

Lesson 51

10.4. Church, a prophetic interval

- The Church is a prophetic interval, yet it was never prophesied in the Old Testament. Do you remember when we studied the feasts that God instituted for the people of Israel? There were seven feasts: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles. The first four were held one after the other, but there was a time gap before the last three. Today, we are living in that time gap.
- The Church period is prophetic because of the time between the feasts. We learnt that each feast represents a prophecy of the stages of Jesus Christ's saving work for humanity. We established that the first four feasts have already been fulfilled; that is to say, the prophecies to which each feast referred have been realized through Jesus Christ. We are currently living in the interval, and Jesus will fulfil the remaining three feasts: The Feast of Trumpets, when the rapture of the Church will take place; the Day of Atonement, when Israel will be saved as a nation at the end of the tribulation period; and the Feast of Tabernacles, which will be fulfilled during the millennium, when Jesus will '*tabernacle*', i.e. be present on earth in His millennial kingdom.
- There was no church in the Old Testament. As we saw in the previous lesson, the Church is not formed without the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Through this baptism, each person who truly accepts Jesus as the Lord and Savior of their life is born again in spirit, becoming part of the universal Church that God sees. Therefore, the Church could not have existed in the OT. Therefore, there could be no church in the OT. We mention this because some theologies claim that Israel is the OT Church. As we have said before, Israel is Israel, and the Church is the Church; they are completely different entities in God's plan.
- Israel was, is, and always will be God's people, but the Church is something new. Didn't we read in the last lesson that the church is '*a mystery which, in Paul's time, was being revealed by God*' ? ⇒ **John 7:37~39**
 - **V.38:** '*Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*' What tense is this? It's the future tense because it had not happened yet when Jesus spoke.
 - **V.39:** It is clear that the Holy Spirit would be given after Jesus was glorified, which happened after his resurrection.
- So, the Holy Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified. One characteristic of the Church period is the permanent indwelling of the Spirit in saved people. The people of Israel had the Spirit among them, but not within each individual as is the case today in the Church. The Spirit was with them because without the Holy Spirit, there is no conviction of sin or knowledge of God. However, there was no permanent indwelling. After the rapture of the Church and during the Tribulation, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit will continue for those who accept God's provisions for that time. After Jesus' sacrifice, anyone who accepts him has complete acceptance before God, not just atonement as in the Old Testament (OT). Some people in the church claim that after the rapture, the Holy Spirit will leave the earth. However, the Holy Spirit is God and will not leave the earth because he is omnipresent. After the rapture of the Church, the ministry of the Holy Spirit will change. He will no longer restrain evil as He does today during the Church age. During the Tribulation, Satan will be free to act on Earth, which is not the case today.

10.5. We are part of this era

- We are part of the era we are studying. We are part of the '*picture*.' When we look at a painting from a distance, we see the whole thing. However, the closer we get, the easier it is to lose sight of the whole picture. As we are part of the picture, we must pay close attention to what is happening.
- The Church period is absolutely no different from the other periods we have studied. What is this characteristic? God presents his plan, and then Satan presents his version. If we look at Satan's version, we will see that it is terribly similar to God's plan. Satan uses the same technique, presenting something similar but with an entirely different objective than God's.
- Satan's goal is to erase God's plan for humanity by distracting people with his own plan, which is similar. Those who follow Satan's plan turn away from God. This is Satan's sole objective. Throughout history, the battle has been to distinguish God's plan from Satan's. There is only one way to avoid confusion: the Bible. There is no other way. If you do not know God's word, you will be lost and deceived.

⇒ **Romans 10:11;** '*Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.*'

⇒ **John 8:31~32;** '*And the truth shall make you free.*'

- What is God forming in our time? He is forming His Church, the body of Christ and the Bride of the Lamb. What God is forming is a body. When Satan saw Jesus leave the earth after the resurrection, he must have felt relieved. However, he became very worried soon afterwards when the Church began to form because he saw new '*Christs*.' In other words, he saw people being born with the same nature as Jesus – being born of the Spirit. Therefore, Satan began to persecute Jesus' Church. In the beginning, he persecuted people to death because they began preaching the Gospel boldly. The more he persecuted them, the more the church grew. The more people he lost physically, the more the church grew spiritually.
- At the beginning of the Church, Satan began persecuting people through Roman emperors and Israeli authorities. The Church was tremendously persecuted in an attempt to extinguish it. Study the Book of Acts of the Apostles, and you will see this for yourself.

⇒ **Acts 4:1~31**

However, when Satan saw that the Church was growing, he reverted to his old technique of taking on a likeness. Thus, he infiltrated the Church through fraudulent apostles and false ministers, as the Bible calls them.

⇒ **Jude 3~4;** '*For certain men have crept in unnoticed...*'

⇒ **1 John 2:18~19;** '*Many antichrists have come* '

⇒ **Matthew 7:15~23;** '*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing*'.

- Satan introduces tares among the wheat, (*as Jesus said he would*). Jesus says, '*An enemy has sown tares among the wheat, and the enemy is the Devil.*' Satan's envoys arrive in the midst of the Church, causing confusion and division. This tactic has worked so well that Satan continues to use it to this day.

Groups misuse the name '*Church*,' while the true Church is often persecuted. For centuries, the Word of God has been '*buried*.' History calls these centuries the Dark Ages. Human traditions and dogmas have replaced the Word, and the true Church is being decimated, tortured, and persecuted. All of this is written in encyclopedias and history books that we learn from in school.

- When God brought the Word to light again and began spreading it throughout the world, Satan launched new attacks in the realm of interpretation. He wants to convince the world by spreading the myths that the Bible is difficult to understand, that it takes experts to interpret it, and that one must be careful when approaching it. The Bible is the world's best-selling book, yet it is also the least read. We often hear: '*I can't understand the Bible. I have tried reading it, but I need help interpreting it.*'

⇒ **1 John 2:27;** *The anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone to teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things...*

- The Bible is a book of revelation written by God the Father, the creator of man, for man. Would God write a book that humans could not understand? If it were up to another man, who would interpret it? Is one man superior to another in God's wisdom? God establishes teachers and people with the gift of teaching in the Church, but this is different from the need for men to interpret the Bible. Teachers and those with the gift of teaching will not learn for you nor interpret anything for you. God uses these people to shorten the time it takes the Church to study the Word of God, which is what we do in this course. However, the responsibility lies with each one of us. If we simply go through the motions of studying these lessons and think we know everything, we are lost. We must delve deeper into reading and studying God's Word, and we must pray to the Holy Spirit within us to teach us the whole truth.
- Satan fight everything '*with tooth and nail*' to prevent people from understanding the Bible, and his main attack today is on the interpretation of Scripture. Everyone wants to interpret it however they wish, which has caused major divisions within the Church.
 - Ah! Baptism has to be like this! No, I interpret it differently. The Supper is similar, but I interpret it differently. So, you take your interpretation, and I will take mine. That is how the division is formed.
- And so, the various denominations emerged. We are part of this era, living in the midst of it all. If we don't open our spiritual eyes, Satan will deceive us with his cunning traps. It would be easy to understand if we stuck to the simplicity of God's word. '*If the Word says so, then let's do it.*' However, make no mistake: Satan attacks our minds through interpretation. One of the first principles we learn in the course is that the Bible interprets itself. Never forget that the Bible means what it says.

- The local Churches should have the names of the cities where the people live.

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| ⇒ Romans 1:1~7; | <i>Paul, to all those in Rome, letter to the Romans.</i> |
| ⇒ 1 Corinthians 1:1~2; | <i>Paul, to the Church in Corinth.</i> |
| ⇒ 2 Corinthians 1:1; | <i>The Church of God in Corinth.</i> |
| ⇒ Galatians 1:1~2; | <i>To the Churches in Galatia.</i> |
| ⇒ Ephesians 1:1; | <i>To the saints in Ephesus.</i> |

We don't see Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian Churches in these passages. Divisions were never God's plan. Because we lack firmness in the Word, we play into the Devil's hands and wage war among brothers and members of the same body: the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.