

The Handwriting Is On The Wall (1996)

God's Warnings to the Church of God

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 27-Sep-96; Sermon #FT96-01

Daniel 5:5, 25-30 In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. . . . And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; You are weighed in the balances, and are found wanting. PARES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain.

The past number of years I have been beginning each Feast of Tabernacles with a survey of some problem generally facing the Western world, and I have begun with these same scriptures because of the phrase that is there—"The handwriting is on the wall." I have used these verses for a sermon regarding earthquakes and how the number, as well as the intensity, of earthquakes has increased over the past seventy years to such a place where it is pretty hard to ignore that something unusual is happening.

Last year, I think it was, I gave one on abortion and recounted some of the statistics involving that. I believe the figure (in the United States) of the number of babies put to death since 1972 is somewhere in the low thirty millions. There certainly is a "bloody chain" that is going through the Western world as a result of that.

This proverb—"The handwriting is on the wall"—has come to mean that somebody has been **clearly warned** about what is going on, that a danger is imminent—perhaps even the collapse of an institution (or a nation). Perhaps, even death is imminent (for the person about whom the prophecy is spoken).

This year I want to give a survey of a number of ways that God has sent **a warning of grave danger** facing the church of God. The church was, without doubt, experiencing its gravest danger, I would say, in the past century (in order to be conservative). I do not believe that the danger is so great that it appears as though it is going to be put to death, especially considering that Jesus said that even the gates of the grave would not prevail against the church. But the outlook is still very grim, because the scattering is continuing.

I want you to turn to a very familiar scripture in Romans 8:28. I think in some cases we might even say that the church is not scattering. It is **atomizing**—it is being broken into very small particles. In fact—to use a Biblical metaphor—maybe the church is going to reach the place where there is "not one stone", as it were, "upon another." Maybe we are going to be brought to the place where we are going to be like many of the other great men and women of the past where they have had to **stand alone**—*them and God*, as it were—without any kind of a fellowship. Not even somebody even within your own family. Maybe some of you have already done that. Maybe some of you are still doing it. But maybe the atomizing of the church is going to continue. I hope not, but I am sure that all

the fellowships that do exist are going to continue to be quite small in comparison to what we had in the Worldwide Church of God.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

It is good to notice that there are *qualifications* for those that "all things work together for." The one is the person has to love God—which means that he is submissive to God, that he is keeping God's commands. Things are going to work out well for that kind of person, even though there may be a great deal of difficulty while the person is going through a problem. Also the person has to be one of "**the called**" of God—which means one of "the elect of God".

So we cannot say that *all* things work together for good, but we can say (dogmatically) that all things work together for good for those who *love* God, and those who are part of *the called* of God.

Romans 8:29-31 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

Now, we can take hope in that. We can take comfort in it. And we are supposed to rejoice here at the Feast of Tabernacles. I think that we can **rejoice in hope** (that God put *this encouragement* in His Book) despite the fact of what is very clearly taking place in the church as it is being blown apart into very tiny pieces.

Warnings have been made to the church of God. Many warnings have been given to the church. And the intensity of these warnings have been creeping up on us over the past twenty years, at least. The warnings began to be sounded **in** the church of God. I think that we can say that these warnings can no longer be avoided. I think that virtually everybody here has heard some of the warnings, recognized what they were, and done something about the warning that they received. This is interesting to me because I think that we have reached the place where it is **decision time** for many of us.

This is especially interesting to me because Billy Graham is in Charlotte, where we just came from. He may be speaking right at this very time (because of the one hour time difference. It is about 9 o'clock or 9:30 there). And he may be speaking, even as I speak. He is holding a crusade there. It is going to be going over the weekend, and I think that it will be over Sunday evening. But Billy Graham titled his radio program *The Hour of Decision*. That always kind of amused me, because Billy Graham's *Hour of Decision* is only half an hour long. Maybe he has always been on fast time. I do not know. But I really did understand what he meant. What he meant was that putting off a decision to do something positive about your relationship with God should not be delayed. The time for a decision is **now**. We cannot let it go by.

Billy Graham is also interesting to me, at this point, because even though he is going out to the public, I do not believe that he is an evangelist in the classical mold. But rather, I consider him to be a revivalist, a person sent out to revive the latent religiosity in the Protestant movement. Now, I am interested in him because I believe that what he is doing for Protestantism is something that needs to be done (at this time) within the church of God, in order to strengthen it again—so that it might be

united if God so wills. All the wishing (all the praying in the world) is not going to bring **unity** about to the church unless God wills that it be done. And if He does not want it to be, our will is not going to overpower God. If He wants it to be scattered, if He wants it to be atomized, it is going to be atomized; and we will have to accept it and work within it. But if He is doing what He is doing for a different reason, then it will come back together again.

We need 'the faith' that was once delivered to the saints to be revived. We need to be *revived to a living faith* that will unite us—first of all with God, and then with our brethren. Now instead, what we are continuing to see is large numbers of people going off into obscure technicalities that are succeeding only in dividing the church even further. Meanwhile, very many of these people are blaming everybody but themselves for what has happened in the church. (Hang onto that phrase. This is going to be important for the entire Feast.)

Looking back over the past twenty years or so, I can see that we have been very amply warned! First of all, by the Scriptures. Do we think that we are any different than the 1st century church? Did the 1st century church get blown apart? Even though it was **the** church of God, and even though many of those people had listened to the original apostles, they **still** got blown apart. The apostle Paul, in Acts 20, on his way through Ephesus (back to Jerusalem) told those people there that, "when I leave, grievous wolves are going to come in; and they are going to rend the flock."

Paul was a realist. I think that he understood that the spiritual strength of the 1st century church was waning. The apostles were reaching the age when they were going to die, and when they died, the flame was going to begin to diminish. There are plenty of warnings in the Scriptures. We should have expected what has happened to happen. But we did not.

Secondly, we were warned by Mr. Armstrong time and time and time again, "You people aren't getting it!" (More of that a little bit later.) But we were asleep. I was asleep. I will admit that to you. I cannot say that I was not because God Himself says in Matthew 25 that "they all slumbered and slept." I was blind to what was going on. Maybe I woke up (or maybe God woke me up) before many of you; but, nonetheless, I was asleep (and too long).

Thirdly, we should have been warned by *events that were taking place* in the church. We should have been able to compare those events to the Scriptures and to what Mr. Armstrong was saying. Turn with me back to Deuteronomy 28. Every one of us knows that this is the "blessing and cursing" chapter. But, we should have understood that this chapter should have been applied to the church of God. Yes, its primary focus was the nation of Israel; but all these things were written for our benefit so that we would understand.

Deuteronomy 28:15-25 But it shall come to pass, if you will not hearken unto the voice of the LORD your God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command you this day; that all these curses shall come upon you, and overtake you. Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your store. Cursed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your land, the increase of your kine, and the flocks of your sheep. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. The LORD shall send upon you cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that you set your hand unto for to do, until you be destroyed, and until you perish quickly; because of the wickedness of your doings, whereby you have forsaken Me. The LORD shall make the pestilence [spiritual sickness] cleave unto you, until he have consumed you from off the land, whither you go to

possess it. The LORD shall smite you with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue you until you perish. And your heaven that is over your head shall be brass, and the earth that is under you shall be iron. The LORD shall make the rain of your land powder and dust: [a drought, a famine of the word, a famine of spiritual truth] from heaven shall it come down upon you, until you be destroyed. The LORD shall cause you to be smitten before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them; and shall be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.

Scattered!—into how many different "groups"? How many different "fellowships"? So even if we only take *part of the curses* and apply them to the church, we should have known by the scriptures that these things were very likely going to occur. **We knew**, pretty much, what was going on in the church by way of events. **We knew** that we were not keeping the commandments with the kind of integrity and faithfulness that we once had. And so spiritual sickness, a malaise in the attitude, a famine of the truth, and scattering! Has the church been so ravaged by spiritual sickness that it cannot fight off *its enemies*—the flesh, the world, and the Devil? Have we been living in the midst of a spiritual famine, where "meaty food" is so sparse that a body can barely survive? Where are "the former and the latter rains" that cleanse and produce growth? Is the church fleeing before its enemies? Are we continuing to divide?

Well, the problems of the church are not unique. Israel went through them under the Old Covenant. And God faithfully recorded them for our admonition so that when we see similar conditions develop in the church, we ought to be able to understand. A lot of the problem was that we foolishly and unrealistically did not believe that it would ever happen to the church. We are *God's beloved*, are we not? Of course we are! And that is *why* it happened!

God is faithful in punishing, in chastising, and in disciplining His faithless children. He would not be God—He would not be a good, loving, Father—if He did not. This kind of thing does not happen to those having God's Spirit, does it? God is not like soft-hearted (or maybe I should say "soft-headed") parents, who let their kids get away with just about everything and run the house. It is God's will that is done, not ours. He is the Sovereign. We are the slaves. We do what **He** says. He is the Boss.

Well, it has happened, and it **is** happening. It has not stopped. Just like Israel of old, we are scattered, and, as the old *King James Version* said, "There is much confusion of faces." We were warned by the scriptures. I just read seven or eight verses of Deuteronomy 28 and these things are scattered all the way through Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah, Zephaniah, Joel, Amos, Obadiah—they are all over the place!—**for our admonition**. Let us turn to that scripture there in Romans 15.

Romans 15:4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning. . . .

That is written to **the church!** Deuteronomy 28 is for **you and me**. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and all the rest, that is written for **you and me!** We are the Israel of God! Very, very many of those scriptures apply (in the principle of *dualism*) to the church of God.

Romans 15:4-6 . . . that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That you may with one mind and with one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Oh, would to God that it was that way. But those things were written so that we could be unified. That is what it says. So, there is a major part of the problem in the church. Not nearly enough people are looking back at what God inspired to be written, so that we can understand what is going on and have **hope**. I hope that you leave this Feast of Tabernacles on a "high"—full of hope—that, because God sits on His throne, and He is the Sovereign Creator, what is happening is for **your good**. That you are going to come out of this **far better** than if He had let the church continue *as one body* called the Worldwide Church of God. If we had stayed there (the way it is going), we would end up in the fire. Would you not rather go through this difficulty and make it into the Kingdom of God, than to stay there and just float away? Well, I would.

Let us look at that companion scripture in I Corinthians 10. I will tell you, there was a time that I personally was a lot more upset. I mean, to me what was happening to the church was just like I was dying of a cancer. But I am reconciled to it now, because I realize that God is sovereign, and that what He is doing is **right**. I never believed that I would be doing something like this. But here I am. So what do you do? You just *do* what the Boss tells you to do.

I Corinthians 10:11-12 Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom [That is you and me!] the ends of the world [The purposes of the age.] are come. Wherefore let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

It is so interesting to see these two verses its context because this admonition falls right on the heels of the Old Testament examples that Paul uses for the church's benefit. And those examples were almost all **curse**s. In fact, they were. So we should have known! The prophets speak of Israel—and then of Judah—being scattered *because of faithlessness*. They then speak of Judah being re-gathered from the land of their captivity to do the work of rebuilding the temple and then the wall of protection that surrounded it.

But brethren, we were so spiritually weak—so proud, and asleep—that we did not see it coming until it was too late. But I will tell you something. Hindsight is better than when you are going through something. I can look back on it now, and I can understand that Mr. Armstrong saw it happening. He got it! He may not have done the right things. But then, again, maybe *he* did do the right things, but *we* were too asleep (and too weak) to respond. He no longer had the health, the energy, or vitality. Maybe God was, in a sense, you might say, withdrawing from him somewhat *for our benefit* so that his words no longer had the impact upon us that they formerly had earlier in our conversion. But he did "see it."

I have in my possession here this evening, and I am going to read some excerpts from it, the transcript of a sermon that he gave on June 24, 1978 in which he shouted at the Pasadena P.M. congregation fifteen times, "**Wake up!**" (This was one of the first sermons that he gave when he came back after his heart failure.) **Fifteen times!** A couple of times he said, "You're in mortal danger!"

Now for you "numbers buffs", there is some interesting number combinations that makes a person feel that maybe what he was saying was not accidental or coincidental. Even that number (fifteen times) is 3 x 5. Three is the number of completion. Five, the number of grace. The message was given fourteen days after Pentecost, on the 19th of Sivan. It was exactly 192 days (whose numbers add up to 12) until the church was attacked by the state of California.

I am going to read some of these things. The first one will be a little bit long; but after that, it will be pretty much without comment. He said:

I have called a special day of prayer and fasting today because God's church is in fatal danger. We don't realize, my brethren, the way that we've been drifting. We've been doing just what you heard in the sermonette—'Doing our own thing.' We've been getting lukewarm.

The sermonette was given by Carlton Greene, who at that time was the head of Food Service there at the campus.

I have good news for you; and I have bad news. The bad news I will give you first. God was doing really *a great work* through us (through this church) up to about nine or ten years ago—right around 1969. We were one. Nobody was in doubt about "Who's in charge?" But then, many (near the top) began every man to try to do his own thing instead of trying to do God's thing. They began to do their own thing; and *a spirit of competition* came in. At the same time, what I call "*the leaven of intellectualism*" was coming in—and gripping the college, and also gripping our congregation here locally, and more or less the whole church. I have noticed that thing of errant intellectualism ever since the college was started. I noticed it in the first year of Ambassador College. Well, about nine or ten years ago (along about 1969), a *spirit of intellectualism* started getting into the college again—until it no longer was God's college, I'm ashamed to say. But I'm going to change that! And so, some of us were of one leader, and some of another—and no one seemed to know who was really *in charge*. Well, I'll tell you Who was in charge—Jesus Christ! Only we're all going to sleep—just letting the church go its own way.

He brought me back for two reasons. One is to try to revive you. To shake you up (if I can). To get you to realize that you are in danger. And I'm not going to *purr* that out like a college professor. I'm going to *shout at you* in power! And you can take the warning and wake up and maybe go into God's Kingdom; or, you can go the other way and burn up.

And I say he's [Satan] deceiving over half of you people that are sitting in front of me right now. I don't mean the person next to you, I mean you!

I want to tell you, I'm heartsick today. I'm just grieved clear to the bottom of my heart, because you, brethren, have gone to sleep. And not just you. When I say 'you', brethren, I mean all the church. It's time to wake up.

Satan is angry. He is stirred up. He's not asleep. He's trying to lull you to sleep, but I'm trying to wake you up. I'll probably offend a lot of you, but I'm doing this in love and the only way I know to wake you up. If I come with flatteries and say only nice things, I'm not going to wake anybody up.

I say, Wake up, brethren! We've been asleep. I say, Wake up! Sometimes the truth hurts. And I hope it hurts. I hope it hurts enough that you wake up (and realize) and do something about it!"

Then he went on to say that we also have the condition of Ephesus—we have *left our first love*; and it is time to get back to it. Let me give you just a couple more.

You'd better *tremble* before these things. I am frightened for you, brethren. This church is in mortal danger. We're slipping; and we're getting on very dangerous ground. And Satan is winning the battle.

Then came quite a bit of encouragement. And he is talking about God, and about repentance, and about us getting back to God. And he says that He knows our weaknesses. He is a forgiving God. And, **if** we will only turn back to Him, He will still put out His arms and receive us and love us. And you cannot imagine how much *the love of God* can come into your mind and your heart, and how much He can love you. **God loves His church.** Then, he goes on to say that *we need a shaking up*. And, he closes the sermon by saying. . .

Unitedly, brethren, let's get on our knees; and let's get back to Christ.

I want to pick up something that Mr. Armstrong said very close to the beginning of that sermon when he talked about *the leaven of intellectualism*. There were three themes in that sermon. Two of them were bad. One of them was good. The two bad ones were that we have fallen asleep, that is, into Laodiceanism. The second one was "*the spirit of intellectualism*." The one good one was **urging people to repent** so that God will still receive us, and we need to get back to doing that.

In I Corinthians 2:6, I want you to apply this to "the leaven of intellectualism." This is important. It is very important to me, because my wife has been telling me about this sermon for quite a bit of time. I really did not pay a great deal of attention to it, even though I read it a number of years ago (at her encouragement). But there was something in there that I heard Mr. Armstrong say a couple of times. And then, when I read it this time—eighteen years after the fact—the light went on. I understood what he meant.

Do you know what he meant by "*the spirit, or the leaven, of intellectualism*"? I did not. I am a minister. I am supposed to know those things. Why was he so concerned about it? Think about the apostle Paul who is writing this.

I Corinthians 2:6-12 Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect; yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which

God has prepared for them that love him. But God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

The very fact that there is so much division in this world's "Christianity" is proof that the organizations (the religious organizations of this world) are being driven by the *wisdom of this world*—which Mr. Armstrong labeled "the leaven of intellectualism." They are driven by human intellect, *not by revelation*. True Christianity is **revealed**. If all it depended upon was human intellect, everybody would believe the same things. Men have a mind, they have a heart, they have a spirit for human things. But men (apart from God) do not have a mind (they do not have a spirit) for the things of God. The things of God must be revealed. The attitude of Laodiceanism, combined with the leaven of intellectualism, has been the engine that has driven the destruction of the Worldwide Church of God.

Let me give you a vivid example right from the Bible. We will not go into it because everybody knows it so well. The apostle Paul. Was Paul intelligent? Was Paul a man of great intellect? The apostle Paul did not figure out the Word of God until God (in a blinding flash of brilliant light) struck him blind. And, at the same time, *opened his mind* and *revealed Himself* to him. Christianity is *revealed* to **the elect**. The only reason the elect can understand it is by God giving that person *the ability to understand* it.

Now I want you to think. Jesus Christ and the twelve apostles were all considered unlearned men by the wise of this world, were they not? Here we have the testimony of perhaps the man with the greatest intellect in the church of God (at least in the first century); and he could not figure it out. **He was an enemy**, until God *revealed* it. And that is the apostle that God caused to write this. Christianity is a religion of revelation—not human intellect. This is why Mr. Armstrong so frequently said that he just had an average brain (an average intellect). God struck him down and **revealed** the way to him.

Do you see what he meant when he said that people forgot who the leader was that God put in charge under Jesus Christ? People of greater intellect than Mr. Armstrong began to rise (within the church) and introduce doctrines that were not really part of *the revealed mystery*. Things that came close, but they were not the real thing. But they came close enough, in many, many cases, to deceive everyone of us (in some cases). Now maybe Mr. Armstrong *saw it* because he was confronted by it almost every day. I do not know. But he saw it. And from 1978 on (at least, we will put that date on there) he spent virtually his entire ministry, until he died, warning the church that it was "off the track".

Now I want you to think about where the men who were leading the church after Mr. Armstrong's death got their education—Azusa Pacific, Southern Methodist University, and other places. Paul said, "I don't speak to you the wisdom of this world." That is what he meant—the things of human intellect. He said, "I speak to you the things that were *revealed*." If Paul was operating by human intellect, he would have remained a Pharisee.

There is one more interesting thing for you "numbers buffs" again. It was exactly seven years to the day (June 24, 1985, right on the very day) Mr. Armstrong caused to be published "The Recent History of the Philadelphia Era of The Church of God"—which was his final warning to the church.

He says, on the last page (if you have one of them), "**Lest it happen again.**" (That is an interesting number, is it not? Seven years to the day.) Well, did it happen? It did. It happened, and I am sure it was worse than he ever thought. I do not think that he dreamed that it would be that bad.

Let us go to the book of Amos, because there is an interesting parallel there. What is so interesting about this is that the setting for Amos 4 is in the cities of Bethel and Gilgal. These were cities where Israel kept the Feasts.

Amos 4:2-4 The Eternal God has sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks. And you shall go out at the breaches, every cow at that which is before her; and you shall cast them into the palace, says the LORD. Come to Bethel, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years.

I think it is pretty obvious what he is talking about here. Amos is warning that these people are going to go into captivity if they do not repent. This particular chapter is directed at the wealthy ladies there in Israel. Down in verse 11 is another warning—a reminder of the warning.

Amos 4:11-13 I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have you not returned unto me, says the LORD. Therefore thus will I do unto you, O Israel: and because I will do this unto you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel! For, lo, he that forms the mountains, and creates the wind, and declares unto man what is his thought, that makes the morning darkness, and treads upon the high places of the earth, The LORD, The God of hosts, is his name.

He is reminding them that He has the power to bring on them what He is warning *and that He is faithful*. His word goes forth, and it does not return to Him empty. If they did not repent, they could not blame Him—or blame His prophets.

Now the result of the Laodiceanism and the intellectualism was a weakened spiritual diet. And because of the resulting weakened spirituality, a spiritual famine was created within the church. Mr. Armstrong and other faithful ministers could not staunch it for a number of reasons. **Worldliness** (in the form of Laodiceanism) **overwhelmed the church**. In some areas, people were receiving good, meaty sermons. Just like God describes in His Word—"Here a little, there a little." In some places, it rained. It rained on one city, but it did not rain on another. And so the effect of what was going on (the deterioration of the church) was spotty. Some people were receiving a good diet. Others were not.

But Laodiceanism still overwhelmed the church. There was too much of it. It is interesting that, all the while that this was going on, the church was *growing in numbers* and yet becoming weaker and weaker spiritually. The people loved to go to the Feast, to make their offerings. But, just like the people here in Amos 4, we were laden with sins. And in our self-righteous blindness, we not only overlooked but refused to repent at what was being told us—so that Mr. Armstrong appeared to us to be nothing more than "an old crank".

In Jeremiah 3, we see another parallel. This happened to Judah. (In Amos, it happened to Israel.)

Jeremiah 3:2 Lift up your eyes unto the high places, and see where you have not been lain with. [God describes their sins.] In the ways have you sat for them, as the Arabian in

the wilderness; and you have polluted the land with your whoredoms and with your wickedness [idolatries].

We are going to see, sooner or later (at least, in one sermon of mine), that Laodiceanism is one of the worst idolatries that there can possibly be.

Jeremiah 3:3-4 Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain; and you had a whore's forehead, you refused to be ashamed. Will you not from this time cry unto me, my father, you are the guide of my youth?

Jeremiah 3:12-14 Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, you backsliding Israel, says the LORD; and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, says the LORD, and I will not keep anger forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD your God, and have scattered your ways to the strangers under every green tree, and you have not obeyed my voice, says the LORD. Turn, O backsliding children, says the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion.

These prophecies (these parallels) are endless, almost. If we continued in chapter 7, what we would soon find out is that Israel did not repent at the preaching of Amos. Neither did Judah (one hundred and twenty years later) repent at the preaching of Jeremiah. God, indeed, was **faithful** in warning them—in carrying through with what He said He was going to do. And God was faithful in warning us too! He says that He will do nothing except He reveals His secret to His servant the prophets. He warned us; and we did not repent. Too many of us *trusted in lying words* for too long. Now, look what has happened to Israel and Judah—and also to us.

Now think back. Think back while this was going on. Have we repented? Or, did we all do like **I** did, and point the finger of accusation at the Pastor General? First, Mr. Armstrong (to some degree), and then Mr. Tkach and the group that he gathered around him. Did we point the finger at them, as though *all of the problem* resided in **them**? Let me suggest to you that **we got what we deserved**. That is where we have to begin.

We got the Pastor General we deserved. And, if I can be so bold, that *he reflected us*. He was just in a position to do something about it. And God made sure that this man was given the opportunity to change things in hopes that we would repent, by making very obvious what was happening. Well, we did not recognize it for a long, long, time! When I think of myself, I did not take the warnings of Mr. Armstrong as aimed at John Ritenbaugh. It was Mr. Tkach's fault. It was Joe Junior's fault. It was Mike Fezell's. It was Greg Albrecht's. (Their sins were obvious, because they were out in front.)

I think Darryl said something. I do not know whether he said it to everybody, or if he might have just said it to me, but I got the point. I thought it was pretty interesting. He said, "If we're proud, we can generally see it; but we are **blind** to self-righteousness. It's almost impossible to see." I can look back on it now; and I can see those warnings just like they were a trumpet blowing—*the events, the scriptures, and Mr. Armstrong*.

The result is scattering of people all over the place and a very **grave** distrust of the ministry. That is exactly the way Satan wants it, because people are much easier to pick off one at a time than they are when there is a fellowship that gives encouragement and strength. It is not a cure-all. We had a fellowship within the Worldwide Church of God and we let it slip away. Everybody knows that God

used that metaphor of roaring lions, because one of the characteristics of a lion is to pick off the stragglers—those who are out away. It is there.

So the handwriting has been on the wall for quite a while; and it remains there, because this problem is far from over. I would have to say, based upon what I saw happen, and is happening, that we did not pay a lot of attention to the warnings. And, so, what the rest of the church of God is going to do remains to be seen, but God's instruction is clear. When something like this occurs, it is time for people to **take warning** and **repent** of their own sins, and to make appeals to God—not only for ourselves, but for the church as well.

Now, Christ did not form a corporate body as an act of vanity. It is my hope that eventually we will all be back in *one body*. But the size of that body, I fear, is going to be very, very, very, greatly diminished. Maybe that 7,000 figure (at the time of Elijah) is not there for nothing. I do not know. (We can all speculate. And I will speculate...I am not saying it is even a speculation...I am just wondering about it.) Christ formed a corporate body for the purpose of providing **common teaching**—for the perfecting of the saints, for fellowship with those of a common spirit, and to provide a base for the preaching to the world. The focus of this corporate group is *a family relationship* with the Father, through Jesus Christ, so that we will be prepared for His Kingdom.

I feel pretty confident that, even as God promised that He is going to re-gather Israel, and even as God did re-gather Judah—this gives me more hope than the Israel one, because *we are the spiritual Jews*. God sent the Jews into captivity for 70 years into Babylon. It is also very interesting that when they returned to their homeland, very, very few returned. So small was the group, that Ezra planned their traveling and asked the people to fast, that nobody would attack them on the way. They were so tiny. Is that a forerunner? Now I do believe (again, I am confident) that God is going to re-gather us. But it may not be until—as it has been suggested—the Two Witnesses begin to rise, and the church begins to rally around them. Unless God does it, we will never get back together. I think that there is going to be a very hard go (and maybe a fairly long one) before we get to that point.

We are here tonight to begin a period of **learning to fear God**—and to rejoice in His purpose. Now is the best time to get started on your own personal revival. *The hour of decision* is now.