

Forerunners & The Spirit of Elijah



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Introduction

There are two great arrival aspects to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. The first was His coming as a little child, to grow up into manhood and then to die as the Lamb of God for the sins of the whole world.

The second will be His coming again to glorify and gather to Himself the church, and to judge the unbelievers.

Before each event, the Lord raises up forerunners with the spirit of Elijah, anointed to prepare the people of God to both recognize and receive the Lord when He arrives.

John the Baptist was prepared in his mother's womb to be a forerunner of the Lord Jesus at His first coming.

And he (John) will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord, their God. It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him (Jesus) in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitudes of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. (Luke 1:16-17)

When the disciples questioned Jesus about Elijah, He answered them as follows:

***Elijah is coming and will restore all things**, but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they (the leaders) did not recognize him, but did to him what they wished . . . Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist. (Matthew 17:11-13)*

John's ministry focused on the need for pure heart attitudes, sincere repentance and faith toward the coming Messiah. The leaders in Israel, on the other hand, were only interested in keeping traditions and laws that they had laid upon the people.

The words of Jesus, "*Elijah is coming and will restore all things*," reveal that the spirit of Elijah will prepare the way for the second advent of Jesus, as forerunners are raised up with hearts on fire to see the church restored (Malachi 4:5-6).

Why Elijah?

The life story of Elijah provides us with the best biblical example of a forerunner. After serving the Lord as prophet for many years during which time he performed great miracles, the Lord told Elijah to go and anoint Elisha as prophet in his place.

Elijah's history as a prophet was marked by his stand for righteousness, while the nation and its king were given to idolatry. His experiences were key in Elijah's discipling of Elisha.

Elisha responded immediately to his call to be a prophet. He served Elijah as a true servant while being trained over a period of several years (2 Kings 3:11).

When the time came for Elijah to go to heaven, Elisha would not leave his presence until he was assured that, if he would see Elijah depart, then he would receive a double portion of the spirit on Elijah. This took place, and Elisha went forth in the anointing that Elijah had possessed, but he performed more miracles in his lifetime as a prophet. Elijah was an excellent forerunner for the prophet who came after him, and he is a good example to the forerunners who are preparing the way for the Lord's return.

Looking for the Reality to Come

The hearts of believers are fixed on that future, glorious day when the Lord Jesus returns for His bride; a bride who has prepared herself for that wonderful day. Her preparation, as expressed in the following scripture, reveals the spirit of Elijah in divine restoration that will precede His return.

Therefore repent and return so that your sins may be wiped away in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive (retain) until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. (Acts 3:19-21)

Restoration includes the following two important areas of reality:

1. The salvation of Israel; the church will not be complete apart from the salvation of Israel. There will be Messianic forerunners.

2. The church that Jesus returns for will exhibit all the righteous qualities and truths of the early church. The reality of such restoration is not apparent from examining the church that exists today. However, it can be found in the New Testament by researching the following subject areas:

- The teachings and authority of Jesus
- The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus
- The commissioning of believers by Jesus and their baptism in the Holy Spirit

- The acts, teaching and epistles of the apostles to local churches
- The lifestyle and relationship of the early believers

The documentation of the above truths in the New Testament was completed early in the second century. Church documents after the second and third centuries reflect a much different church.^{1, 2} My emphasis is on the original church that the Lord planted, which was characterized by the following qualities.

- The church existed as the body of Christ; it was *not* an institution. Assemblies were autonomous, local expressions of the body of Christ.
- Each local church was overseen by a collegial group of men called “elders.” No one man was a final authority figure. The overseers jointly sought direction from Christ.
- There were no hierarchical levels of authority in the overall church; Christ was head of everything.
- Deacons were appointed to assist the elders in many tasks; they did not function in spiritual oversight of the church. Like the elders, they saw themselves as bond-servants of Christ.
- Every member of the church was recognized as having a personal gift and place of service, for which he, or she, was equipped to serve. Godly character was always more important than ministering ability. There was no division of believers into clergy and laity classes.
- All members were expected to bear witness of Christ in their every day activities. Meetings of the church were largely confined to worship, prayer, teaching and the breaking of bread.
- There were no titles or offices. The word “office” denotes an organizational position that carries resources and authority to perform a specific task. God does not operate through offices. When He calls a believer into a specific ministry, all of the necessary resources and authority lie in the supply of the Holy Spirit. Some Bibles translate the Greek word “EPISCOPE” as “office” in scriptures such as 1 Timothy 3:1. EPISCOPE is more correctly translated as “an over-seeing.”
- Meetings were not formatted or programmed; they were prophetic and spontaneous as the Holy Spirit moved among believers.

The above factors provide a challenging understanding of what lies ahead in restoration of the church before the Lord’s return. This is where we can expect to see forerunners raised up.

Decline of the Early Church

The church that existed after the third century was quite different than the early church described in the New Testament.

The initial and major change came from leaders in the church. They introduced the office of bishop in each church. The bishop, who was selected from among the local elders, was given final and supreme authority over all matters in that church. This action violated the headship of Christ, and opened the door for additional levels of authority in the future. The great error of exalting man and diminishing the centrality of Christ introduced the apostasy. In time, the jurisdiction of bishops was extended to take in neighboring assemblies.

Because of the handiwork of man, the church became institutionalized. Liturgy emerged to define the “correct manner” of coming before the Lord. Ministry changed from being revelatory, prophetic and spontaneous into teaching and definition. Public ministry was confined to men called “clergy.” Everyone else, the “laity,” were expected to serve the clergy.

The office of bishop led to a diminishing of apostolic ministry. Gifts and ministries of the Holy Spirit began to fade. Foundational scriptures such as, Ephesians 2:20-22; 4:11-16, had less relevance in building the church.

The lordship of Christ in individual believers, and His headship over the collective church were greatly weakened. Clearly, the centrality of Christ is the most important requirement in restoration of the church. The height of darkness in the apostasy was marked by the Inquisition, anti-Semitism and the sale of indulgences.

The apostasy of the church continued through the Dark Ages (400AD - 1000AD) into the 16th century, at which time the Reformation, under Martin Luther, began. A light had dawned in the church!

The Light of Reformation

Whenever a lost truth is recognized and adopted in the life of the church, such reformation is a step in restoration. Restoring the truth of “justification by faith” was the heart of Martin Luther’s contribution to reformation. He was a forerunner.

A great multitude of truths have been restored over the past four-hundred years by various Protestant churches. These truths touched many areas of the Christian faith such as taking the gospel to the unsaved, water baptism, divine healing, baptism in the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts and

much teaching literature. Beginning with the printing press, this era saw the development of great communication and publication technologies.

With the church now spread over most countries in the world and with all of the communication and translation technologies that are available, we are near the end-time purpose of God when Jesus returns for His people.

The Church Today

Christianity is the fastest growing religion in the world, and many believers are convinced that the return of Christ is imminent; but how does the Lord see His church today?

I believe when a man of God starts a church, it can be likened to a man digging in the desert and he hits water, which breaks forth as a stream. The stream is identified with the person who dug it. The surface of the desert, which represents the world, is covered with many streams and bodies of water; some are small while others are quite large. Some streams are nearly dried up while others are flowing with water. The streams rarely connect and are quite distinct from one another. This is how I believe the Lord sees the church. His desire is for each stream to flow into the great river of God and lose its identity, becoming one, great, united body.

An honest view of the church today makes it clear that the following qualities of the early church have yet to be restored.

1. Christ will become truly central in the life of the church. In particular, His headship must replace man-ordained leadership.
2. The reality of the body of Christ will replace the institutions that man has defined in church structure.
3. Valid apostolic and prophetic ministries will be raised up to lay foundations for local churches.
4. Things such as: offices, titles, the concept of clergy and laity, hierarchy, etc., will slowly disappear.
5. True spiritual unity will replace ecumenism as the body of Christ becomes evident.
6. Small groups (home churches) will flourish.

Conclusion

There are growing reports of miracles taking place in evangelistic settings. These reports come from various places in the world, but primar-

ily from churches in the East. There are reports of the lame walking, the blind seeing, the deaf hearing and even the dead being raised to life. These are all signs of church restoration and harvest.

The grace of God is raising up forerunners who have faith to walk under the authority of God's word, rather than under the traditions of man that have become entrenched in the church.

Although we do not know the time-line, we realize that deepening darkness and tribulation lie ahead. However where sin abounds, grace does much more abound. God's glory on the church is His answer to spiritual darkness.

*For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; **but the Lord will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you.** Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. (Isaiah 60: 2-3)*

God's end-time strategy is to shake all things that man has built, so that only what He has built will remain³ (Hebrews 12:25-27; Haggai 2:6-7). He will lead His church through a time of great tribulation before He returns in glory (Matthew 24: 29-31; Revelation 7: 9-14). Scripture teaches us to expect difficulties in our Christian walk (Romans 8:17-18; 1 Peter 4: 12-13; James 1: 2-4).

*For momentary light affliction is producing for us **an eternal weight of glory.** (2 Corinthians 4:17)*

Daniel prophesied of such days:

*Many will be **purged, purified and refined,** but the wicked will act wickedly, and none of the wicked will understand, but **those who have insight will understand.** (Daniel 12:10)*

Persecution will draw believers closer to the Lord and to one another. Compassion and prayer will be fervent; martyrdom is a seed of the church. As God's glory rises upon His people, there will be a great end-time harvest of souls, in fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles with Jews and Gentile believers celebrating together.

The final harvest will not only apply to the good grain, but the Lord will also, in this time, gather out all tares and stumbling blocks from His kingdom (Matthew 13:30, 40-44; 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12).

When Jesus spoke to His disciples concerning the spirit of Elijah that had rested upon John the Baptist, He knew that John had already died. The tense of His words to them pointed to a future ministry of forerunners that will prepare the church for His second coming.

Elijah is coming and will restore all things (Matthew 17:11)

This expresses the burden and challenge of my tract.

I do not fully understand the time-line of the future, however by faith, I see forerunners coming over the horizon in the spirit and power of Elijah. Their cry is, "Make straight the way of the Lord; the government is upon His shoulders."

His government is defined by the reality of the following scripture:

*He (God) has seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as **head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all.** (Ephesians 1:20-23)*

Jesus must become central in all church life. Forerunners will be men of vision who stand out in humility, love and forgiveness. They do not pray for a return of visitations from the past, but for the visitation that God has planned for today to restore His church.

The spirit of Elijah is preparing the way of the Lord; great change is coming!

References

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