

The Famine of the WORD

***A prediction made in one of the Minor Prophets, Regarded as having Special Relevance in the End Time, is Used by Some to Justify Personal Lethargy!
How should we Respond to this Condition?***

© Rich Traver, 81520-1411, 1-4-09 [138] www.goldensheaves.org

The 1960's and 1970's were a heady time for the Church of God. Its radio broadcast represented, for more than a decade, the largest single purchase of religious air time in the world. Response to those broadcasts proved to be no less impressive, to the point of attracting the largest number of attendees each week than at any time in ages.

It Wasn't to Last!

But as the 1970's drew to a close, significant events foreshadowed dramatic changes. The expulsion in mid-'78 of the second most highly regarded minister in the organization, due to unconquered extra-marital infidelities,¹ then the seizure of Church offices, finances and properties in early-'79 by the Attorney General of the state of California, and from within that turmoil, the ascension of the man who would later become appointed as Pastor General seven years later, the stage became set for a dramatic and wholesale repudiation of the teachings that organization had represented since its inception a half century before. With the death of its esteemed elderly founder in 1986 at age 93, and the dramatically new paradigms of his successor, the Church was set on a path which brought a swift and thorough demise, not only of its solid biblical teachings but of its very presence as an organization.

Though the first few years after the new Pastor General was appointed saw the momentum of the prior administration continue, with new television presenters, and very professional production, it was determined that the Church, despite its successes, could no longer afford the costs of that medium. Simultaneously, the print media efforts were dramatically reduced, with similar explanation of

¹ A minister, who along with his father, had been regarded at one time as one of the two witnesses described in Rev. 11.

being unjustifiably expensive, even while the income was still seeing an upward incline!² Books and booklets were being advertised as 'out of print' while truckloads of "*Mystery of the Ages*", "*US & Britain*" and many others, even brand new hard-cover hymnals, were being hauled off to the dump.³

Frogs in Hot Water

Changes came slowly at first, unnoticed by the majority of unsuspecting members who were kept relatively in the dark. But within a few years, the long denied 'agenda' driving the changes surfaced.⁴ Those fundamental doctrinal changes began to accumulate and create a crescendo to where the situation could no longer be kept under cover. By the seventh year, alarm bells were finally beginning to ring. By the mid-90's, membership losses were beginning to approach landslide proportions. Losses were publicly admitted to being at 26,000 for 1995.⁵ Ministers by mid decade were finally beginning to admit their deep concerns, despite tacitly accommodating the situation for a time for the sake of their jobs, salving their profound anxieties in various ways, until it, for them, finally became unbearable, and their Christian obligations, at last, came to the fore.

² This situation is well documented in Stephen Flurry's book, "*Raising the Ruins*". ISBN-13 978-0-9745507-1-8

³ I am acquainted with a former WCG Pasadena employee who witnessed said clandestine trashings, even rescuing unopened cartons of books off those trucks, some of which remain in my possession.

⁴ Admitted publicly by pastor general Joe Tkach, Jr. finally on a nationally televised broadcast of *The 700 Club*.

⁵ Feast Sites were cancelled on a massive scale reflecting these membership losses, with 6 announced in the spring of 1995. A seventh, the site where the new pastor general was to have presided, was obliterated by hurricane Opal on the Day of Atonement that same year! Mid-year of 1995, the United Church of God formed, eroding membership by another 15,000.

With the decease of the **new** Pastor General in late 1995, under rather shocking circumstances,⁶ his son and heir apparent, pressed thru major doctrinal repudiations he had long championed, finally free of the more cautioned approach of his father. Only thereafter was it acknowledged that the son and cronies had been secretly conspiring for some time with those long regarded as ‘the enemy’ to gain expertise in pushing thru changes they themselves didn’t have sufficient talent to successfully put over on the membership. Talents of more experienced ‘evangelicals’ were tapped, providing many subtle techniques that proved effective with a membership long on organizational loyalty but inadequate to the task of upholding fundamental biblical truths, in that they had been told *what* to think for so long, but not *how* to think and to **really** prove those essential doctrines. The Church had drawn to its breast many lethal deficiencies. The approach of ‘unquestioned loyalty to the leader’ undeservedly extended the same consideration to his successor, who proved in time to be a rubber crutch.

The END of the Work?

But with the Church irreversibly fractured, its sheep and many shepherds driven off and scattered, its media and publishing efforts cut back, and with the content of what remained being repulsive to a majority of former members, it was an easy conclusion on the part of an under-experienced membership to throw up their hands and declare the Work to be finished! We need do nothing from this point onward! That in greater part due to a prophecy that factored into peoples’ thinking, often referred to as “the famine of the hearing of the Word”. That prophecy is found in Amos chapter 8. *“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: 12: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the*

⁶ Beginning in early ‘95, the pastor general was afflicted with four life-threatening illnesses in five months, all unrelated, and which ultimately ended his life 40-weeks to the hour of his presentation of his ‘watershed’ message in Atlanta, GA regarded as being the one that precipitated the official over-throw of key doctrinal positions of the Church, particularly the Sabbath. The last line of his last letter to the membership was, *“There is no turning back.”* Emphatically true!

east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it.

From this passage it was concluded that there’d be a time in which “the Work” would completely cease and our obligations to continue “going into all the world and preaching the gospel” would cease as well. Many found comfort in that situation, (despite not liking it), in that they weren’t inclined to actually do anything personally anyway. After all, they’d done little to nothing by way of personal witness for so many years, and would likely have been strongly discouraged had they **tried** to do anything like that, making their reticent momentum perfectly logical! This idea provided them a very convenient excuse in justifying their assigning themselves and others to a ‘spiritual retirement’.

“The Work is Done”, they declared, poisoning ourselves to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory! Then again, with now a quarter century having passed since that supposed “end”, their conclusion might have been just a bit premature, especially considering other specific end-time prophecies.

What Are We to Conclude?

Famines aren’t new to the world’s experience. History provides some memorable examples, from those caused by climate conditions, by wars and those totally artificial, such as what Stalin did to his own people in the 1950’s. But in any famine situation, there is always some food, but just not in sufficient supply for the needs. How do we in our situation define ‘famine’? Is it a situation of absolutely none at all or just a relative scarcity?

Think how you would regard the approach of a farmer who you found hadn’t planted a crop during years of famine conditions. His reply to your question about that being, “Don’t you know there’s a famine on? I shouldn’t plant, we’re in a famine! I would be working against God’s express Will!” I think we could all see seriously faulty reasoning in that kind of response in a famine year.

Yet Church people seem to find a similar kind of reasoning to be perfectly logical as it regards doing the Work of God! It seems we think that just because it will be difficult for sincere truth seekers to find a genuine source of Truth in this informationally distorted world, that we should shrink back

into the shadows, sit on our hands and do effectively **nothing**! Why should we attempt to ‘preach the Gospel’? Don’t you know this is the famine of the hearing of the Word?

Certainly NOT Unique

First, IS Amos’ prophecy as exclusively applicable to our day as we’ve concluded, and second, does famine mean what we’ve posed it to mean, with **no** possible source of Truth or access into the Family of God? Food being hard to find is one thing, but that versus there being none at all is quite another matter. And husbandmen who dismiss the need and use a dried-up world scene as justification for unproductiveness, is an excursion into a logical ‘twilight zone’.

How do we regard the inter-Testamental period as it regards this prophecy? How do we regard the Dark Ages from the early second century through the early seventeenth? Those eras were locked more into informational famine than any we might expect in this era. Yet pockets of true disciples remained functional to limited degree during those ages. And if a willful cessation of evangelization is entirely appropriate, what do we make of Christ’s statement in Matthew 24:46 and Luke 12:43? *“Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.”* We see in this an **expectation** on His part of His servants doing something meaningful during that point in time we assign as ‘the famine of the hearing of the Word!’.

Not only this consideration, but we also have the description of conditions in the end time as it relates to His true Saints. Despite extreme opposition as it regards world reaction, His Saints are called to service in a particularly opportune way! The 11th chapter of Daniel has this: *“...but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.”* (This is during the active era of the Beast Power!) 33: *And they that understand among the people shall instruct many: yet they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil, many days.* 34: *Now when they shall fall, they shall be holpen with a little help: but many shall cleave to them with flatteries.* 35: *And some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a time appointed.”*

His Two Witnesses

Concurrent with the exploits of these end-time Saints is the projection onto the world scene of His Two Witnesses. For three and a half years, there will be a **powerful witness** to the whole world, unprecedented in all of world history! (Revelation 11:3-13.) Who will these individuals be? What organizations support them? Will they be heads of Church organizations or just ‘common’ men drawn by God from among His flock? Various Church leaders have assigned themselves as being these over the years. Two in particular in the past, who today are no longer living, and others presently who feel confident in imitating their presumption.

Whoever they may be, their commission is a long way from our definition of a famine of the Word in the end-time as has been posed. It doesn’t say society in general will positively respond to their corrective and provocative witness (though Daniel 11:34 may offer some indication that some **will** respond), but their upsetting message will be very widely known around the world as Revelation 11:10 clearly shows. The world will celebrate their deaths as an ‘historic’ event!

Hand-in-glove with the too reticent nature of some, the concept of the Church being swept out from in front of the turbulent stream of end-time events is the idea of surviving Saints being taken to a place of safety. That certainly could be suggestive of a famine of the Word at that time, but its coincidence with the 42 month public ministry of the Two Witnesses represents a contradiction needing more adequate answers.

Though, sadly, being in possession of but a ‘little strength’, the Church in the end-time is exhorted to hold fast to its commission and respond to any and all ‘open doors’ afforded to it. (Rev. 3:8) The safer bet by far is to be found ‘so doing’! **Ω**

Related Topics: (available from this author)

- “Considering Laodicea”
 - “The TWO Witnesses”
 - “The End-Time Martyrdom of Saints”
 - “Using the Holy Spirit”
-