

The Battle for The Word

**The age-old battle for the Word,
Beginning in the Garden of Eden,
Continuing right through the Old and New Testaments and Church history,
&
Coming to a double climax at the End Time just before Jesus returns.**

THE BATTLE FOR THE WORD

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Age-Old Battle for the Word

The Original Aim of the Father of Lies: To Seduce from the Original Word

One of the keys to properly understand any matter in the Bible is to go back to the beginning, to the time when it is first found.

What was the devil from the beginning? A liar (John 8.44).

What was the very first thing he lied about? The Word of God.

- ***He questioned*** God's first words (Gen 3.1).
- ***He denied*** God's first words (Gen 3.2-4).

What was the first sin of the first man?

- ***He disobeyed and turned from*** God's first words (Gen 2.16-17, 3.6,11,17).

The Ongoing Battle for the Word

From then on, throughout the Old Testament, throughout the New Testament, throughout Church history and especially just before Jesus returns, the battle has raged over the Word of God:

- ***The devil*** fights to undermine, contradict and destroy the Word and those who provide, proclaim and uphold it.
- ***Man*** either it rejects it or receives it and becomes a living manifestation of it.
- The Holy Ghost and those inspired by the Spirit are always drawn to the Word.
- The spirit of antichrist and its agents are always deeply antagonistic to the Word and to they who love the Word.

Over the coming years, the battle was fierce and the cost of receiving the love of the Word was high:

- ***Tribulation and persecution*** for the Word (Mt 13.20-21; Mk 4.16-17)
- ***Prison and exile*** for the Word (Rev 1.9)
- ***Death*** for the Word (Rev 6.9; 20.4)

But not only did the godly overcome through the Word; the Word itself overcame.

- The godly overcame the wicked one by the Word (1 Jn 2.13-14).
- Even when the ambassadors of the Word were put in chains (Eph 6.19-20), the Word itself could not be chained (2 Tim 2.9).
- Despite persecution, the Word multiplied and spread in the early Church (Acts 6.7; 12.24), growing powerfully and triumphing (Acts 19.20).

2. Why this Battle? What is so Special about the Word?

Its Power

The Word of God is the most powerful force in the universe:

- By it, the worlds were made and are upheld (Ps 33.6,9; Heb 1.3; 11.3; 2 P 3.5).
- It will endure for ever (Ps 119.89; Mt 24.35).

The secret of the power of the word is the Spirit. The Spirit and the Word are one. All Scripture contains the breath/Spirit of life from God (Jn 6.63; 2 Tim 3.16).

Its Effects in the Believer

The Word is absolutely essential for the believer. He cannot live without it (Mt 4.4).

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|---|--------------------------------------|
| • It produces faith | Ro 10.17 |
| • It gives new birth | Jn 3.5; 1 P 1.23 |
| • It is powerful | Mt 22.29; Heb 1.3 |
| • It powerfully works within the believer | Ro 1.16; 1 Th 2.13 |
| • It produces fruit in the believer | Col 1.5-6 |
| • It nourishes/feeds | Mt 4.4; 1 Tim 4.6; 1 P 2.2 |
| • It strengthens | 1 Jn 2.14 |
| • It reveals sin in the heart and life | Heb 4.12-13; Jas 1.23-25 |
| • It cleanses the heart | Jn 15.3; 17.7; Eph 5.25-27; 1 P 1.22 |
| • It is both living and life-giving | Ps 119.50; Jn 6.63; 1 P 1.23 |

A good way to see just how beneficial the Word is for the believer is to compare it with honey. (The Bible likens honey to the Word: Ps 19.9-10; 119.103; Ezk 2.8 - 3.3.)

The Honey of the Word

Honey is highly valued (Ex 3.8; Gen 43.11; Jer 41.8). Why?

Sweet

- Natural honey is sweet (Pro 24.13; Ju 14.18).
- But the honey of the Word is even sweeter (Ps 19.1). Its sweetness can take the bitterness out of the sad experiences of life and out of a sour heart.

Nourishing

- Honey contains everything needed to nourish, sustain and strengthen the body.
- It is easy to digest. The body can quickly and easily absorb its benefits.
- It is suitable for the young (Isa 7.15) and the mature (Mt 3.4; Lk 24.42).
- It is the best food for reviving (natural & spiritual) heart action and a weak heart.
- Best results if unprocessed and unmixed (cp 1 P 2.2, the pure **unadulterated** milk of Word). Processing destroys much of natural benefit.

Revives/Quickens

- When natural strength and energy drained away, honey is the quickest way to restore them. It is fully absorbed into blood (2 S 17.29; 1 S 14.27-28).
- In the spiritual race and warfare, the honey of Word restores spiritual vitality.

Wholesome/health-giving (i.e. Preventative)

- Natural honey provides nearly all that is needed for the bones from which come the blood cells, which protect the body against germs (Pro 16.24).
- Natural honey is not only health to the bones but to the body generally, building up resistance. Bees produce six kinds of antibiotics in honey.
- Spiritual honey will build up our resistance against spiritual germs.

Healing (i.e. Curative)

Natural honey not only reinforces health. It restores it when defences are breached.

- Doctors say it is far superior to drugs for wounds, sores, ulcers & infections. Why? Germs cannot live in pure honey.
- Honey also heals burns, soothing the pain and drawing the sting.

Likewise with spiritual honey:

- It snuffs the life out of germs.
- It heals wounds received in the spiritual warfare.
- It heals burns from fiery darts of the evil one (Eph 6.16).

Soothing

- Honey is one of best age-old sedatives, restoring and building up nerve cells.
- It calms restless babies; in warm milk it helps older people to sleep.
- Spiritually, a mouth dripping with the honey of the Word (Pro 16.24; SoS 4.11) can soothe & calm troubled atmospheres. The honey of the Word is not only **for** us. Honeyed words can also come **from** us (SoS 4.11).

Long-lasting

- It does not deteriorate. In the right conditions it seems indestructible.
- There is something in it that keeps decay & even death at bay, hence formerly used for embalming in Egypt & China, and even today in Burma.

Inimitable

- A reward if anyone could manufacture honey artificially was never claimed. Even when all known ingredients are blended artificially, it lacks the nutritional and medicinal value of the real thing. There is an unidentified missing quality.
- Likewise with the Word. There is an invisible ingredient. It is the Spirit (Jn 6.63).

Abundant, even in the most unlikely places

- Dripping (1 S 14.25-26) and Flowing (Ex 3.8; Job 20.17)
- Found in hard, rocky places (Dt 32.13), wilderness places (Mt 3.4), and even in the carcass of a lion (Jud 14.8).

Finally, and very relevant for the day we live in, from ancient times natural honey has been used for beauty treatment. It is effective in removing spots and wrinkles.

Used along with the cleansing water of the Word, the honey of the Word removes spiritual spots and wrinkles and prepares the bride for presentation to her Bridegroom (Eph 5.26-27).

No wonder the Word is so special. No wonder the evil one battles so hard against it.

THE BATTLE FOR THE WORD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. The Sacred Trust: to Preserve the Knowledge of the Word

Since the aim of the evil one was to draw men from the Word, the Lord took steps to ensure the preservation of the record and knowledge of His pure unadulterated Word.

Israel

The privilege of preserving the Word of God was entrusted to Israel:

- Israel had many great privileges (Ro 9.4-5).
- But one stood high above them all (Ro 3.1-2).
- The Psalmist gloried in that unique privilege (Ps 147.19).

It was not only a sacred **privilege**, but also a sacred **trust**. Israel was a trustee of a very sacred thing. Its importance is seen in the location of the first written copy. It was kept in the most sacred place on earth, the Holy of Holies (Dt 31.24-26a).

To ensure its preservation, detailed instructions were left for priests, rulers & people.

Priests

The prime responsibility for the ongoing teaching of the Word was entrusted to the priests, the guardians of the knowledge of that Word (Lev 10.11; Dt 33.10; Mal 2.6-7).

As well as a *general* responsibility to teach the Word, there were also *specific* times to teach it to the whole assembled nation (e.g., Dt 31.9-12).

Rulers

These were solemnly charged to continually inform themselves of and diligently observe the Word (Dt 17.18-20).

Joshua is an excellent example of a ruler who gave the Word its proper place.

- When first made leader, the Lord clearly instructed him to have the Word ever before him. (Jos 1.7-8)
- He took these words to heart. Early on in his campaign to take the land of promise, though hostilities were still in progress, he brought all Israel to Shechem at the geographical centre of the land. Why? So that from the very beginning, all Israel would hear the Word and have it at the centre of their national life. (Jos 8.32-35)
- At the very end of his life, he still showed how deeply he had taken to heart the words the Lord spoke to him, both for himself and for his people. He exhorted them to give themselves wholly to the Word. (Jos 23.6)

People

These were not merely to passively follow their priests or rulers. They were to actively give themselves to the Word (Dt 6.6-9).

It was not only to be written on tablets of stone, as with the 10 commandments and Joshua 8, but on the fleshy tablets of their heart (cp 2 Cor 3.3).

2. The Battle to Preserve the Knowledge of the Word before the Exile

Throughout the Old Testament, the serpent kept trying to do what he did in the beginning, to take the people away from the Word. But the Lord raised up men with a passion to preserve the knowledge of, and restore obedience to, the Word. Among the most important before the exile were Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah.

Jehoshaphat

Although the Lord had made provision to ensure that the people were fully instructed in the Word of God, this was certainly not happening in the days of Asa, the father of Jehoshaphat, nor even before (2 Chr 15.3).

But Jehoshaphat had a heart for the Word (2 Chr 17.3-4). He determined to restore the knowledge of the Word by sending teaching priests together with the Book throughout the land (2 Chr 17.8-9).

On this occasion, no permanent institution was set up to ensure the Word governed all aspects of national life. But later, to ensure that the law was properly enforced, (i.e. the law of Moses, the Word), he installed judges throughout the land (2 Chr 19.4-7) and in the capital city (2 Chr 19.8).

Hezekiah

Two key principles in the life of the godly Hezekiah were the Spirit and the Word.

He was probably much influenced by his family background. His mother's father was a prophet (2 Chr 26.5 & 29.1). This spiritual influence is seen in his attitude to the Word:

- He collected words given by the Spirit, which became part of the Bible (Pro 25.1).
- His devotion was unequalled because of his keeping the Word (2 K 18.5-6).

The Spirit and the Word come together from the very start of his reign.

- He restored temple worship. Why? Because of the Spirit-given words of the prophets of his day, and the commands of David, which were part of the Word of God (2 Chr 29.15,25).
- Immediately after, he began preparations to keep the long-neglected Passover (2 Chr 30.1,5).
- As with the restoration of temple worship, his two guiding principles were the prophetic word and the written Word, the law of Moses (2 Chr 30.12,16).
- Finally, after encouraging all the teaching priests (2 Chr 30.22), he ensured ongoing provision for the offerings and sacrifices so that everything was done in line with the Word (2 Chr 31.2-4).

Josiah

At the time of Josiah, the spirit of antichrist came very near to totally eliminating both the knowledge of the Word and even the very Book itself. It was bad enough to have no teaching priest (2 Chr 15.3). How unspeakably worse to have no Bible!

Hezekiah, great grandfather of Josiah, had ensured that the land was governed by the Word. But his good work was destroyed by his son and grandson:

- Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, did many evils (2 Chr 33.4–5, 7). Though he later repented (2 Chr 33.15-16), two vital things were not restored: the Ark and with it the Book, which was beside the Ark (Dt 31.26).
- Nor were they restored by his grandson (2 Chr 33.22).

Into this great darkness came a bright and shining light, the young king Josiah. The Spirit gives a beautiful testimony of him (2 K 23.25; 2 Chr 35.26).

He restored not only the lost knowledge and practice of the Book but the lost Book itself. And he began from a very early age:

- He became king when only 8.
- At 16, he began to seek the Lord.
- As a result, when only 20, he began to purge his land from idolatry (2 Chr 34.3).

Initially, although helped by prophets (e.g. Jeremiah, another godly young man, Jer 1.2), all his actions were based on tradition and memory alone. There was no known copy of the Word of God to refer to.

Then, six years later, a copy of the Word of God was found (2 Chr 34.14-16a). This enabled Josiah to fulfil even more of his heart's desire, to bring his people back to the full Word of God.

The king's reaction revealed his deep reverence for the Book:

- He immediately gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem (v29).
- Then he went to the house of the LORD with the priests, Levites and all the people, and had read to them all the words of the Book (v30).
- Then he made a solemn personal covenant to walk after the LORD and to keep with all his heart the words in the Book (v31).
- He then made all present to do the same (v32).

The discovery of the Book inspired even more obedience:

- A further cleansing of the land (2 K 23.24; 2 Chr 34.33).
- The way in which the first Passover after the discovery was kept (2 Chr 35.18).

Why does Scripture say this Passover was so special? Because Josiah ensured every detail was done wholly according to the Word:

- Firstly, he gathered the teaching priests, who taught the Word (2 Chr 35.3a).
- They had to prepare themselves according to their divisions. Why? Because that was the prophetic word spoken by David and Solomon) (v4).
- He then told the priests to prepare the Levites so that they also would do everything according to the Word (v6).
- They then ensured that the offerings were offered as it is written (v12).
- Finally the singers were put in place according to the prophetic word (v15).

Truly Josiah was a man of the Book.

- Even with no Bible, he tried to bring as much as possible into line with what was still remembered of the Word.
- After finding the Bible he made even greater efforts to bring everything and everyone into line with the Word.

3. The Battle to Preserve the Knowledge of the Word after the Exile

After the destruction of the Temple, copies of the Book went to Babylon with the exiles (e.g. Dan 9.2). Additional copies were made by scribes such as Ezra (Ezra 7.6,11).

The 1st Return from Exile

Ezra 1 - 6 tells the story of the first return from the exile. From the very beginning they wanted to re-establish themselves on the foundation of the Word (3.1-4,10; 6.18).

But the knowledge of and commitment to the Word was not passed on to the next generation. E.g., compare Ezra 3.4 with Neh 8.14, 70 years later.

Ezra the Scribe

But God had a man ready to restore the knowledge and observance of His Word among the returned exiles, Ezra the scribe. He was truly a man of the Book:

- When copying the Word of God, scribes were extremely careful to ensure accuracy and to preserve the exact words of the original.
- Since Ezra was specifically designated Ezra “the scribe”, it highlights his dedication to passing on only the exact original Word.
- He was not only a skilled scribe, but also a *ready scribe* (7.6), i.e. eager, quick and prompt in copying the Word to ensure its preservation and dissemination.
- Also, he had prepared his heart to seek the Word, to obey it himself and to teach it to his people (7.10).
- Even among the Gentiles, Ezra was known as a man of the Book (7.11 & 14).

(In view of his attitude to the Book, unsurprisingly the Jews believe he compiled 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah and put together the final, complete version of the Old Testament.)

Ezra the Scribe leads the 2nd Return from Exile

The Lord opened the way for Ezra to lead a second return to the land. He was given full royal authority to put into effect all that lay in his heart: to ensure that the worship of God complied fully with the Word and that that Word was taught and given full authority throughout the land (7.23, 25).

As soon as he returned, his spirit of complete devotion to the Word impacted the inhabitants to bring their lives into line with the Word (Ezra 10.3).

Ezra at the Feast of Trumpets

Though no more is heard of Ezra until Nehemiah was appointed as governor, it is clear that Ezra’s attitude to the Word had made a deep impression on the people. This is clearly seen at the feast soon after the wall of Jerusalem had been rebuilt:

- The people unanimously asked Ezra to read the Word (Neh 8.1).
- They listened attentively for hours (Neh 8.3).

- They built a platform for him to stand on while reading so as not to miss anything (Neh 8.4).
- They showed a deep reverence for the Book (Neh 8.5).
- Its words penetrated deep into their hearts (Neh 8.9).

During the reading, they realised there was something in the Word they had not been doing, i.e. keeping the feast of Tabernacles (Neh 8.14-15).

- They obeyed so swiftly and carefully a remarkable thing was said (Neh 8.17)
- How could this be true when the feast of Tabernacles had been kept on other occasions since the days of Joshua (e.g. 2 Chr 8.13, Ezra 3.4)?
- There can only be one answer. The Word was truly central on every day in this feast (Neh 8.18). So, on this occasion it must have been kept more exactly in accordance with the Word than at any time before.

This was not just a flash in the pan:

- They were very soon listening to the Word again for several hours (Neh 9.3).
- Hearing the Word led to deep rededication (Neh 10.28-29).
- They covenanted to separate themselves from worldly marriages, to avoid sabbath breaking and to pay their tithes and temple taxes, i.e. to live in accordance with the Word.
- They also committed themselves to two other things, to ensure they kept that which was written (Neh 10.34-36)

Truly, the people were inspired to a full commitment to the Word. Why? Because of the example of Ezra,

- the man of the Book,
- the man with the Book in his hand,
- the ready scribe in the law of Moses
- the man who had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord.

May we have the same attitude to the Word, and may our attitude have a similar effect on others.

Amen.

4. The Test: False Prophets & Lying Wonders

From the beginning, even before there was a written Word, God has spoken His Word by His holy prophets (Lk 1.70; Acts 3.21).

In his battle to take men from the true Word of God, the evil one also sent forth prophets who spoke by an evil spiritual inspiration

- Some were obviously false as they tried to turn men to other gods (Dt 13.1-3).
- Yet these false prophets could display real supernatural power, working real lying signs and wonders to confirm their false prophecies (Dt 13.1-3).
- Other false prophets spoke in the name of the Lord (Dt 18.20, 22).

Does it seem strange that false men can work real wonders? The Bible shows that:

- the devil can work real wonders (e.g. Job 1.16)
- his agents can also exercise great power (2 Cor 11.13-15)

One astonishing example is the case of the Egyptian magicians. They performed real, supernatural miracles. These were not tricks.

- Ex 7.11-12 turning real rods into real snakes,
- Ex 7.20-22 turning real water into real blood
- Ex 8.6-7 producing real frogs

Why does the Lord allow such strong delusion? To test the people to see if they will listen to wonders or to the Word (Dt 13.3-4).

False Prophets in the kingdoms of Israel & Judah

The unclean spirit of false prophecy is found throughout the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. They are frequently mentioned in the prophetic books.

- They are unholy drunkards motivated by greed (Isa 28.7; Mi 3.5-7,11).
- They are certainly spiritually inspired, but by a lying spirit (Mi 2.11; Isa 9.15).
- And the people are ensnared by that same deceiving spirit (Ho 9.7-8).

Why were such prophets permitted?

- The Lord Himself blinded them (Isa 29.10).
- Why? As a judgement on those refusing the true Word of the Lord (Isa 30.10).

Let us look at two examples of this judicial blinding.

a) Micaiah & the 400 Prophets of the Lord

This shows clearly the difference between those who heed the Word of God and those who do not when a deceiving spirit is at work (1 K 22.6-7,10,12-13,22-23; 2 Chr 18.5-6,9,11-12, 21-22).

- Ahab, the most wicked king of Israel to date, is at war with Syria (1 K 16.33).
- The Lord deliberately deceived him by a lying spirit in the mouth of his prophets so that he would be killed (1 K 22.20-22).

- Jehoshaphat was with Ahab. He was the exact opposite of Ahab, the most godly king of Judah since David (2 Chr 17.3).
- Yet Jehoshaphat was strangely weak in his dealings with Ahab. He had married his son to the evil daughter of Ahab and his wife, the witch Jezebel (2 Chr 18.1). He had foolishly allowed himself to be persuaded to join Ahab's campaign.
- Ahab was deceived by his 400 prophets, speaking in the name of the Lord, that He would give him victory (1 K 22.6).
- These must have been ungodly. Jezebel had slain the true prophets of the Lord (1 K 18.13), but clearly felt at ease with these 400, even though they prophesied in the name of the Lord, not Baal. No wonder a lying spirit could so easily speak through their lips.
- Although Ahab was deceived, something did not witness with the godly Jehoshaphat. He asked if there was not another prophet of the Lord (1 K 22.7).
- Micaiah was sent for and a true word from the Lord given, that Ahab would die (1 K 22.17).

Jehoshaphat was not fooled by the lying spirit like Ahab since he was godly. Yet even he only just escaped with his life for he would not make a decisive break with Ahab. He went into battle with him. He even agreed to Ahab's disguising himself, while he himself kept on his royal robes (1 K 22.30), thus attracting enemy attention to himself.

Ahab's attempt to frustrate the prophecy of Micaiah failed. He was slain. Jehoshaphat was only delivered by crying to the Lord (2 Chr 18.31). Even for the godly, it is dangerous to disregard divine guidance. Although they enjoy His protection, they must obey the Lord's direction to avoid unnecessary suffering.

b) The Old Prophet

A very solemn example of the need to carefully obey the Lord's voice is the story of the old prophet (1 K 13.11,18,20,23,25-26,29).

- He told the young prophet he too was a prophet and that an angel had spoken to him by the word of the LORD. But he lied.
- Very strangely, a true word of the LORD then came to him, and it came to pass.
- Although a very confusing situation, if the young prophet had been obedient to the word the LORD gave him at the beginning, he would have been safe.

Flood of False Prophets just before the Exile & End of the kingdom

A flood of false prophets appeared at the end of the Jewish kingdom age. It is helpful to study them since the same thing happens at the end of our own Church age.

- Some prophesied in the name and under the inspiration of another god (cp Jer 2.8; 23.13) but such men would not fool any true believer.
- The most dangerous ones, in their utter folly, did not fear to speak in the name of the Lord even though their words were not from the Lord. And there were not a few. Many verses speak of them: Jer 14.14-15; 23.16,21,25-26,28,30-39; 27.9-10,14-16,18; Lam 2.14; Ezk 12.24; 13.2-4, 6-9,16,19,23; 22.28.

What are we told about their motives and the nature of their revelations?

- They prophesy lies in His name, saying, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed!"
- They see false and deceiving visions and speak false prophecies and delusions, saying, "Thus says the LORD!" when the LORD has not sent them, and, "The LORD says", when He has not spoken.

- They prophesy visions out of the deceit of their own hearts and follow their own spirit, but have seen nothing.
- They speak foolishness and lying visions, seeing flattering visions of peace when there is no peace.
- They profane the Lord among His people for handfuls of barley and pieces of bread, lying to His people.
- They are like foxes in the deserts.

How were these false prophets so deceived?

- In the same way as in the story of Micaiah and the 400 professed prophets of the Lord. The Lord deceived them (Ezk 14.9).

And how were the people so deceived that they listened to them?

- Because they wanted what the false prophets said and would not listen to the man with the true Word (Jer 5.31).

Just like in the last days, just before the day of Christ (2 Th 2.10-11; 2 Tim 4.3-4)!

How can we Discern the True from the False? the Wheat from the Chaff?

With such a confusing array of prophets professing to speak in the name of the Lord, how can we know what is right? By the Word. Here are two Biblical tests to help discern:

- Mt 5.11-12 their popularity
- Mt 7.20 their fruits

a) Their Popularity

How were the false prophets received compared with Jeremiah? (Jer 5.31)

Although true believers received his ministry, he was certainly not generally popular with those claiming to be the people of God. He was opposed not only by the people and the princes, but also by those who should have known better, the priests (of whom he was one) and those who claimed to be prophets of the Lord. In their folly they did not fear not only to ignore, but also to attack, a true prophet of God.

Examples of those who opposed Jeremiah, a true prophet:

- Jer 18.18 the people of Judah and Jerusalem
- Jer 26.8, 11, 16 priests and the prophets
- Jer 28.1, 5-6, 8-12, 15, 17 Hananiah the prophet
- Jer 29.1, 8, 15, 19, 23, 24-27 even prophets taken into in exile

b) Their Fruits

And what kind of people were the false prophets of Jeremiah's day?

- Lam 4.13 sinful
- Jer 2.26 thieves
- Jer 6.13; 8.10 covetous and practising deceit
- Ezk 22.25 tearing the prey like a lion; taking treasure and precious things
- Jer 23.9,11,14-15 ungodly, wicked, adulterers and liars

THE BATTLE FOR THE WORD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. Jesus and the Word: *"It is Written."*

If the Word was the guiding principle of the godly in the Old Testament, it is unsurprising that it was also at the centre of the life of Jesus, the Word in flesh (Jn 1.1,14).

He repeatedly used the Word when dealing with those who came against Him or questioned His teaching. For example,

- When criticised for attending the feast of Matthew, He referred them to Ho 6.6 (Mt 9.13).
- When the disciples were criticised for gathering ears of corn on the sabbath, He referred them to 1 S 21.3-6, Nu 28.9-10 and Ho 6.6 (Mt 12.3,5,7).
- When tempted by a lawyer about how to inherit eternal life (Lk 10.26).
- When they were going to stone Him, He quoted Ps 82.1,6 (Jn 10.34-35).
- When questioned about divorce, He quoted Gen 1.27 (Mt 19.4).
- When the religious leaders criticised the reaction of the children on His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, He quoted Ps 8.2 (Mt 21.16).
- After the parable about the wicked farmers who rejected and killed the son of the owner, He quoted Ps 118.22-23 (Mt 21.42).
- When the resurrection was questioned, Jesus said, "Are you not mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures?" and referred them to Ex 3.6. (Mk 12.24,26-27)

Jesus not only used the Word in His verbal battles with those who wished to oppose or undermine Him. He used that same weapon when tempted in the wilderness. When the evil one displayed his supernatural power, Jesus responded with the most powerful weapon in the universe, the Word.

- **On the first temptation**, Jesus quoted Dt 8.3 (Mt 4.3-4).
- **On the second**, after displaying his supernatural powers (how did he set Jesus on a pinnacle of the temple?), the devil tried a new approach. He himself quoted the Word (Ps 91.11-12), but not in the context or spirit in which it was first written. Jesus again overcame by quoting the Word (Dt 6.16) (Mt 4.5-7).
- **Finally**, the devil tried one more temptation with another supernatural display. (How did he take Jesus up into a very high mountain and show all the kingdoms of the world and their glory?) Jesus put him to flight with Dt 10.20 (Mt 4.9-10).

Notice,

- Jesus came to the wilderness in power, full of & led by the Spirit (Lk 3.22; 4.1).
- He afterwards returned from the wilderness in power (Lk 4.14).
- How was that power manifested? By speaking the Word.

2. The Believer and the Word: “What does the Scripture say?”

The Godly in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the Word was at the centre of the life of the believer. He would:

- Ps 1.2 chew it over and over, like a cow with its food
- Ps 119.11 hide it in the heart
- Ps 119.31 cling to it
- Ps 119.20 long for it at all times
- Ps 119.131 with opened mouth, pant and long for it
- Ps 119.72 consider it more highly than much gold and silver
- Ps 119.162 rejoice over it, as one who finds great treasure

The final authority of the godly Jew in all things was the Word. Actions were inspired by expressions such as: *as it was written, as it is written in the book of the covenant* or, *according to that which was written*. Everything must line up with the Word:

- Before the exile (e.g. Hezekiah, 2 Chr 30.5; 31.3; Josiah, 2 K 23.21; 2 Chr 35.26).
- At the first return from the exile (e.g. Ezra 3.2,4,10; 6.18).
- After the second return (e.g. Neh 8.14-16; 10.34).
- In New Testament times, even before conversion (Acts 17.11; 2 Tim 3.15a).

This guiding principle was clearly summed up by Isaiah (Isa 8.20; 34.16).

The Godly in the New Testament

It was the same in the New Testament. The believers aimed to live fully in accordance with the Book, to ensure the preservation and transmission of the knowledge of the Book, and to ensure the preservation and transmission of the Book itself.

The first Christians were mainly Jews. After conversion, they kept the same attitude to the Word that they were brought up with. For example, Apollos:

mighty in the Scriptures ... vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ. (Acts 18:24,28)

Similarly, Paul, like Jesus, appealed to the Word to confirm his teaching:

- Acts 17.2 in the synagogue in Thessalonica
- Ro 4.3 on justification by faith, quoting Gen 15.6
- Ro 9.17 on election, quoting Ex 9.16
- Ro 10.11 on righteousness by faith, quoting Isa 28.16
- Ro 11.2 on the future of Israel, quoting 1 K 19.10
- 1 Cor 15.3-4 on the prophesied death and resurrection of Christ
- Gal 4.30 on not tolerating legalism, quoting Gen 21.10
- 1 Tim 5.18 on honouring those who labour in the Word, quoting Lev 19.13

Paul was focussed on the Word right to the very end of his life. In prison, awaiting a probable death sentence, his chief request above all else was for his Bible:

Bring the cloak ... when you come - and the books, especially the parchments (i.e. probably copies of the Hebrew scriptures) (2 Tim 4.13).

3. Warnings of a Departing from the Word

Even in the early days of the Church,

- Some were already straying from the faith, the original Word (1 Tim 6.10,21; 2 Tim 2.18)
- Not just passively straying from the true Word, but actively teaching differently (1 Tim 1.3,6-7; 6.3-5).
- Not just teaching differently, but actively opposing true teaching (1 Tim 1.19-20; 2 Tim 2.25; 4.15).

One reason for this was a carnal love of money (1 Tim 6.10; 2 P 2.1-3). But there was another more serious spiritual reason.

- All through the Old Testament the spirit of antichrist sought to turn the people from the original Word and even to take away the Book itself.
- In New Testament times the same spirit continued this same work, still seeking to achieve the same original objective of the serpent, through deceiving spirits speaking not by outsiders, but by those who teach in the Church.

There are many warnings of a coming supernaturally-inspired, deceptive demonic invasion:

- The Spirit had warned Paul that such men were coming (1 Tim 4.1-2a).
- He repeatedly warned the Ephesians about the coming of savage wolves (Acts 20.28-31).
- Earlier, Jesus had warned of supernaturally empowered wolves (Mt 7.15-23).
- Outwardly they look like sheep, but inwardly are ravenous wolves (Mt 7.15).
- They are more than just preachers or teachers. They are supernaturally empowered to prophesy and do many amazing works of power (Mt 7.22).
- But they are not of God, they are false (Mt 7.15). Though they do their works in Jesus' name (v 22), they are not His (v 23).
- Later, John spoke of demonic spirits in the Church in his day, claiming to prophesy, i.e. to speak by the Spirit in the Name of the Lord (1 Jn 2.18; 4.1-3).

No wonder Jude cried out to contend earnestly for the original faith (Jude 3).

Furthermore, the Bible warns that this turning from the original faith would not end in New Testament times. It would get worse and worse (2 Tim 3.13), coming to a climax at the end time:

- In the last days, dangerous times would come. Professing believers would resist the Truth, the Word (2 Tim 3.1-8).
- They would not listen to sound doctrine but turn from the truth (2 Tim 4.3-4).
- This would climax in a great rebellion against the Word at the end of the age (2 Th 2.3).
- Jesus would be put out of His own Church (Rev 3.20).
- It would be so great that Jesus questioned whether He would find the original faith on earth when He returned (Lk 18.8).

How did Paul respond to this?

4. Guarding and Passing on the Sacred Trust

The Sacred Trust in the New Testament

- In the Old Testament the oracles of God were committed to the trust of the Jew (Ro 3.1-2). They were stewards of the Word.
- Likewise, in the New Testament, the gospel of the glory of God was committed to the trust of the early Church faithful servants of the Lord (1 Tim 1.11). They too were stewards (1 Cor 4.1-2; Ti 1.7).

Paul Passes on the Sacred Trust to Timothy

Paul took his responsibility to guard and proclaim the sacred trust very seriously (2 Tim 3.10-11), to the end of his life (2 Tim 4.7,17). But the time came for him to go home (2 Tim 4.6-7). To whom could he entrust the New Testament oracles of God, the sacred trust, which had been originally entrusted to himself, especially in the light of the prophesied turning away from the Word?

He chose his son in the faith, Timothy, as a steward of the original Word. He was a good choice:

- He had been given a good foundation in childhood (2 Tim 1.5; 3.15).
- After conversion, he had closely followed the teaching of the man to whom the Lord had entrusted His Word (1 Tim 4.6b; 2 Tim 3.10).
- Paul had left him in Ephesus earlier when there were problems of wrong teaching (1 Tim 1.3; 4.6; 4.13).

In his earlier commission, when leaving him in Ephesus to deal with the problems there, Paul had repeatedly charged Timothy to firmly grip and guard the Word (1 Tim 1.18; 4.15-16; 6.13-14; 6.20a).

Now, as Paul was about to leave, the days were even more dangerous and evil men even worse. He made a final exhortation/appeal/charge to Timothy in his last letter,

- To fight the good fight and stay true to the original faith (1 Tim 6.12-14) just as he himself had done to the end of his life (2 Tim 4.7).
- To diligently and blamelessly fulfil his responsibility so as to be unashamed at His Coming, just as Paul was confident that he had fulfilled his God-given ministry (1 Tim 6.13-14; 2 Tim 2.15).
- To guard, hold tight to and continue in the Word (2 Tim 1.13-14; 3.14).
- Not only to hold it tight but also to preach it fully, and fulfil his ministry (2 Tim 4.1-5).

Timothy in turn to Pass it on to Trustworthy Men

Timothy was not only solemnly charged himself to guard and preach it well. He in turn was to ensure that the sacred trust of the original truth of the Word was passed on.

- As Paul had taught Timothy, he in turn was to commit these teachings to trustworthy men capable of passing on them on to others (2 Tim 2.2).
- Church leaders he appointed must hold tight to the original faith (1 Tim 3.9) as

stewards of God's Word (Ti 1.7a), able to teach others (1 Tim 3.2).

How could Timothy Fulfil such a Solemn Responsibility?

How could Timothy fulfil such a responsibility? How could he discharge his sacred trust, his stewardship of the Word of God? The evil forces against him were very strong:

- These were dangerous times (2 Tim 3.1).
- Persecution was certain (2 Tim 3.12).
- This was a real fight (1 Tim 6.12).
- In fact, it was total war (1 Tim 1.18b).
- The opposition was supernatural (1 Tim 4.1-2; 2 Tim 3.8).

But even if the opposition was supernatural, the holy weapons at his disposal were also supernatural. And they were even more powerful:

- guidance from the voice of the Spirit (1 Tim 4.1)
- strength from the voice of the Spirit (1 Tim 1.18-19a)
- the indwelling Spirit (2 Tim 1.13-14)
- the gift of God within him (1 Tim 4.14)
- the Spirit of power (2 Tim 1.6-8)
- divine deliverance (2 Tim 3.11)
- divine presence (2 Tim 4.17)

But he must make full use of these weapons,

- He must not let them be extinguished, but stir them up (2 Tim 1.6).
- He must not neglect them (1 Tim 4.14).

The battle may be hard, but nothing can stand before a God-sent, Holy Ghost-anointed man!

Press the battle! Hold fast to the Word. Preach the Word. Pass on the Word.

THE BATTLE FOR THE WORD IN CHURCH HISTORY

1. Ephesus: Leaving the First Love, the Original Word

The First Church Age

The 7 churches of Revelation 2 – 3 are prophetic of the different phases of Church history from New Testament times until the return of the Lord.

The first, Ephesus, covers the period of the early Church up to about 60 years after the end of the New Testament.

The early Church had been well grounded in the Word by Paul:

- The Word had been fully preached (Acts 20.20,27; Ro 15.19; 2 Tim 4.17).
- This preaching was by revelation from God, not from man (Gal 1.12).

But, in the letter to Ephesus, given to John some years after Paul's departure, Jesus warned that the early Church was losing her grip on the Word.

- Ephesus was warmly praised (2.2-3,6).
- But, she had fallen and forgotten what she used to be and do (2.5).
- What was the root problem? Leaving her first love (2.4).

Leaving the First Love

What is the first love? How is it expressed? What does the Bible say?

- The love of God is to **keep** the Word (Jn 14.15,21,23; 1 Jn 2.5; 5.3).
- The love of God is to **walk in** the original Word (2 Jn 6; 1 Jn 2.24).

So, despite her good points, Ephesus had left her first love. What was the remedy?

- To turn her mind back to where she used to be (2.5).
- To turn her feet back and do the first things she used to do (2.5).

In other words, go back to the original Word.

The reward to the overcomer is very significant: access to the Tree of Life (2.7).

- How was access to this Tree first lost (Gen 3.22-24)? Because the bride of the first man did not listen to the original Word of God (Gen 3.1-4). She was deceived by the serpent and listened to another word.
- Paul feared that the early Church, the bride of the second Man (1 Cor 15.47), would also be deceived into listening to another word (2 Cor 11.2-3).

The overcomers stayed true to the original Word. Their reward would be to eat of the Tree of Life in the Paradise of God.

Sadly, however, many others failed to stay true to the original Word.

The downward slide from the original Word continued in the next three Church ages.

2. Smyrna, Pergamos & Thyatira: Progressive Loss of the Original Word

Over the coming years, in 3 successive downward steps, the Church turned more and more from the original Word, until the very Bible itself was taken from her.

The Doctrine of the Nicolaitans

- In the early deeds of the Nicolaitans developed into a doctrine (Rev 2.6,14).
- The word "Nicolaitan" means "conqueror of the laity". The Lord hates it.
- True shepherds do not dominate, they serve (Lk 22.24-26; 2 Cor 4.5; 1 P 5.3).
- Nicolaitanism replaces the rule of the Spirit and the Word in the Church with the rule of a man-made priesthood.
- Control over the Church by the Nicolaitan priesthood was agreed at the Nicene Council in 325 AD and enforced by the State after the Church-State union.
- From then on, the Church was ruled by a progressively stronger central control.
- Although Protestantism later broke free, it brought with it many Nicolaitan ideas.

The Doctrine of Balaam

Once the authority of the Nicolaitan priesthood was established, they were able to teach and enforce the doctrine of Balaam, mingling the Church with the world and causing her to lose her separation, sanctification and the blessing of God.

The story of Balaam in Numbers 22 – 25 mirrors how this happened.

- Israel's enemies could not destroy the people of God militarily (Nu 22.6). They needed a new approach. So they asked Balaam to curse them.
- He was a false prophet who claimed only to act and speak in the name of the Lord (Nu 22.8,13,18; 23.3, etc).
- Balaam was prepared to try and bring a curse on the people of God because he wanted money and honour (Nu 22.27; 2 P 2.15-16; Ju 11).
- When his first attempt failed (Nu 23.23), in order to get the money, he advised their enemies to lure Israel into breaking their separation by mingling the holy people with pagan worship and behaviour (Nu 31.16; Rev 2.14).
- Taking the bait would mean losing the blessing of God.

The Doctrine of Jezebel

The doctrine of Jezebel (Rev 2.20,24) was the final consolidation of the rule of the Nicolaitans. By using State power, the people were forced to accept false teaching. Those who wanted the true original Word were persecuted or put to death.

It is called the doctrine of Jezebel as it mirrored what she and her family did in Israel.

- She stirred up the political ruler of the land to be the worse so far (1 K 21.25).
- She introduced to Israel the teachers of the worse idolatry so far (1 K 18.19).
- They who spoke or heeded the Word were slain (1 K 18.13; 19.1-2; 21.1-16).
- Her daughter almost fully wiped out the seed royal, the line of Christ (2 K 11.1).
- Her son-in-law forced the people to follow her pagan doctrines (2 Chr 21.11).

The awful end result was that not just Biblical teaching, but the Bible itself in the language of the people was banned and burnt. The downward fall that began in the Ephesus age ended in the Thyatira age in the awful depths of Satan (Rev 2.24).

3. Sardis & Philadelphia: Progressive Recovery of the Original Word

The Lord turned the tide in the 16th C. At the Reformation the Bible was restored to the people and from then on, its truths were progressively recovered.

Sardis

- The Reformation recovered the Bible, printing and circulating it widely in the languages of Europe. It was a fierce battle. Many were persecuted or slain for translating, printing, distributing or simply possessing and reading the Word.
- Along with the Bible came the recovery of the Truth of Christ as our Justification, by grace not works, removing the need to approach God through the Nicolaitan priesthood.
- But the work of restoring the full original Word was not brought to completion. They did not keep alert, even losing some of what they once had recovered so that the Lord had to exhort them to hold tight to what was left (Rev 3.2-3).

Philadelphia

- The 18th/19th C Philadelphia age experienced a succession of evangelical awakenings, not only in Europe and America but spreading to more and more mission fields.
- The key truth recovered in this age was that of Christ as our Sanctification, a sanctification by the Spirit not by works, along with separation from the world.
- Other truths recovered included a much deeper awareness of the ministry and work of the Spirit, the Second Coming and healing.
- This age also saw a second wave of Bible translation and distribution in about 550 languages, this time far beyond Europe to the ends of the earth.
- How appropriate, then, that Philadelphia was commended for keeping the Word (Rev 3.10).

Although commended for steadfastly holding to the Word, it is significant that Philadelphia was exhorted to keep a tight hold on what it had as the time of trial before Jesus' return drew near (Rev 3.10-11).

Why is this significant? Because Jesus comes in the next and final Laodicea age. Although there will indeed be a time of trial and testing in that age known as the great tribulation, the last age will also see a different type of testing.

The test will be the Word.

The Laodicea age will see the end time climax of the age-old battle for the Word. The majority of the Church will rebel against the Word (2 Th 2.3; 2 Tim 4.3-4). Christ, the Word, will be outside His own Church (Rev 3.20).

But those who are faithful to the Word will come back to the full original faith and the full stature of Jesus Christ.

THE END TIME DOUBLE CLIMAX

of

THE BATTLE FOR THE WORD

1. Food in Due Season

Feeding the Flock

- One of the main God-given responsibilities of church leaders is to feed the flock (Jn 21.15, 17; 1 Tim 3.2; 5.17; Ti 1.9).
- But before he can give out, the leader must first take in (1 Tim 4.13).
- Feed with what kind of food? The Word (Heb 13.7).
- The food of the Word is essential for growth, health and strength to overcome things that would do harm (1 Jn 2.14).
- The food that is given must be suitable: Milk for those young in the faith, not watered down but pure (1 P 2.2); Solid food for those older in the faith (Heb 5.12-14).

Feeding with Food in Season

The food must not only be suitable for the spiritual age of the listener. It must also be suitable for the time we live in. The shepherd must be like the children of Issachar, who “had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chr 12.32).

Jesus said that a faithful and wise steward gives food in due season (Lk 12.42). This season is the end time. So, what is the food/Word needed for this time?

- To warn of the coming end time rebellion by the lukewarm Church against the Lord and His Word (2 Th 2.3; 2 Tim 3.1-8, 4.3-4; Lk 18.8; Rev 3.20).
- To turn the godly to the full, original Word, thereby making ready a people prepared for the Lord, just as before His first Coming (Lk 1.17; Rev 19.7).

In this day, more than ever before, the shepherd must fight to give the sheep the full, pure, original Word (Ju 3).

The battle will be hot. But let us fight as David’s mighty men fought to ensure food for Israel when the enemy came to take it away. Become one with the sword of the Spirit, the Word (Eph 6.17), just as the hand of Eleazar became one with his sword battling to preserve their food (2 S 23.8-10 & 1 Chr 11.12-14; 2 S 23.11-12).

Like Paul,

- Not only hold firmly yourself to the full original faith to the end (2 Tim 4.6-7).
- But also give out to the sheep the full counsel of God (Acts 20.20,27).

Press the battle! It will be hard, but the reward for remaining faithful to the full, original Word will be great. The true Church will become one with the Word. She will come to the unity of the original faith, not blown about by every wind of doctrine (Eph 4.13-14). Becoming fully one with the Word, she will truly be fully prepared for presentation to her coming Bridegroom, whose name is the Word of God (Rev 19.13).

END TIME REBELLION AGAINST THE WORD

1. The Word outside the Church

Jesus is not only coming for a pure, holy bride. He is coming for a bride that has His mind (1 Cor 2.16; Phil 2.5). How do we know His mind? By the Word. But, will the majority of the end time professing Church have His mind?

What did Jesus say?

- He questioned whether He would find faith on the earth at His return (Lk 18.8).
- He did not mean faith in general, but **the** faith, the original Word, the faith once and for all delivered unto the saints (Jude 3).

He said more about this in His letter to Laodicea, the last of the 7 prophetic periods of Church history, just before His return (Rev 3:14-22).

- This letter was not addressed to unbelievers but to the church (v 14).
- Her sad condition is described in detail (v 15-18).
- Worst of all, Jesus (the Word) is outside the door of His own Church (v 20).
- Not outside the heart of the unbeliever, but outside His own Church!
- This is the awful result of the great end time rebellion of 2 Th 2.3.
- They have put their Commander outside the Church and refuse His orders.

Paul also warned of dangerous times in the last days (2 Tim 3.1-8; 4.3-4):

- The danger will not be from without, but from within. (Only professing believers would put on an outward appearance of godliness (v 5), or could be traitors (v 4), betraying Him like Judas (Mk 14.10-11).)
- These will not only be worldly, half-hearted and carnal. Far more seriously, they will be wilfully rebellious.
- How? By not merely ignoring the Truth (i.e. the Word) but by actively resisting it (v 8). By blaspheming, i.e. speaking strongly against true teaching (v 2). By actively denying the power of godliness (v 5). By betraying Jesus (v 4) like the Jewish religious leaders who claimed to stand for the true Word, yet rejected the One who came to fulfil that Word (Acts 7.52).
- Churchgoers will not tolerate sound teaching. They will turn their ears away from the Truth (the Word) (2 Tim 4.3-4).
- But they will not leave the Church. Instead they will let it take over, appointing many teachers to teach the things they want to hear (2 Tim 4.3).

It would all end in a terrible rebellion against the Word:

- Before Jesus returns, there will be a falling away, an apostasy (2 Th 2.2-3).
- This is not speaking of the **world**, but the **Church**.
- Apostasy is not apathy or falling numbers, but wilful rebellion. Rebellion is not desertion. A deserter **leaves** but these rebels **remain** in the Church, refusing to obey the Leader's orders.
- Who is the Leader? What is His name? The Word of God (Rev 19.13). So, the apostasy is a refusal to hear the Word by those who claim to belong to Christ.

So, at the end of the Church age just before the 2nd Coming, the professing Church will be like Israel at the end of the Jewish age before the 1st Coming: "*He came unto His own and His own received Him not*" (Jn 1:11).

2. Wonders or the Word?

The end time rebellion will not be fought with words only but also with wonders. But this is the Lord's way of sifting the Church. Would they follow wonders or the Word?

End Time Climax of Demonic Deception: False prophets & Lying Wonders

The spirit of rebellion in the end time Church leads to terrible consequences. Rebellion opens the door wide to deception.

Even in his own day, Paul warned of false teaching inspired by demons and deceiving spirits (1 Tim 4.1). But before Jesus' return, the deception will be far worse. It will manifest itself not only in false teaching, but also in widespread demonically-inspired false prophecy and lying wonders:

- When asked about His return, Jesus first warned of deception (Mt 24.3-4).
- It would be very serious. Many false prophets would deceive many (Mt 24.11).
- "Confirmed" by many great signs and wonders, this deception is so powerful that if possible (but it is not), even the very elect would be deceived (Mt 24.24).
- How can this be? Because Paul warned it would be the most powerful display ever of all the deception that unrighteousness is capable of (2 Th 2.9-11).

Confusingly, these prophetic and miracle working ministries will be done in His name, by professing believers, not by followers of other gods.

- Men wishing to lead astray after other gods sometimes work signs (Dt 13.1-5).
- But it is more deceptive to claim to speak in the Lord's name (1 K 22.5-7,11).
- Jesus warned of many deceiving, supernatural words and works to be done in His name by many who call on His name (Mt 24.5; 7.22).
- Paul warned of men opposing the Truth with remarkable supernatural signs and wonders just as the idol-worshipping Egyptian magicians opposed Moses, the man with the true God-given Word (Ex 7.10-12; 7.20-22; 8.6-8; 2 Tim 3.8). But there was a very significant difference. Unlike the magicians, the opposers Paul warned of will claim to be genuine believers (2 Tim 3.5).

How can we Discern? The Word Test

Why does the Lord permit false prophets and false miracles in His name? Surely men cannot be blamed if deceived by such remarkable supernatural works?

It is to test those claiming to be believers. What comes first? Wonders or the Word?

Miracles, signs and wonders, even if real, are not an automatic proof that a man is of God. The evil one and his agents can perform real wonders (Dt 13.1-5; Job 1.12,16; Mt 4.5,8; 2 Cor 11.13-15).

Jesus warned of the danger of seeking for signs (Mt 12.38-39; see also 1 Cor 1.22a).

The key to a correct understanding of miracles is found in Abraham's reply to the rich man who asked him to send Lazarus back from the grave to warn his five brothers about the torments of hell: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. ... If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Lk 16.29-31).

It is true that signs and wonders should be a normal part of New Testament preaching (1 Cor 2.1-5; Heb 2.3-4). But signs do not replace the Word, they confirm it (Mk 16.20; Acts 14.3). They are a signpost pointing to the Word. A sign is not the destination; it points to the destination. It is the Word that is pre-eminent.

When answering the messengers of John the Baptist, Jesus illustrated how miracles and wonders confirm the Word (Mt 11.3-5).

- When asked whether He was the one sent to announce the coming Kingdom, why did Jesus refer them to the wonders that accompanied His ministry?
- Because in the Word those wonders were associated with the coming of the Kingdom (e.g. Isa 29.18; 35.4-6).
- So, the wonders and miracles were the signposts directing them to the Word, which would have answered their question for them.

The Word, not wonders, was also the test in the Old Testament (Dt 13.1-3). It is still the test today. The professing Church will be deceived by the Lord Himself at the end time through lying signs and wonders because of her wrong attitude to the Word.

- Because they refuse to receive the Truth (i.e. the Word, Jn 17.17), God Himself shall send a strong delusion, designed to lead those involved in the rebellion of 2 Th 2.3 to believe the lie (2 Th 2.9-11).
- Likewise, Churchgoers who refuse sound teaching and turn their ears from the Truth shall be turned aside to believe falsehoods (2 Tim 4:3-4). Turned by whom? By the Lord Himself.

Delusion is not sent to take good people from the Word. It is a judgement on they who refuse His Word. (See I K 22; Job 12:16-17; Ps 81:11-12; Isa 66:3; Ezk 14:9.)

How can we Overcome?

But fear not. Even if only a few remain faithful to the original faith, while most follow a 'faith' which is to their own liking, there is much blessing for they who remain true.

When opposed by the Egyptian magicians, Moses openly exposed their folly for all to see (Ex 8.18; 9.11; 2 Tim 3.9). It shall be the same at the end time.

In what way can such strong opposition be overcome? By the Word.

- When tempted by supernatural works, Jesus overcame by the Word (Mt 4.1-11).
- The apostle John's converts overcome the wicked one in the same way. Despite many adversaries (the spirit of error, the spirit of antichrist, many false prophets, many antichrists), John could still triumphantly say: *you are strong, **the word of God abides in you, you have overcome the wicked one*** (1 Jn 2.14).

We are at the end. Be alert.

- No matter how great the manifestations and power, stay with the original Word given by divine revelation.
- Even if an angel from heaven appears, stay with the Word (Gal 1.8).
- Even if ministers of righteousness and angels of light appear, stay with the original gospel (2 Cor 11.3-4, 13-15).

But the rebellion is only one side of the story of the end time Church.

THE END TIME CHURCH PREPARED BY THE WORD

1. Prepared as a Bride for her Husband

In the Revelation, John made two significant references to the bride:

- Rev 19.7 his wife has made herself ready
- Rev 21.2 prepared as a bride for her husband

How can the bride make ready? How prepare herself for His Coming?

By the Word.

The First Bride

- The first bride fell by not listening to the Word of God, but the voice of another (Gen 3.1).

The First Coming Bride

- Before Jesus' first coming, He sent John the Baptist with a voice (Mk 1.2-3) to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Lk 1.17).
- Most of those who claimed to be his people rejected Him (Jn 1.11).
- But the bride of that day who had listened to the voice of God through His prophet, John, was well prepared. She was a source of joy to the Bridegroom when He came, and a source of satisfaction to John (Jn 3.29).

The Early Church Bride

- Paul feared that, like Eve, the early Church New Testament bride also would listen to another voice (2 Cor 11.2-3).
- His fear was not misplaced. Jesus said that the early Church had lost her first love for her Bridegroom (Rev 2.4).
- What does losing the first love have to do with listening to the voice of the Word? The answer lies in knowing what the love of God is. We know if we love God by our response to the Word (Jn 14.15,21,23; 1 Jn 2.5; 5.3; 2 Jn 6).

The End Time, Second Coming Bride

- From the first days of the Church, seducing spirits tried to draw believers away from to the Word originally delivered to the saints (1 Tim 4.1; 2 P 2.1-2; Ju 3).
- At the end time, those who claim to be His people will refuse to hear His Word, His voice (Lk 18.8; 2 Th 2.3; 2 Tim 4.3-4; Rev 3.20).
- But the true bride of Christ will prepare herself for His Coming and the marriage feast (Rev 19.7).
- How? By washing in the water of the Word (Eph 5.26-27).

2. Prepared for Presentation to the Bridegroom: Washed by the Water of the Word

A bride prepares for her wedding. We must do the same. How? By the Word.

The Word Reveals impurity

- Looking into the Word is like looking into **a mirror** (Jas 1.22-25).
- It **reveals** not only external blemishes, but also unholy thoughts of the heart (Heb 4.12).

The Word Removes impurity

As the time approaches when the Bridegroom will return to take His bride to His heavenly home, it is very important that all impurity is cleansed. Why? Because:

- Ps 24.3-4 Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? or stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands, and a pure heart

How can we cleanse our hands and purify our hearts? By the same Word that reveals the impurity and defilement:

- Ps 119.9 How can a young man **cleanse** his way? **by ... Your word**
- Jn 15.3 **clean through the word**
- Jn 17.17 **Sanctify** them **by** Your truth: **Your word** is truth.

The Word not only reveals impurity a natural mirror cannot see, it can cleanse it. It can answer the heart-felt cry of the psalmist for a clean heart (Ps 51.10):

- Acts 15.9 **purifying their hearts** by faith (i.e. faith in the Word)
- 1 P 1.22 **purified your souls** in obeying the truth (i.e. the Word)

What is the secret of its cleansing power? The Holy Spirit! The Spirit and the Word are one (Jn 6.63).

- 1 P 1.22 purified your souls in obeying the truth **through the Spirit**
- 1 Cor 6.11 washed, sanctified **by the Spirit** of our God

The Laver: An illustration of the cleansing power of the Word

- Priests could only enter the Tabernacle, the house of God, the place of His Presence, after first washing hands and feet at the laver (Ex 30.17-21).
- The laver was made from brass mirrors (Ex 38.8).
- It was filled with supernaturally/Spiritually produced water (Dt 9.21; 1 Cor 10.4).

Preparing the Bride for Presentation to the Bridegroom

Soon Christ will return to present to Himself a bride who is sanctified and cleansed, without spot or wrinkle (Eph 5.26-27). How is this to be done? By the Word:

- She is cleansed and sanctified by the washing of the water of the Word (Eph 5.26).
- Spots and wrinkles are removed by the honey of the Word (Ps 19.10; 119.103).

3. Prepared for the Judgement Seat of Christ

The Word also prepares the bride for the judgement that takes place at His Coming.

There is a Coming Judgement

One day, all will be judged.

But all are not judged at the same time or place.

- There is a judgement at ***the great white throne*** at the end of the 1000 years (Rev 20.11-15).
- There is a ***judgement seat of Christ*** where the bride will appear at His Coming (Ro 14.10; 2 Cor 5.10).

The Judgement Seat of Christ

This judgement is not for salvation, but for rewards (1 Cor 3.13-15).

- Everyone shall give account of himself (Ro 14.12; 2 Cor 5.10).
- Who is the Judge? Christ (Jn 5.22; Acts 17.31; Ro 2.16).
- Who is Christ? The Word (Jn 1.1; Rev 19.13,16).

So, how shall we be judged? By what standard? Not by church rules, African customs or European or American practices. By the Word.

Let us illustrate.

Our works will be revealed and tested by fire (1 Cor 3.13-15). This is not the fire of purgatory, testing ***us***. This fire tests ***our works***.

What, then, is the fire that tests the quality of and reveals our works?

- What else reveals? The Word (Heb 4.12-13).
- What else is like a fire? The Word (Jer 23.29).
- Who has eyes like fire? Christ, the Word (Rev 1.14; 19.12), the One who is our Judge.
- Why are His eyes like fire? Is it because they are blazing with anger? No. It is because they see into, test the true worth of and reveal all things (Ps 11.4) just like fire tests our works (1 Cor 3.13).

Before the first coming, the Lord sent a man to prepare the way and to prepare the people (Mk 1.3; Lk 1.17).

Likewise before the Second Coming. His wife must prepare herself and make herself ready (Rev 19.7; 21.2).

Prepare to meet your God (Am 4.12). Set your house in order (Isa 38.1).

Make ready for the Judgement Seat of Christ. Bring everything in your personal and church life into line with the Word. Remember, it is the Judgement Seat of Christ, Who is the Word. Everything will be measured by the Word

THE END TIME HARVEST OF THE WORD

1. The Seed of the Word

Samson was asked, "Tell me where your great strength lies" (Jud 16.6). Many ask the same about the Word. What is the secret of its age-old power?

One reason is because it is like a seed (Lk 8.11).

The Word of Life (Phil 2.16)

- A natural seed contains something no man can create, life.
- So it is with the seed of the Word (Jn 6.63; Acts 7.38; Heb 4.12).
- A natural seed can live a very long time in the right conditions.
- The life of the seed of the Word will never die (Isa 40.8; Mt 24.35; 1 P 1.23).

Truly, the Word is living. But where does the life of the Word of Life come from?

The Breath of God

The life of the seed of the Word is the most powerful force in the universe. God breathed His breath, His Spirit, into all Scripture (2 Tim 3.16; 2 S 23.2).

What happened when the breath of God, the Spirit of life entered into:

- Lifeless dust (Gen 2.7; 7.22)?
- The 2 end time prophets/witnesses slain by the beast (Rev 11.11)?

This is why Scripture says:

- Jesus' Word is not only life, it is Spirit (Jn 6.63).
- The heavens were made both by the **word** of the LORD and by the **breath** of his mouth (Ps 33.6).

The Spirit and the Word are One

The Word (the seed) and the Spirit (the life of the seed) are inseparably linked:

- Heb 4.12-13 the Word is like a sword
- Eph 6.17 the Word is the sword of the Spirit
- 1 P 1.23 born of the Word
- Jn 3.5 born of the Spirit
- Eph 5.26 sanctified with the washing of water by the Word
- 1 Cor 6.11 washed, sanctified by the Spirit
- Col 3.16 spiritual songs inspired by the indwelling Word
- Eph 5.18-19 spiritual songs inspired by the infilling of the Spirit

Finally, the Word not only **contains** life (Acts 7.38; Heb 4.12; 1 P 1.23), it **imparts** it. In good soil (Jas 1.21), it contains the power/Spirit to enable the hearer to obey it.

- when the heavenly Voice spoke the Word to Ezekiel, the Spirit entered into the prophet enabling him to obey the Word (Ezk 2.1-2).

2. The Seed Comes to Fruition at the End

To benefit from the life in a natural seed, it must be planted in good soil. Likewise, the Seed of the Word can only grow to full maturity, if planted in a good heart.

The Word must be received in the right attitude to benefit from it (Jas 1.21).

The Parable of the Sower (The Nature of the Soil the Seed is Planted in)

This parable (Mt 13.1-23; Mk 4.1-20; Lk 8.4-15) uses a natural sower to explain the result of the Word being sown in different types of heart (Mk.4.15).

- **The wayside** - hard soil which the seed cannot penetrate; the birds devour it
- **Rocky, stony ground with little soil** - the seed begins to grow, but obstacles prevent it developing deep roots, so the heat of the sun drains its life away
- **Thorns** - although it overcomes the birds and the sun, and the seed grows and begins to fruit, it brings nothing to perfection since cares, riches, pleasures and other things squeeze the life out of it
- **Good Ground** - the seed brings forth fruit through all its trials; there is no hardness, rocks or thorns to hinder it

What is the fruit of the seed of the Word, the harvest? Service? Souls? Or something else? Before answering, let us look at another parable.

The Parable of the Growing Seed (The growth of the Seed in Church History)

Mark 4.26-29 shows the stages of growth of the seed of the Word. It describes its progress both in the heart of a true believer and also in the history of the true Church.

- Firstly, the seed of the original Word, given by revelation (Gal 1.12), was fully sown (Acts 20.20,27; Ro 15.19; 2 Tim 4.17; Ju 3).
- But from the very beginning the spirit of error (1 Jn 4.6) went forth to oppose the Spirit of Truth (Jn 16.13), spreading another gospel (Gal 1.8-9; 2 Cor 11.4). Over the centuries the original Word was progressively lost through a flood of false apostles, prophets and teachers (2 Cor 11.13; 2 P 2.1; 1 Jn 4.1).
- Nothing seemed to be happening to the original seed of the Word. It lay hidden in the soil. But though it seemed to be lost, there were still some who did not deny His faith (Rev 2.13).
- Then one day the life of the original seed was revealed above the surface, springing up and growing.
- First came the leaf stalk. Though the life of the original seed was in the stalk, the stalk did not yet resemble the original.
- Next came the ear. This looked more like the original, but not yet a full likeness.
- Finally came the full grain in the ear. The original seed was now fully and exactly reproduced, containing the fullness of the original life and able to reproduce the same works as the original seed.
- Once the fruit appears, immediately the sickle is put in to gather in the harvest.

What is the fruit of the seed sown at the beginning? If the original seed was the full Word, then so must the end time harvest be. The true believer:

- Will come to the unity of the original faith, no longer blown about by every wind of doctrine (Eph 4.13-14).
- Will reveal the Word in its original life and works.

3. The Nature of the End Time Harvest: The Word Made Flesh

Let us look at the nature of the end time harvest of the seed of the Word.

Fruit according to its kind

When planted, a seed gives birth to new life. What kind of life/fruit does it produce? The same life that was in the original seed that was first planted.

- Gen 1.11-12 according to its kind
- Gal 6.7 you reap what you sow
- Mt 7.17-18 a good tree bears good fruit, a bad tree bad fruit

- Jas 3.12a Can a fig tree bear olives or a grapevine figs?
- Mt 7.16 Do men gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles?

It is the same with other forms of life, such as animals. For example, can a leopard change his spots (Jer 13.23)? No. Why not? Because the life in the seed he came from is leopard life, and leopards have spots.

Fruit of the Seed of the Word

As in the natural world, so it is in the spiritual.

- The true Christian is born of the Word of God (Jas 1.18; 1 P 1.23).
- Since the Word is Spirit (Jn 6.63), he is born of the Spirit of God (Jn 3.5; Ti 3.5).
- Since he is born of God, God is his Father and His seed is in him (1 Jn 3.9).

What does this mean?

- The true child of God will be a revelation of the life of God, the divine nature, in flesh (2 P 1.4; Heb 12.10). Why? Because His seed is in him.
- His children will also be a revelation of the life and Spirit of the Word in flesh. Why? Because if you sow the Word, you reap the Word. A seed must yield fruit according to its own kind (Gen 1.11).
- Children of God are illustrated editions of the Word, living letters of Christ. Men read their lives (2 Cor 3.3). They should reveal Jesus.
- Unconverted husbands can be won without the Word because they read the Word in the daily lives of their wives (1P 3.1).

God in His sons - The Born Again Believer as a Living Letter

A truly born again believer is a revelation of the Word. Since Jesus is the Word (Jn 1.1; Rev 19.13), this means he will progressively reveal the life and nature of Jesus:

- Jn 14.27 having not just peace **from** Jesus, but the peace **of** Jesus
- Jn 15.11 having not just joy **from** Jesus, but the joy **of** Jesus
- 2 Cor 5.14 compelled not just by love **for** Jesus, but the love **of** Jesus
- 1 Cor 2.16 not only **knowing** the mind of Christ, but **having** it
- Gal 2.20 (KJV) living not just by faith **in** Him but by the faith **of** Him

- Phil 1.8 longing after others with the very longings of Christ Himself
- 2 Th 3.5 having hearts directed not into being patient **with** Christ but into the patience **of** Christ
- 2 Cor 11.2 jealous with God's own jealousy

How blessed!

- Jesus was the Word in flesh (Jn 1.1,14). He did not just teach or live by the Word. He embodied the Word.
- In the Bible we **read about** what God is like. In Jesus we **see** what God is like (Jn 1.18).
- Everything he did and said was a revelation of God (e.g. Jn 5.19,30; 8.28; 12.49).
- The Bible is the written edition of the Word. Jesus is the illustrated edition.

Now, because we are born of the seed of the Word,

- Not only is the written Word illustrated by and revealed in us.
- But also Jesus, the Word in flesh, is revealed in us: Jesus speaking in us, Jesus' love, joy, peace, faith and patience in us.

We are just like Him:

- 1 Jn 2.6 in our walk
- 1 Jn 3.3 in our purity
- 1 Jn 3.7 in our righteousness
- 1 Jn 4.17 in all things, "as He is, so are we in this world"

So, the seed of the Word in a good heart will bring forth its original life, JESUS.

No wonder the Bible says this harvest is of great price and that the Lord waits patiently for it (Jas 5.7).

4. The Word in the Mouth of the End Time Church

We have seen how, at the time of the end maturing and harvest of the seed of the Word of God, its full original life and power will manifest again.

We have also seen how one way the seed of the Word reveals itself in a true believer is the way his life and character will reflect the Word and Jesus (who is the Word).

Another remarkable way is how his words, spoken in the will of God by the Spirit, can have the same power as those spoken by God Himself.

The Word of His Power

The Word of God is not only living, it is powerful (Heb 4.12).

- It is not only ***the Word of Life*** (Phil 2.16), alive with ***the Spirit of life*** from God (Rev 11.11),
- It is also ***the Word of His power*** (Heb 1.3), full of ***the Spirit of power*** (2 Tim 1.6).

It may not have the appearance of a weapon of war, but:

- To be ignorant of the Word is to be ignorant of His power (Mt 22.29).
- The Word spoken by Paul brought the Spirit & power (1 Cor 2.4-5; 1 Th 1.5).

Power in the Mouth of God

A word in the mouth of God has immense power. By His spoken Word, God:

- Created all things (Gen 1.3; Ps 33.6; Heb 11.3)
- Upholds all things (Heb 1.3)

Power in the mouth of the Son of God

Jesus manifested the same power of the spoken Word when in His flesh:

- When He cursed the fig tree, He did not pray, He spoke (Mt 21.19-20).
- When He stilled the storm, He did not pray, He spoke (Mk 4.39).
- When raising Lazarus, after He had prayed, He went and spoke (Jn 11.41-43).

The Power of the Word in the Sons of God

To read or hear the Word does more than ***instruct*** the believer. It works within his heart to ***empower*** him to enter into its teachings:

- It contains the power to save (Jas 1.21; Ro 1.16).
- The word of the Gospel has the power to bring full assurance (1 Th 1.5).
- After conversion, it continues to work powerfully in the believer (1 Th 2.13).
- It not only teaches holiness, it imparts it (Jn 15.3; 17.17,19; Eph 5.26).
- Finally, the seed of the Word produces a harvest of fruit in us (Col 1.5-6). The

end result of the power of the Word at work within us is to be a partaker of the very nature of God (2 P 1.3-4).

Power in the Mouth of the Sons of God

But the Word is more than a power at work within. It is one of the weapons of the Christian (Eph 6.17). It has power to pull down the strongest opposition (2 Cor 10.4-5).

In the mouth of a true believer it has remarkable power:

- ***Like a sword***, it can cut down the enemy (1 K 19.17; Ho 6.5; Rev 19.13 & 15).
- ***Like a hammer***, it can shatter the hardest resistance (Jer 23.29).
- ***Like a fire***, it can consume all opposition (Jer 5.14; 23.29; Rev 11.5).

Most remarkable of all, as the Church comes to the final end time harvest and the full stature of Christ, she will be enabled to speak the Word with the same authority as the Lord. Just as the Word in the mouth of **God** and of **the Son of God** has amazing creative power, so it is when **a son of God** speaks according to the will of God with the faith of God.

Jesus taught this:

- Mt 17.20 you shall **say** (not **pray**) to the mountain
- Mt 21.21-22 if you **say** (not **pray**) to the mountain
- Lk 17.5-6 if you **say** (not **pray**) to the mulberry tree

There had been examples in the Old Testament (Jos 10.10-13; Ezk 37.4-7,9-10). A New Testament example is Peter. After he had prayed for Tabitha, he then spoke to her dead body (Acts 9.40).

The Faith of God

How is it possible to have faith to do such things? Where can we find the faith to move mountains (1 Cor 13.2)?

For a man it is not possible. This kind of faith must come from elsewhere:

- ***From the Word*** (Ro 10.17).
- ***From above*** (Mk 11.21-24). (In the original language of the Bible, this verse says, "Have **the** faith **of** God", not, "Have faith **in** God".)

What a beautiful example of a believer manifesting the life of Jesus:

- His **faith** is not his own, it is the faith of the Son of God (Gal 2.20).
- His **words** are not his own, it is Jesus speaking in him (2 Cor 13.3).

Truly, the original seed of the Word is fully manifest once again.