter, the Lord asked Ezekiel, "*hast thou seen this, O Son of man*"? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah (house of praise) that they commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them (Ezekiel 8:5-18).

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We know that at present, these abominations have not yet been fully developed. Thus, the denominational church systems still retain in them some measure of life. What we actually find in the church world at the time of the end as revealed in that parable of the Lord in Mathew 13:24-30 is a delicate mixture. It is not yet a total (irrecoverable) blackness. But the scriptures reveal clearly the end of the path upon which the denominational churches now trend. The end is destruction. And it is only those who turn away from the wickedness we now behold in the church systems that will obtain mercy of the Lord.

The Work of Recovery and Total Restoration

Verse 30 of Matthew 13 shows that at the time of the end (the time of harvest), the Lord Jesus Christ is going to carry out a work of recovery and restoration in the midst of the church. This recovery and restoration would take the form of separation between the wheat and tares, the gathering of the tares into bundle in preparation for burning (judgment), and the *gathering of the wheat* into the barn of the Master. We are also shown in Ezekiel 8 and 9 that before the judgment of the holy city, God carries out a work of separation (recovery and restoration). The Lord, by his messenger, is to

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go through the midst of the city of religion, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst of her (Ezekiel 9:1-4, see also Revelation 7:1-3). The words of the Lord in Luke 17 shows also that there would be a separation between them that love the Lord and them that love him not (Malachi 3:16-18). Verse 34-36 says two men shall be in one bed (sharing in the same ministry, but with evidently different heart disposition towards the Lord, the one shall be taken (out), and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together (labouring to provide food for the king's household), one shall be taken, and the other left. As Lot was taken out of Sodom before the final judgment, so the righteous are to be delivered out of the city of religion, that they may not be partakers of her plagues (Revelation 18:4).

2 Peter 2:6-9 comments on the manner of life Lot lived in the midst of Sodom and his deliverance from that city just before the destruction. He was said to be a righteous man dwelling among them, having his soul vexed day by day in seeing and hearing their unlawful deeds. And we are told that the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly *out of* temptations, and

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to *reserve* the unjust unto the Day of Judgment to be punished.

We shall have more to look at concerning Lot and his wife in our meditation on the “*Epiphany*” and “*Apocalypse*”, but it is important to note that both Abraham and Lot actually symbolized two classes among the believer whose hearts are towards the Lord and have a measurable disposition of faithfulness towards him. They represent two classes among the wheats the overcoming saints. Historically Abraham and Lot were actually related naturally, Abraham was delivered out of Mesopotamia (which is another word for Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans) in the same way Lot was delivered from Sodom. But Abraham responded to God in full submission much earlier than Lot, and became the means by which Lot was delivered out of Sodom (Genesis 18:20-33). The indecisions of Lot, his love for worldly riches and honours, his divided loyalty and slow footedness in responding to the call of God, are well revealed in the scriptures. At the end of everything it was at a very late hour when the clouds of divine judgment were just about to burst upon the city that Lots’ eyes were opened. Even then, he still needed to be literally pulled out of the city by the angels, but not without suffering a great

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loss. Matthew 13:33 says “*whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it.*” May the Lord give us understanding in Jesus name.

So, we find that the work of harvest which the Lord Jesus Christ comes to carry out in the midst of the church at the time of his Second Advent is actually a work of judgment. Before the great judgments of God are revealed upon the nations in the apocalypse, the Lord, first of all, comes to judge his house (1 Peter 4:17). He comes to separate between truth and error, between the faithful and the unfaithful, between them that serveth God and them that serveth themselves or their bellies (Malachi 3:18). He comes to prepare the faithful for a full union with him in his glory, while preparing the unfaithful for judgment. Yes! He comes with his rewards in his hands, to give unto every man according to how his work is (Revelation 22). He says to the reapers (messengers) gather ye together first the tares and bind *them in bundles* to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn (Matthew 13:30). Verses 40-43 says “*As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom **all things** that offend, **and them** which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there **shall be***

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wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

For those who submit to this work of recovery and cleansing which the Lord comes to carry out in his church, the scriptures holds out the promise of total restoration Isaiah 61:3-4 says, he will appoint to them that mourn in Zion (remember Ezekiel 9:4), *“To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified. And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations.”*

Through them God shall accomplish the work of restitution of all things in relation to the rest of the human race.

Joel 2:21-22 confirms that there is to be a great work of restoration that the Lord carries out in the midst of the repentant among his people before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. The passage opens up with the

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blowing of the trumpet *in Zion* (among God's people). This is after the prophet had shown the gradual corrosion of truth, spirituality and life among God's people in Joel 1. The trumpet is to sound an *alarm in God's holy mountain* (once the nation of Israel, but now the church, the spiritual Israel). It is an alarm of a coming judgment, a coming destruction upon the Land, an alarm of the great day of Jehovah's wrath. The trumpet calls (all of God's people to repentance that God's people might turn now to him with all their heart and with fasting and weeping and mourning. All are called to rend their hearts and not their religious garments and turn unto the Lord, for the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness (Joel 2:12-14). The trumpet calls for the wicked to forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and return unto the Lord, for He will have mercy and will abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:7).

For those who hear and respond to the sound of the trumpet, it is said,

21 Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the Lord will do great things.

22 Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the

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wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their (full) strength.

23 Be glad then, ye *children of Zion*, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.

24 And the floors shall be full of *wheat* (there will be no longer tares), and the vats shall overflow with wine (these wine are encounters with the Lord and the knowledge of his glory that comes from such encounters with him) and oil.

25 And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.

26 And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.

27 And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the

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Lord your God, and none else: and my people shall *never* be ashamed.

28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:

29 And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.

30 And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.

31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, *before* the great and terrible day of the Lord come.

32 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in *the remnant whom the Lord shall call*.

So many things are shown to us in the above passage to be associated with the total restoration of truth, and of the life and glory of God in the midst of the church before the

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Epiphany and Apocalypse. The days of glory are just about to break upon the faithful church. Haggai 2:9 says the glory of the latter house (the church at the time of the end) shall be greater than the former (the church at the beginning). There shall be the outpouring of both the early and latter rain in great deluge. The early rain outpoured shall bring to *the church recovered from Babylon*, things in the earnest of her inheritance which has been lost as a result of the years of unfaithfulness and spiritual wanderings and other things associated with the earnest that the church had not fully experienced. The latter rain outpoured will lead her into things that belong to the fullness of the inheritance: glories, beyond which the early church knew and experienced. The powers of darkness shall be *completely* brought under the dominion of the believers. There shall be blood for deep cleansing, fire for purification, pillars of smoke (manifestations of divine presence for guidance, direction and confirmation) as the Lord seeks to prepare for himself a church without blemish, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing (Ephesians 5:27). And all these things shall take place *before* the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

Yes! God's glory shall be rightly revealed in the church of his purpose. The Lord God shall cause

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righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations (Isaiah 61:11). There shall be great divine visitations upon the church. But for the unfaithful among God's people who remain in their unfaithfulness (the tares who are being gathered into bundles), their sun shall be turned into darkness. There shall be the famine of the word of God (Amos 8:11). There shall be the darkening of the eyes, the binding of the hands and feet and a casting into outer darkness. There, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The book of Malachi associates this work of recovery and restoration with the coming of Moses and Elijah. Moses and Elijah were also revealed to be associated with the coming of the kingdom with power on the mount of transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8). And Peter's comment on the event on that mountain associate it with the Second Advent of Christ (2 Peter 1:16-18). We reproduce below some parts of Malachi 3 and the whole of Malachi 4 for the reader's profit. Malachi 3:1-6

**1 Behold, I will send my messenger,
and he shall prepare the way before
me: and the Lord, whom ye seek,
shall suddenly come to his temple,
even the messenger of the covenant,**

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whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.

2 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap:

3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

4 Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

5 And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts.

6 For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

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Malachi 4:1-6

1 For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

2 But unto you that fear my name shall *the Sun of righteousness* arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall *go forth*, and grow up as calves of the stall.

3 And *ye shall tread down the wicked*; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts.

4 *Remember ye the law of Moses my servant*, which I commanded unto him in Horeb *for all Israel*, with the statutes and judgments.

5 *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:*

6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

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Just like we observed earlier, the prophecy in Malachi 3 and 4 applied both to the first and Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jews expected Elijah to come first before the appearance of the Messiah, even though they did not understand exactly what those prophecies mean. But from verse 5 of Malachi 4, and from the words of the Lord in Matthew 17:12, we know that these prophecies await a larger fulfilment at the time of the end, before the great tribulation. There in Matthew 17, the disciples wanted to know why the scriptures said Elijah shall come first. And the Lord answered them "*Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things* (speaking of something that was still to be fulfilled relative to that time). *But I say unto you, that Elias is come already* (speaking of an aspect of that prophecy that had already been fulfilled at that time, in the coming of John), *and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed.*" Verse 13 says then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

These words of the Lord enable us to know that the reference to Elijah and Moses has nothing to do with their persons but to the nature of their ministries. Elijah had a peculiar anointing upon him. He was raised up by God to fulfil a specific

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ministry among the people. That ministry was the recovery of God's people from apostasy (Baal worship) and their restoration to the true worship of God as handed over to them by the Lawgiver (Moses). And he fulfilled that ministry with great power, under the mighty anointing of God (1 Kings 18).

John came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). He was not the man Elijah of old, but he had the same kind of love for God and disposition towards God and his worship that was in the man Elijah. And he was raised up to fulfil the same kind of ministry, under the same kind of anointing (Luke 3:1-14). He was the messenger sent to prepare the way of the Lord in his first advent. Isaiah 40:3-4 shewing forth his ministry says,

3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it

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**together: for the mouth of the LORD
hath spoken it.**

This way of the LORD was to be prepared in the hearts and minds of God's people.

John came forth preaching the baptism of repentance, calling the Lord's people to turn from their wickedness and return to the practices and the form of truth God originally gave to them in the law through Moses. He warned of a coming judgment. He said unto the people "*I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I (the Lord Jesus Christ, the messenger of the covenant: Malachi 3:1) cometh, the latchet of whose shoes (ministry) I am not worthy to unloose: He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will **thoroughly** purge his floor (remember Malachi 3:3) and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable (remember Matthew 13:30) (Luke 3:16-18).* It is worthy of note that at the time John was speaking these words, the Lord Jesus Christ, the One of whom he was speaking, was already present among his people, even though he was not yet revealed.

We know that the ministry of John prepared a people who were able to receive the ministry of

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the Lord Jesus Christ in his first advent (most of the disciples of the Lord were formerly disciples of John). We know also that the Lord in his ministry, during the first advent carried out a work of cleansing the typical sanctuary (Matthew 21:12-14). He also taught his disciples on things concerning the kingdom, and by his ministry, prepared them to escape the judgment that was to come upon that nation.

At this time of the end, there is to be the emergence again of the Elijah ministry. This time, the ministry shall not be borne by one individual but by a many membered body of servants that the Lord raises up unto himself at this time of the end. Matthew 24:31 says:

31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet (with a trumpet, and a great voice), and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven (the kingdom of heaven: the church world) to the other.

The Lord Jesus Christ comes in his Second Advent to restore all things. But he first reveals himself to the church in the Elijah ministry. And, to those who responds to that ministry, he reveals himself to them, in a further work, at the

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messenger of covenant. The Elijah ministry has one focus (goal) – to call God’s people out of their apostasy, out of the denominational church system through the proclamation of the word of the Kingdom showing forth the estate of life and the glory that God is calling his people unto, to gather them unto the Lord and cause them to begin to seek the Lord for his appearing and to delight in him (Malachi 3:1). The ministry calls the church out of her whoredoms and back to the original purity of doctrine and practice that the Lord handed over to the church through the apostles, in order that the Lord may now come into his temple to carry a further work of cleansing, restoration and perfection. It comes to prepare a people for the Lord.

Isaiah 40:3, 4; Malachi 3:6, and Malachi 4:6, show that the sending forth of the Elijah ministry is the manifestation of God’s covenant commitment towards his people and purpose. It is also the reaction of God to the apostasy of his people. Before he moves in judgment, before the Revelation of the Lord’s fierce burning judgments (Malachi 4:2), before he moves in swift witness against all workers of iniquity (Malachi 3:1), he introduces a time of mercy. he sends his angels with the sound of the trumpet to gather out of the apostate denomination

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church systems all those who love him and have ears to hear what he has to say to his people. May the Lord cause us to be gathered unto the Lord at this time of the end. May we not be shut out and cast into outer darkness having our portion with the hypocrite. Amos 3:6, 8 says *“shall the trumpet be blown in the city of religion, and the people not be afraid?”* The Lion hath roared, who will not fear? As we saw in Joel 2:15-17 one of the messages of the trumpet is that the Lord hath a controversy with his people, and the church must come into an agreement with his will, if she must walk with the Lord in his plans and purpose (Amos 3:3). May the Lord grant us understanding, in Jesus name.