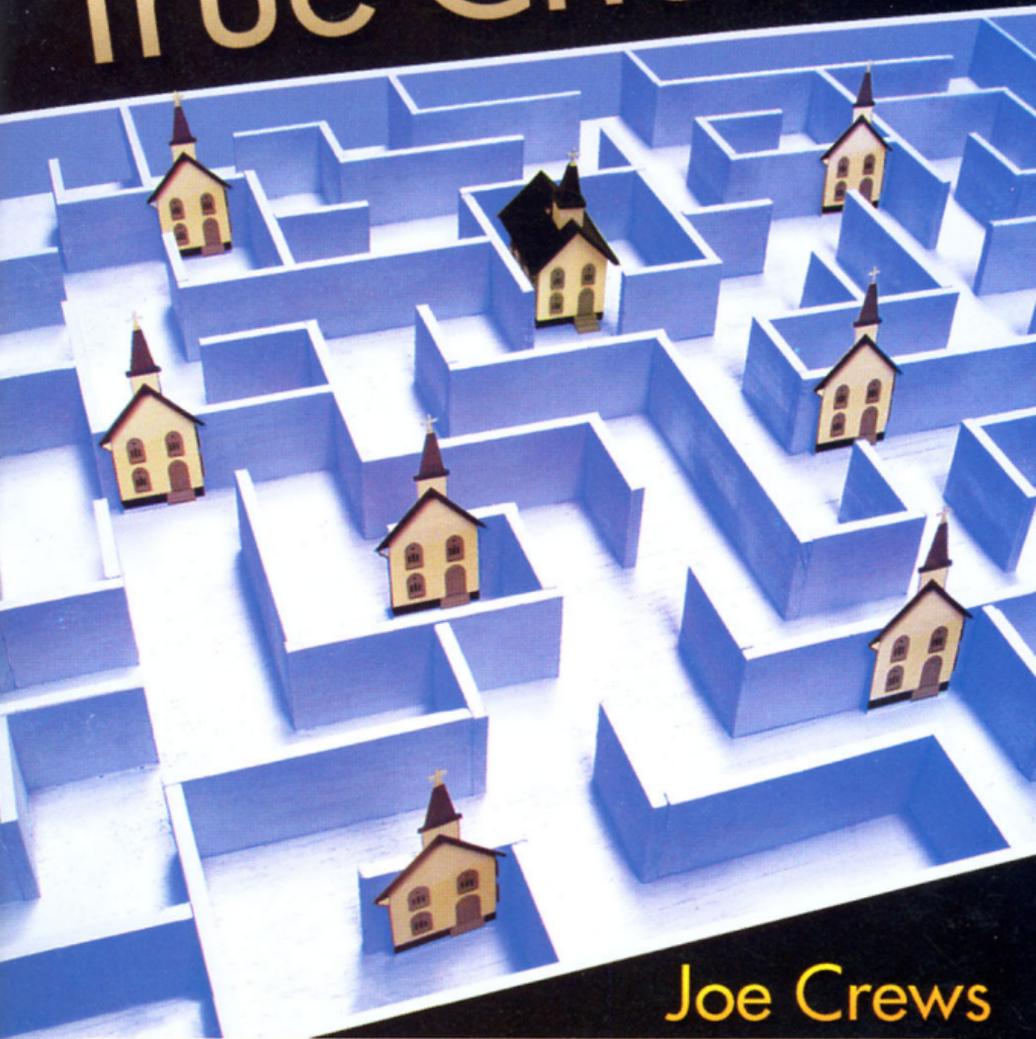




The
Search
for the
True Church



Joe Crews

Library of Sermons #21

The Search for the True Church

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CHAPTER 1

The Search

Is there a true church in the world today? And if so, how can it be identified?

Of all the religious questions facing the modern truth-seeker, this is certainly the most demanding and also the most frustrating. Conflicting voices from every quarter declare that they have the answer. Denominations, sects, and cults make strident claims based upon emotional interpretations of isolated Bible texts.

The average Christian today has been so totally turned off by these exaggerated boasts that many have even discounted the possibility that any “true church” could really exist. Others have questioned the criteria by which any church could be tested and rated as “truer” than another.

It is very important to recognize that no church can be proven superior because its members are without sin. People are people, and all are subject to the same frailties of human nature. Yet, it is also true that every Christian has access to the same mighty power of God for overcoming those frailties. Therefore, any

church today will necessarily be made up of individuals who are at varying levels of personal sanctification. The wheat and tares will still be mingled together, and no church will be made up entirely of perfect people.

But the question remains: Is there some valid way to identify the church which is closest to the biblical standards of truth? Some feel that the distinctive name of the organization will set it apart as the right one. Obviously, this could be no accurate test, because the choice of a name would reveal nothing about the spiritual nature of that church. Such shallow claims only serve to discourage intelligent searchers after the truth.

It must be apparent to all that if God has a special church in the world today, He will reveal it clearly and explicitly in His holy Word. The information must be couched in language that will appeal to human logic and should consist of more than just vague generalities or insinuations.

I am reluctant to make any claims for what you are about to read, although I know very well that it could revolutionize your life. Do not scan or read lightly the material which follows. I ask only that you study it prayerfully and with an open mind. Then judge it on the

basis of the Scriptures and your own spiritual convictions. If it is truth, the Holy Spirit will guide you into joyful recognition of it. My personal feeling is that you will find this experience to be the most exciting adventure you have ever had in God's Word.

Our quest for truth will focus upon the twelfth chapter of Revelation. Limited time and space does not allow for an exhaustive study, but two principles will be given priority—accuracy and simplicity. Over twelve hundred years of history must be dealt with only briefly as we follow the absorbing story of the true church to its surprising climax. Further confirming evidence for the historical part of the prophecy has been provided in my book entitled "*The Beast, the Dragon, and the Woman.*"

CHAPTER 2

The Woman Symbolizes the Church

Revelation 12 is basically the narrative account of a beautiful, sun-clad woman and her descendants. "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (Revelation 12:1).

Here we are introduced to one of the most familiar symbols in the Bible. In both the Old and the New Testaments, God represents His people by a woman. As the bridegroom, He is married to the church. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2).

All through the Bible we can follow the record of this symbolism. God said in the Old Testament, "I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman" (Jeremiah 6:2). And again, "Say unto Zion, Thou art my people" (Isaiah 51:16). The church is called Zion and God compares it with a beautiful woman. In the Old Testament, Israel was the chosen people so often portrayed as being married to God.

In the New Testament, the true Israel of God is no longer a nation but a church composed of Jews and Gentiles who receive Christ as their Savior. Therefore, the woman of Revelation 12 flashes us the picture-story of the church at the time of Christ. The clothing of sunlight typifies the glorious New Covenant of grace, and the twelve stars represent the twelve apostles. The moon under her feet indicates the fading glory of the Old Covenant in the presence of the true Lamb of God.

Now begins the thrilling part! We are going to follow the unfolding future of that true church of our Lord Jesus. The next verses vividly delineate the course of truth through the ages. We want to know where that woman can be found TODAY! Don't miss a step of the prophecy as we trace the vicissitudes of the true church right down to the present day!

The first thing we discover is that the woman is about to give birth to a baby. "And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his

heads . . . and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne" (Revelation 12:2-5).

Who is this man-child destined to rule all nations and who was caught up to heaven? Only one person can meet this description—Jesus Christ. And who does the dragon represent, who tried to kill Christ at His birth? It was Herod, the representative of Rome, who sent out the order for all babies of two years and under to be slaughtered. Ordinarily, the dragon is used as a symbol of Satan, but in this case, the devil was working so closely with the Roman power to kill Jesus that the dragon also symbolizes Rome.

How did Jesus escape the diabolical decree of Herod? Joseph and Mary were warned of the danger in a dream and fled to Egypt with the infant. Later, after the death of the tyrant, they returned and settled in the town of Nazareth.

Even though the devil was foiled in his initial plot to kill Jesus, he did not abandon his purpose. Repeatedly, he sought to take the life

of Jesus, and finally, he managed to bring Him to that mockery of a trial where He was tortured, crucified, and buried. But the grave could not contain the Son of God, and on the third day He burst out of the tomb. Later, He ascended to His Father in heaven.

CHAPTER 3

Persecution of the Church

With no direct access to Jesus, the dragon (Rome) now turned his anger against the followers of Christ, the church: “And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child” (Revelation 12:13).

These words provide only a tiny hint of the horror of the violence which broke forth against the apostolic church. Practically all the early disciples and church leaders were martyred for their faith. Cruel pagan emperors turned the sporting arenas and coliseums into theaters of death for those who followed the true gospel.

Soon pagan Rome yielded to papal Rome, and the persecutions continued with even greater force. Millions died under the terrible inquisitions which sought to eradicate all opposition to the papal system. Historians estimate that during the Dark Ages more than fifty million people laid down their lives rather than yield up their Protestant faith.

But let's follow the tragic story in our prophetic outline. Revelation 12:14 tells us

what the true church did as the pressures of persecution built up to a climax: “And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.”

In order to escape extinction, the faithful Protestant refugees fled back into the Alpine mountains and valleys holding onto the true doctrine delivered by Jesus. Another book of Acts could be written about the heroism of the Waldenses, Huguenots, and Albigenses who refused to surrender their faith during those centuries of fierce oppression. God fought for them, and sometimes the pursuing armies of Rome were cut off by mysterious avalanches and rock slides. At other times the mountain streams were reddened by the blood of those faithful ones who sealed their devotion to the truth with their lives. The Revelation prophecy gives a symbolic picture of the desperate attempts made to wipe out those minority Christians who were now in hiding for their very survival: “And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood” (Revelation 12:15).

How long was the true church to remain out of sight in the wilderness? The prophecy declares it would be for “a time, times, and half a time.” How mysterious! What is meant by this strange description of the time period involved? When would it end? The answer is found in verse 6: “And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.”

Now the picture begins to clear up. One verse says the woman was in the wilderness for 1,260 days and the other verse says she was there for “a time, times, and half a time.” These two periods are equal. This means that a “time” has to be a year in prophetic symbolism, “times” is two years, and “half a time” is half a year. When we add up the one, the two, and the half, we get three and a half years. And that is equal to exactly 1,260 days, using the Bible reckoning of 30 days to the month.

There is one more principle of prophetic interpretation to take into account here. In symbolic Bible prophecy a day always stands for a year. You will find the key for that principle in Ezekiel 4:6: “I have appointed thee each day for a year.” It is laid down

elsewhere in these words: “. . . forty days, each day for a year” (Numbers 14:34).

Please note that this applies only to symbolic prophecy, and cannot be read into other portions of the Scripture. A day is used for a year only in the setting of an obvious prophetic context. This places the woman in her wilderness hideaway for the full period of 1,260 literal years.

Our conclusion must be, then, that the true church could not appear in the world until the end of the 1,260 years. Did such a thing happen to the true people of God? How long did the papal power continue to suppress the true doctrines by the exercise of her religio-political authority?

Here is a fascinating point of history. In A.D. 538 a decree by Emperor Justinian went into effect which assigned absolute spiritual preeminence to the church of Rome. Gradually, this religious tyranny drifted into union with civil powers until eventually kings were forced to seek permission from the pope before they could begin to rule. This authority remained in force until the year 1798 when Europe was rocked by the French Revolution. In the subsequent rebellion of the oppressed peasants against the privileged clergy, the pope

was captured in 1798. The papal property was confiscated, and the French Directory government decreed that there would be no more Bishop of Rome. The oppressive rule of the papacy ended exactly 1,260 years after it was inaugurated in A.D. 538.

CHAPTER 4

Three Marks of the True Church

This brings us to a most important observation: **THE TRUE CHURCH COULD NOT APPEAR IN THE WORLD UNTIL AFTER THE YEAR 1798.** It was to remain in hiding until the end of the 1,260 years, and that “wilderness” period ended in 1798. We have before us now one of the most amazing marks of identification for the true church. It is not based on some emotional feeling or upon some strained interpretation of a single Bible text. It is rooted in a prophetic revelation of a specific time period which can be verified by scores of historical records. The woman (church) simply could not make her appearance until the inhibiting powers of papal opposition had been taken out of the way. That prophesied event took place in 1798, and the truth which had been clothed in sackcloth now began to emerge from obscurity, soon to appear as the glorious remnant of the woman.

Now we are brought to an actual description of the woman as she would appear before the world sometime after the year 1798: “And the dragon was wroth with the

woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17).

This text is one of the most crucial to be found in the entire Bible. Nowhere is there a more concise description of the last-day remnant of the original apostolic faith as it was preserved through the ages. Here is an actual verbal definition of the true church for the present day. It is so important that we are going to analyze every word in order to extract the full meaning. If the true church can be discovered at all in the Bible, this will be the verse to reveal it.

“AND THE DRAGON . . .” Who is the dragon? There can be no question on this point. In Revelation 12:9 the dragon is called “the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world.”

“WAS WROTH . . .” What does that mean? “Wroth” is the Old English word for “angry.” It simply means that Satan was angry. Whom was he angry with? “WROTH WITH THE WOMAN . . .” Who was the woman? We have already found that she is the true apostolic church, representing the great, original teachings of Jesus.

“AND WENT TO MAKE WAR WITH THE REMNANT OF HER SEED . . .” Here a new word is introduced into the picture. Satan is going to fight against the REMNANT of the true church. What is a remnant? It is the last end piece on a bolt of cloth. It is exactly like the first piece that came off the bolt, but it happens to be at the very end and is always a small piece.

What does this tell us about the remnant of the woman? It is the last part of the true church, at the very end of time, which will be holding the exact same doctrines as did the early, apostolic church. But let’s read on.

“WHICH KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD. . .” What commandments would this be referring to? This designates the great moral law written by the finger of God on tables of stone. The Ten Commandments reflect the character of God, reveal His will for all His creatures, and form the basis for all morality and true worship.

Here we are confronted with the second intriguing mark of identification of the true church. Not only must it arise some time after the year 1798, but on the authority of the Word of God, *it would have to be keeping ALL the Ten Commandments of God.*

But now let’s finish reading this fantastic verse. “AND HAVE THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST.” Here is another characteristic of the true remnant. Not only will this last-day church arise after 1798 and keep all the Ten Commandments, but it will have the testimony of Jesus. But what is the testimony of Jesus? That is an unfamiliar phrase, and we need more than human wisdom to uncover its meaning.

Notice how the Bible specifically defines this expression for us. If this text truly contains the heart of ultimate truth for us, the Word of God would have to clarify every part of it. The definition is provided by the word of an angel sent all the way from heaven to explain it to John. “I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10).

There it is! We know now without a shadow of doubt that the testimony of Jesus is the SPIRIT OF PROPHECY. And this is the third great mark of identity for the last-day true church!

Let me ask you something: Does a spirit of excitement rise up in you as these plain biblical statements zero in on the most

sought-after secret in the Word of God? We are getting closer and closer to identifying the special people of God in our day and their special message. And we are doing it by allowing the Bible to make the identification. We have not fabricated a single one of these three definitive characteristics. No one can honestly challenge their application to the end-time church of Jesus Christ. That remnant church will have to possess all three of these biblical tags of identity:

1. ARISE AFTER 1798
2. KEEP ALL THE TEN COMMANDMENTS
3. HAVE THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

I know that some are already puzzling over that third mark. The “spirit of prophecy” is just about as incomprehensible as the “testimony of Jesus.” But stay with me, and we will get the explanation for that point very shortly.

CHAPTER 5

A Fourth Identifying Characteristic

Right now I would like to add a fourth crucial mark of identification to our list. We have found this church to be the last, end-piece of historic truth. It will be proclaiming the final message of God just before Jesus returns. In fact, if God has any kind of special counsel or warning for the world at the end of time, He would surely give that message through His last-day remnant church. I think we can all see the logic of this conclusion.

Does God indeed have such a message, and is it identified clearly in the Bible? Jesus indicated that the proclaiming of a certain definite truth would immediately precede the conclusion of human history. Listen to His words: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached *in all the world* for a witness unto all nations; and *then shall the end come*” (Matthew 24:14).

The last sign of Christ’s coming will be a worldwide preaching of the “gospel of the kingdom.” After that, the end will come. Now follow me closely. John the Revelator actually saw in vision the fulfillment of Christ’s words. He wrote, “And I saw another angel fly in the

midst of heaven, having the everlasting *gospel* to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice . . .” (Revelation 14:6, 7).

The next few verses describe precisely what that special last proclamation of the gospel will consist of. Then immediately John said, “And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle . . . and he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped” (Revelation 14:14-16).

Did you catch that? The end comes just as soon as this particular “gospel” message has gone to every nation on earth. Jesus said the same thing, “this gospel . . . shall be preached in all the world . . . and then shall the end come.”

I submit to you that whatever this message is, it has to be the most urgent and compelling one that human ears have ever heard. Both John and Jesus testify that upon completion it will usher in the glorious kingdom of Christ.

Can we know what that final warning will contain? John spelled it out so simply that none need be in doubt. “Saying with a loud

voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; *for the hour of his judgment is come*” (Revelation 14:7). Notice that a part of this last call of God will be announcing that the judgment has already started. “IS COME,” not “will come.” We must look and listen for the preaching of such a pre-advent judgment message to all nations of the earth.

The next part of the first angel’s message is this: “And worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of water” (Revelation 14:7). Does that sound familiar? It should, for it is quoted almost word for word right from the fourth commandment of the decalogue, which strongly indicates that the Sabbath will be a part of the “gospel” proclamation which must go to the whole world just before the end.

How do you worship God as the Creator? Right in the heart of the Ten Commandments God wrote the answer: “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:11).

True worship stems from a recognition of God’s creative power and authority, and the Sabbath is God’s own established sign that He

is the maker of everything. Over and over throughout the Bible God claims worship BECAUSE He created all things. “thou are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: FOR THOU HAST CREATED ALL THINGS” (Revelation 4:11).

God challenged the false gods repeatedly because they could not create. “The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth . . . He hath made the earth by his power” (Jeremiah 10: 11, 12). “God himself . . . formed the earth and made it . . . I am the LORD; and there is none else” (Isaiah 45:18).

The Sabbath was instituted by God as a great reminder-sign of His sovereign authority as the only God to be worshiped. The Creator set in motion the arbitrary cycle of the seven-day week to mark off the true Sabbath, so that the world would be without excuse in knowing whom to worship and when. Thus the first angel’s message called for men to “worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea”—a call to true Sabbath-keeping.

The second and third angels’ messages described by John can be summarized briefly: “Babylon is fallen . . . If any man worship the beast . . . and receive his mark in

his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God” (Revelation 14:8-10). Contrary to the opinion of many, this plain, bold preaching of the beast message is included in the everlasting gospel of God’s kingdom. Even warnings against the mark of the beast will be heralded to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. THEN THE END WILL COME!

We are now prepared to add a fourth characteristic to the list of three others. The true remnant church of the last days will surely be used of God to carry His final warning message to all inhabitants of planet earth. That message will include (a) the judgment hour is come, (b) true Sabbath worship, (c) the fall of spiritual Babylon, and (d) the mark of the beast.

This completes the amazing array of specific characteristics of the present day’s true church:

1. ARISES AFTER 1798
2. KEEPS ALL TEN COMMANDMENTS
3. HAS THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY
4. PREACHES THE MESSAGE OF THREE ANGELS (Revelation 14) ON A WORLD-WIDE SCALE

Could any thinking person be indifferent toward what we have discovered thus far? We have in our hands right now the key to unlock one of the most fantastic spiritual secrets in the world. God has concentrated all the clues in this one, tremendous, prophetic chapter of Revelation. Look at the marks of identification. This is God's list, not mine. I simply lifted them from the inspired pages of God's Book. What do they tell us about the true church today?

First of all, it could not have arisen *before* 1798. This eliminates most of the great popular Protestant churches of the world. Practically all of them were formed before 1798. Secondly, it would have to be a church which keeps *all* the Ten Commandments. At first glance, this would seem to be a very poor definitive test for discovering which church is right. Surely all of them would teach and practice obedience to the great moral law of God— or would they? The fact is that very few contemporary denominations even lay claim to keeping all the Ten Commandments. Most of them admit freely that they do not observe the seventh-day Sabbath required by the fourth commandment. They observe the first day of the week instead of the Sabbath.

CHAPTER 6

Most Churches Fail the Biblical Test

Doesn't that seem strange? God wrote with His own hand, "the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work" (Exodus 20:10). No one has ever been confused about the day God sanctified and commanded. All preachers and churches freely admit that Saturday is the seventh day of the week. Yet most of them are transgressing the commandment of God every week by blatantly doing work on the Sabbath, which God has prohibited.

To compensate for the breaking of the seventh-day Sabbath, they have substituted another day—the first day of the week—in place of the one God commanded.

How do they justify such willful manipulation of the great moral law of God? The situation is astounding no matter how we view it! Many churches brush aside the Ten Commandments as mere ceremonial rules of Moses and teach that they were abolished at the cross! Others take the position that all the Ten Commandments, EXCEPT THE SABBATH, were carried over into the New Testament. In either case, the fourth commandment,

containing the special sign of God's creative and redemptive power, has been rejected and desecrated.

Yet we have just discovered that the true church will be distinguished for keeping the commandments. Mark it down: according to the clear teaching of the Bible, no church could be the remnant of the woman unless it keeps the seventh-day Sabbath as well as all the other nine commandments. Suddenly, we see the vast majority of those who passed the first test failing to meet the second.

But now we move on to the third requirement of the prophecy. The last-day remnant church must have the spirit of prophecy manifested in it. What does that mean? Without doubt this particular flag of identity is the most important one on our list. We shall discover that this involves more than merely understanding and preaching prophecy.

Finally, this special church will be distinguished by the unique message it proclaims to all nations on earth—the judgment is begun, the seventh day is the Sabbath, Babylon is fallen, and warnings against the mark of the beast.

Before we say more about any modern church system which might match these inspired characteristics, let us return to identifying point number three, which still has not been fully explained.

CHAPTER 7

The Spirit of Prophecy

Under the inspiration of God, John declared that the remnant of the woman would have the “testimony of Jesus.” Since that expression is somewhat ambiguous, John later gave a clarification which still leaves much to be desired. He said simply, “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10).

At least this is moving in the right direction, but we must now discover what John means by that expression, “spirit of prophecy.” Whatever it is, it ranks high with God, because He designates it as one of the ways by which to recognize His true church in these last days.

The picture begins to clear up when we examine the full context of the statement. An angel appears to John, and John falls upon the ground in awe and admiration. Said the Revelator, “And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God; for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10).

In this verse, please notice who is described as having the testimony of Jesus, or the spirit of prophecy. Only John’s “brethren” are identified as having it. Now we must seek for some further information as to who John’s brethren were. The Word does not fail us. In Revelation 22:8, 9 John repeats the story of the angel and adds a little more detail. “And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren *the prophets* . . . worship God.” John’s brethren were the prophets, and they alone are said to have the spirit of prophecy.

Suddenly, the whole puzzle falls into place. *The only ones who had the spirit of prophecy were the prophets themselves.* If just knowing prophecy and preaching it could be called the “spirit of prophecy,” then many modern teachers and evangelists might qualify. But the Bible makes it exceedingly clear that it is the actual ability to prophesy. In other words, it is the *gift* of prophecy. Only the prophets had it.

This fact is supported by the apostle Paul. “That in every thing ye are enriched by him,

in all utterance, and in all knowledge; Even as the *testimony of Christ* (spirit of prophecy) was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no *gift*; *waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Corinthians 1:5-7).

Here the testimony of Jesus is called a "gift" instead of the "spirit" of prophecy. And the implication is very strong that the gift will be in operation at the return of our Savior.

With this inspired insight from Paul we are back on familiar ground again. We have no problem with the term "gift of prophecy." The New Testament epistles are filled with references to all the gifts of the Spirit, including the gift of prophecy. Paul told the church at Ephesus just how and when the gifts were bestowed: "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" (Ephesians 4:8).

Little comment is needed on this. It is a well-known fact that when Jesus returned to heaven He left certain special "gifts" or abilities with His people on earth. In fact, they are named: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11).

For what reason did Jesus endow certain ones in the church with these appropriate

spiritual gifts? "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). He did it to build up the believers and strengthen the church. These gifts were to mature and perfect the leaders of the body of Christ as they sought to edify the members.

The next verse tells exactly how long those gifts would be needed in the church. "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the nature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

If language has any meaning at all, these words convey one idea very clearly. All the gifts which Christ placed with His church were to continue operating until the very end of time. They would be needed to bring the church to perfection and to the fullness of Christ's stature.

Dare we ask the next obvious question? Where are these gifts today? If they were intended by our Lord to do their sanctifying work right down to the end of time, then they should all be seen operating in the churches around us. Let's inquire if they are. Do we find teachers in most churches today? The answer is yes. What about pastors and evangelists?

Practically all denominations have them. What can we say about apostles? Since this word literally means “missionaries,” (coming from a Greek word meaning “one who is sent”), again we can say that most modern churches qualify on this particular gift.

So far, so good. But we have one more inquiry—what about prophets? From most religious quarters there is no ready reply to this question. Practically no church claims that such a thing has ever been a part of its ministry.

But why? If all the other gifts are necessary, why should prophets not be necessary as well? It was certainly counted so in the early church. In fact, all the spiritual gifts were very much in evidence, according to the book of Acts. “Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon . . .” (Acts 13:1). Here we have evidence that two of the gifts, teachers and prophets, were a part of the church at Antioch. Then in Acts 21:9 we read that a “man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.” Notice that these four women from one family were appointed by the Spirit to be prophetesses. They had the spirit of prophecy.

CHAPTER 8

Why Did Prophets Disappear from the Church?

It is obvious that all the gifts were operating equally in the apostolic age and immediately afterward. But why did the gift of prophecy seem to drop out of sight after two or three hundred years into the Christian era? We do not have the same record of it through the ages as we do the other gifts. Why don’t we find prophets in all the churches of today along with pastors, teachers, etc.?

We dare not avoid the question as so many millions of Christians are currently doing. The Word of God meets the issue head-on and pulls no punches in the process. It is easy to see why most churches try to ignore the absence of this gift in their midst, *especially when we discover the reason for its absence.*

That post-apostolic period is not the first time that the spirit of prophecy had been removed from among God’s people. The truth is that God was dealing with the church then in the same way He had always dealt with His people. All through the Old Testament God led and instructed them by two divine

agencies—the law and the prophets. Through the prophet Jeremiah God spoke to Israel, “If ye will not hearken to me, *to walk in my law, which I have set before you, To hearken to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I sent unto you . . . Then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth*” (Jeremiah 26:4-6).

The LAW and PROPHETS! The two go together. Not only do they refer to the writings of Scripture, but they also refer to the two means of divine guidance. “Keep my law and hear my prophets” was the requirement of God. And the sacred record indicates that if they rejected one of those divine agencies, God would remove the other also, because they were actually rejecting His leadership. On numerous occasions the children of Israel turned away from the law of God, only to find the prophetic voice silenced as well.

Jeremiah wrote, “The law is no more; her prophets also find no vision from the LORD” (Lamentations 2:9). Ezekiel put it this way: “Then shall they seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the ancients” (Ezekiel 7:26). The wise man laid down the very same principle: “Where there is no vision, the people perish:

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but he that keepeth the law, happy is he” (Proverbs 29:18).

In times of open disobedience of His law, God used the prophets only to rebuke and to call back, not for counsel or guidance. When they turned from the law, they understood that they were also forfeiting the only other avenue by which they could receive divine direction. In his apostasy Saul cried out, “God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams” (1 Samuel 28:15).

We have a perfect example of this in Ezekiel 20:3 when the people came to inquire after God’s counsel. “Son of man, speak unto the elders of Israel, and say unto them, Thus saith the LORD God; Are ye come to enquire of me? As I live, saith the LORD God, I will not be enquired of by you.” Why would He not answer them in this case? Verses 11-13 give the answer: “And I gave them my statutes, and showed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them. Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them. But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they

walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; *and my sabbaths they greatly polluted*: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them.”

Surely we can see that the reason God gave no divine direction was because they had forsaken His law and had broken His Sabbath. It was the violation of the fourth commandment which especially provoked the displeasure of God.

Now we are prepared to deal with the question of prophets in the New Testament, and why they disappeared after two or three centuries. What happened to God’s law at the very same time the gift of prophecy disappeared from the church? The history of that early period shows that the Sabbath was set aside in favor of the pagan day of the sun. A disgraceful compromise with heathen sun-worship led to an open rejection of the true seventh-day Sabbath. And when this happened, God did exactly what He had always done before when His people turned from His holy law; He withdrew the guidance of the spirit of prophecy. Prophets disappeared from the church.

This brings us face-to-face with an exciting and challenging question. Is there reason to believe that when the church restores the law and begins to observe the Sabbath again, that God will also restore the gift of prophecy to the church? This leads us right back to that dynamic prophecy of Revelation 12 and God’s description of the true remnant. Now, for the first time, we can see the full significance of that seventeenth verse: “And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

Do you see it? The law, so long neglected, is right back where it belongs—in the church. And hand-in-hand with the law is the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy. Think of it! The law and the prophets get back together again in the last remnant piece of God’s true apostolic church! All the gifts are again operating as they did in the days before the apostasy.

Remember that a remnant has to be exactly like the original except that it is on the very end, and it is a small piece. This fantastic prophecy reveals that there will be an end-

time restoration of the faith of the apostles. The same Sabbath will be restored. The same gifts of the spirit will be manifested, and all the great apostolic doctrines will be stripped of the effects of 1,260 years of papal distortion.

A church, called the remnant, must appear on the scene some time after 1798. It will restore the foundation of many generations by keeping the Sabbath, the same one that Jesus made for man during creation week, and the same Sabbath He observed when He was on the earth. In that church will be manifested the true gift of prophecy. Under the anointing of unusual spiritual blessing and power that remnant church will carry the special last warning message of Revelation 14 to all the countries in the world. As we have already discovered, this glorious gospel of the three angels includes the present-hour judgment, the Sabbath, the fall of Babylon, and the beast message.

This church is identified again by John in these words: “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12). Do not overlook the fact that these commandment-keeping saints are empowered to do what they do only

by trusting Jesus. When you find them, they will not be boasting of their righteousness, or depending on their good works to save them. Above all people they will have a loving, personal relationship with the Savior they worship. Their obedience will be based solely upon the merits of Christ’s imputed and imparted righteousness. They will keep the commandments because they have been saved by grace and not to gain any favor with God.

By this time you are probably in a state of excited curiosity as to whether any church in existence can meet the incredible conditions laid down in the Bible. Many claim to be the true church, but their claims are not based upon the requirements of the Word of God. Only those who fit the four specific marks outlined in the book of Revelation can be qualified for consideration. Just suppose we could find only one church in the world today which meets all these biblical tests. Could we expect it to be a perfect church with flawless members in it? On the contrary, it would surely be composed of average men and women, subject to the same failings as all other human beings. It would have to be a comparatively small church to meet the criteria of “remnant.” Jesus said the way of

truth was narrow and “few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:14). Again He declared, “And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man” (Luke 17:26). None should be deceived by trusting great numbers, the majority. The saved will be comparable to the eight souls taken into the ark at the time of the great flood. Truth has never been popular, and it will be less so in the final age of sensual pleasure and materialism. The remnant church will not be found among the great, popular churches with their indulgent life-styles. Said Jesus, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).

Paul’s counsel was: “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord” (2 Corinthians 6:17). To Titus he wrote, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts*, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly . . . *a peculiar people*, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:11-14).

These and many other related verses seem to indicate that the true church of the last days will be looked upon by the world in the same manner that Jesus and His followers were

esteemed in their day. Since the remnant is merely an extension of the great original, it will be despised by the majority, counted as peculiar, and finally, like the early church, as worthy of death. The book of Revelation exposes a diabolical plan of the end-time “beast” power to enforce a mark on every individual, and those who will not receive that mark will be condemned to death. As you might suspect at this point, those who resist that beast mark will be those who “keep the commandments of God, and have the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12). In other words, the remnant church.

Again, it must be emphasized that all those who belong to the remnant church will not necessarily be saved. Like all other churches it consists of ordinary people who must maintain a constant saving relationship with Jesus Christ. It is undoubtedly true that there will be people saved and lost out of *all* denominations and sects. Every person will be judged on the basis of revealed truth, and how he obeyed what he knew. Members of the remnant church will have great light, and they will be judged accordingly. Many will fail the test, because they depend on their knowledge of the truth rather than the saving merits of

Christ's righteousness. This is why it is altogether possible for many even in the "remnant" church to be lost. Others who have not so great light will be accepted if they know Jesus and walk in all the light that has been revealed.

But after making those observations, we must also concede that God has a special church with a special message which is designated as the "remnant" of the woman. It will appear near the end, holding the same doctrines as did the apostolic church, keeping all the Ten Commandments (including the Sabbath), having the gift of prophecy, and preaching Revelation 14 to the entire world.

CHAPTER 9

Does Any Church Meet the Four Tests?

Is there such a church in the world right now which meets all the requirements of these biblical texts? God does not leave us to wonder. He has made the marks so distinct and clear and simple in the Bible that all can know what to look for. Is it difficult to match the four great distinguishing signs with the hundreds of confusing church names and bodies? Not at all.

How many of those churches arose after 1798? A small minority. And how many of this minority are keeping all the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath? Very few. They can be counted on the fingers of one hand. How many of these few also have the spirit of prophecy? And finally, how many are proclaiming the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 in all the countries and languages of earth?

The sifting and eliminating has led us down to just one church, believe it or not. It would be less than honest to leave you hanging at this juncture, wondering if God had described some impossible, hybrid church

that would never exist. Out of all the ecclesiastical systems in existence at this date, there is only one that fully meets the biblical criteria of the remnant.

This must be our conclusion based upon historical facts and not because we have any axe to grind for some particular church. The inspired record of Revelation 12 contains no emotional bias toward any existing church. The most disinterested person would have to come to the same conclusion after examining the full, prophetic picture. This leaves no room for boasting or pride. The secret was not revealed by any man but by the Word of God.

As we name the church, it must be with some trepidation. There will always be a few ready to charge us with sectarianism in spite of the undeniable evidence before us. Others will allow personal prejudice to rob them of this glorious truth.

The only church fulfilling the prophetic description of the true remnant is the Seventh-day Adventist church. Arising around 1844 this movement of destiny began the predicted program of restoring the truth which had been lost or distorted during the Dark Ages. One after another of the original doctrines of Christ and the early church were

returned to their former luster and beauty. As the authority of the law and the Sabbath was re-established, God did exactly what He had promised to do: He restored the beautiful spirit of prophecy to the remnant church. That gift was manifested through the life and teachings of Mrs. Ellen G. White. This young woman, with only a grammar school education, received special revelations that extended over a period of more than six decades. From her inspired pen poured more than seventy books, many of which were acclaimed by the highest secular critics to be matchless in form and content.

Although the gift of prophecy served in a powerful manner to give impetus to the new movement, it professed only to be a "lesser light" to the sovereign authority of the Holy Scriptures. In harmony with the Bible rule to "try the spirits," every manifestation had to be tested by the Word of God. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). Had her writings not conformed to the Bible in every respect, they would have been rejected as counterfeit, but they spoke in perfect agreement with the Scriptures. In no way have they been

considered a part of the sacred canon of Scripture. Though inspired by the same Spirit, they do not add to nor take away from the Holy Writ, but like a magnifying glass they bring out the beauty and truth of the Word.

Perhaps the greatest wonder of all is how the emerging remnant church, in the providence of God, settled upon the very same doctrines of Revelation 14—the ones specified by Jesus and John as the final message—as the heart of its teaching. But there is yet another miracle! How could that infant church, with only a few hundred members in 1860, reach out with its unpopular message and evangelize every country in the world? Yet, that is exactly what has happened! The work of Seventh-day Adventists has been established in countries representing nearly 100 percent of the world population. And every one of these unique doctrines of Revelation 14, including the judgment, the Sabbath, and the beast message, is being witnessed to those nations.

There are several churches which qualify on the first point of identity, and there are a few who fit the second also; but, it is a singular fact that only one church conforms perfectly to all four points. With a simplicity and logic

that appeals to human reason, God has fulfilled His promise to guide us into all truth. The next move must be up to us. What will we do about the persuasive conclusions to which we have been led?

No one can avoid making a decision over this kind of truth. We can decide to accept it, or reject it. We can choose to obey or disobey. But one thing is certain—you can never be the same again, no matter which decision you make. Conviction has a way of staying with us even when we try to ignore or banish it. You can never forget the things you have learned about the true church. You are now in possession of the most sought-after secret in the whole Bible.

I would urge you not to make a decision to accept it just because it has convinced you intellectually. No one should join the church, which is the body of Christ, unless they have been drawn spiritually into a relationship with Jesus.

Behind the fantastic prophecy of the true remnant I want you to see the Lamb of God dying on the cross in your place. He hangs there because of sin—because someone did not love Him enough to obey Him. “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

We can't obey Him until we have knelt, broken-hearted because of our sin, and accepted Him as Lord and Savior. Love for Him provides both the motive and the power to fulfill His Word. If you haven't accepted Him already, make that your first decision. Then under the strength of that new love relationship follow Him into service as a member of the true remnant church.

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