

LTBS 5TH MAY 2019 PROPHECIES AND FULFILLMENT OF DEPARTURE IN CHURCH ORGANIZATION

Good morning dearly beloved listener. We are glad to be here again to continue to share with you vital truth about our common salvation, using the word of God as revealed in the Scripture as our standard. This is because we believe that it is only the word of God as contained in the Bible that generates life, creates faith, builds character, infuses hope, cleanses our minds, and guarantees our future forever! We cannot live without the Word of God! At the same time, we equally believe that anyone who wishes to worship God acceptably must of necessity rightly handle the word of God and interpret it based on the original intended meaning. Therefore, we urge you, dear listening friend, never to take the Word of God for granted by accepting the words of men.

Last week, we took your questions and used the Bible to answer them. Before that, we considered the apostasy of Jeroboam, how he changed Israel's object of worship, the worship style and place because he turned his heart and eyes away from the word of God.

Dear listener, we hope you are learning from biblical history because if you don't you are condemned to repeat the grievous mistakes of the past. The apostle Paul encouraged Christians to learn from the Old Testament history so that understanding God and His ways better, you may have hope and walk right. (Rom 15:4)

Today we wish to take another enquiry into the biblical history of apostasy, but this time in the New Testament. In today's lesson, we will be looking at **prophecies and fulfillment of the departure in church organization and leadership**.

We always begin our studies with prayer and we therefore ask that you kindly join us in one at this moment.

PRAYER

You are on to LTBS. LTBS is a sponsored program of the churches of Christ and we advocate a return to the Christianity that we find in the New Testament section of the Bible. At LTBS, we share our belief that the Word of God, is the seed of the kingdom of Christ, and that using this seed alone, the church can be reproduced the way it was when Jesus designed and founded it with the same seed that produced it more than 2000 years ago. We also believe that the Bible teaches us to restore and maintain the undenominational Christianity as revealed in the pages of the New Testament of Christ, and we pray that you, dear listening friend, will join us in this noble quest.

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I am Abiodun Adegoroye and with me in the studio is David Akpata, who also serves as evangelist with the Church of Christ, Kado, our sponsoring congregation, and Felix Ekpenyong, an evangelist of Christ serving with the church of Christ in Masaka.

We begin today's study by exploring various prophecies that teach about the departure from the Christian faith that the world have been experiencing since the first century AD after Christ and the apostles left the scene. The Bible made it abundantly clear when and how this great apostasy will take place. It is a fascinating study and we just wish to ask that you, dear listening friend, join us in the exploration of the events that the Bible says will culminate in a great judgment on that day when Jesus returns to judge the world in righteousness.

Jesus Christ and other inspired writers, prophesied and sternly warned Christians against a departure from the Christian faith which started with apostatizing from the divine leadership system God arranged for His church. It is ironic listening friend, that the very people who appear as gallant soldiers of Christ and spiritual giants in Christ, are the ones fulfilling the prophecies about this departure from God's pattern, which is identified as the work of the devil. For example, in Matthew 7.15-17, Jesus prophesied and gave a strong warning or caution about the false prophets that would come with the use of the word "beware." LTBS!

Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? (Mat 7:15-16 MKJV)

Jesus was giving His disciples or Christians a warning to be on their guard against false prophets. The manner in which they will come is said to be in sheep's clothing, that is, they are counterfeits but they will pretend to be real. Their true nature is identified to be ravening wolves; that is, wolves that are very hungry, looking for a straying sheep to prey on. It is no wonder that we see many so called men of God, who are greedy for material gains, as a result they distort many passages especially Malachi 3.10 as a spiritual gun pointed at the heads of their followership to accumulate money from them, using it for themselves. They achieve this success by deviating from the divine organization of leadership in the church and place themselves higher than Scripture allows, claiming the position due to Christ only so that they will be worshipped by their followers. Dear listener, Jesus said these false prophets can be known by their fruits. You must compare what they do with what has been laid down by inspiration in the Scripture, so shine your eyes!

A major prophecy about this apostates is given in 2 Peter 2.1-3. LTBS!

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. (2Pe 2:1-3 ESV)

Characteristics of these false teachers as mentioned in this passage include their being:

- Greedy
- Covetous
- Sensual and
- Adulterous. And they will also deny the Lordship of Jesus putting themselves first.

This may be applied to those desirous of position and power who despite the warning of Jesus in Matthew 23 that disciples should not put themselves on a pedestal or allow people to put them on one, have accepted the prideful position of preeminent personalities over believers in Jesus and thereby played into the hands of Satan who now uses this licentious state to bring so many other temptations of power like sexual immorality and power and authority which no man should wield except the Lord. Many leaders today find themselves helplessly immersed in sensuality as Peter prophesied and we have some divorcing their wives remarrying many times; some sleeping with young women in their churches and most overcome by greed even competing to display this greed by acquiring airplanes and other material possessions.

Listening friend, we all are supposed to be under the authority of Christ by obeying His teachings in all things. We see people today, as a result of the ungodly desire to be in control, to have pre-eminence over others, draw away the disciples of Christ to make their own disciples and to have control over them. This was also prophesied about by the Holy Spirit through Apostle Paul in Acts 20.28-32, LTBS!

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Act 20:28-30 ESV)

These men who were going to depart from the faith, were already leaders under Christ. But since they were hungry for power and authority and to be in control, they would not be satisfied with only being followers of Christ, but also to become masters as Christ. They would covet the power and authority that only belonged to Christ and would rebel from the way of Christ. These men would speak perverse things, wearing high sounding titles to make themselves different from other people, which they call “floor members or laity.”

After drawing these disciples to themselves, they would further teach things that are contrary to the teachings of Christ since they need to keep their disciples. Let us hear some of such teachings as prophesied in 1 Timothy 4.1-4. LTBS!

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For

everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, (1Ti 4:1-4 ESV)

When a man acquires power and authority (not given to him by Christ), to draw disciples to himself, he will also influence them with teachings that are not from Christ. Power is very corruptive when one is not under the influence of the Holy Spirit of God! For example, when a man or woman claims to be the general overseer or founder of a church, he will also develop philosophies and teachings to make and keep members and lead them in the way **he thinks** they should go, and to what **he feels** they should believe. This is why most churches today are being governed by the constitutions drawn by the founders of those churches. So the apostasy began with leadership and authority in the churches and continues when these leaders change the ordinances and doctrine of Christ. Instead of continuing with the apostles' doctrine (Act 2:42) it became the doctrine of demons and of men (1Tim 4:1-3).

Dear listener, if God has forewarned the world by prophecies about the apostasy we are seeing today, is it not enough reason for us to be on our guards against every proclamation not found in the Scripture? It may confuse you to later realize that you are even fulfilling these prophecies or that you are under the control of one who is fulfilling them.

Let us trace how men stated fulfilling the prophecy of departing from God pattern and arrangement in leadership of His church!

It is worthwhile to know that even before the death of the last apostle standing, who was Apostle John, false teachers had risen, teaching perverse things as stated in the prophecies. Some of them were identified as Gnostics, who taught that Jesus did not actually come in the flesh but only appeared like a real human being. Another claimed since God is light, He cannot also be the creator of darkness, and that darkness is evil. There were many other teachings which posed contempt to the sovereignty of God and His person. Apostle John at that time, combated these false teachings, first by proving that Christ came in the flesh with the use of human senses of seeing, touching, hearing and communing. LTBS from 1 John 1.1-3.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1Jn 1:1-3 ESV)

Again John gave a way for Christians then and even now to use in testing every spirit. LTBS from 1 John 4.1-6

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was

coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1Jn 4:1-6 ESV)

Still, during that first century, men had begun to exalt themselves above other brethren, shortly after the Holy Spirit warnings. Apostle John referred to Diotrephes who loved to have the pre-eminence among the brethren, that he would not even accept the apostles. From 3 John 1.9, LTBS!

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. (3 John 9, NKJV)

Dear listener, tracing history of departure from Acts 20 is very plain. Acts 20 declares that the source of departure is men who were in leadership position of the church. Remember that the church which Jesus built is headed by Christ and Christ alone. The apostles and the first century Christians knew and were loyal to the fact that Jesus Christ is the only person that has supremacy over the church universally. This is clearly seen in Ephesians 1.20-23 and Colossians 1.18 LTBS!

That he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph.1.20-23, ESV).

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. (Col 1:18 ESV)

Since Christ is the only universal head, the General Overseer or Archbishop of the church, Christ made it that elders be ordained to oversee the church locally or congregationally. He commanded through the apostles a structure of leadership that, each matured congregation should have what then was known as elders or bishops or overseers or shepherds or pastors. In Acts 14:23, the Holy Spirit reveals that when Paul and Barnabas retraced their first missionary journey's steps, they appointed elders in every church. LTBS!

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Act 14:23 ESV)

This is also seen in Titus 1.5, LTBS!

"For this cause I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed you." (Tit 1.5)

The Elders were to watch over souls, rule and feed the flock in a particular location and not universally. This is captured in and 1 Peter 5.1-4 LTBS!

"I exhort the elders who are among you, I being also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God among you, taking the oversight, not by compulsion, but willingly; nor for base gain, but readily; nor

as lording it over those allotted to you by God, but becoming examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a never-fading crown of glory.” (I Peter 5.1-4)

Dear listener, these passages reveal that in each local church there was plurality of elders. This simply tells us that every church or congregation in different geographical region had men, “elders,” not a man, “elder” to shepherd them on behalf of the Lord. Again, in Acts 20:17 as Paul returned to Jerusalem from his third missionary journey, he sent from Miletus to Ephesus that the elders of the church should come and meet him, whom he addressed as “bishops” or “overseers” in verse 28 of the same Acts 20. LTBS!

Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. (Act 20:17 ESV)

Many are unaware today that the elders, bishops or overseers, pastor or shepherds are not different offices in the church but names or terms describing their qualifications and the nature of their work. The elders in each local church were equal in authority. Their authority did not extend beyond the “flock of God among them.” As it was prophesied, there came a time that some elders also known as bishops began to extend their authority. How did it happen you may ask?

A famous church historian named Mattox, in his church history book titled, “The Eternal Kingdom” identified that it was Ignatius, who was one of the elders in Antioch and lived in the second century A.D, was the one who first advocated a distinction between elders and bishop. He advocated that there should be a one man –a monarchical bishop ruling over the congregation. Mattox said that this innovation came to reality in after the year 150 A.D (P. 59)

Dear listener, the verses of the Scripture earlier read in Acts 20:17, 28-30 revealed that the words elder, bishop and overseer refer to one and the same office and they are used interchangeably in the New Testament to refer to the same individual and refer to the one work of shepherding the lord’s church. But as a result of men’s lack of respect for Bible authority, they began distinguishing elder from bishop as well as from overseer. This history has sadly continued repeating itself today in so many churches, all because men do not respect the authority of the Bible and the prophecies regarding this departure. That is why in many churches today, there is a difference between the bishop and elders, and there is a difference between the overseers, pastors and the elders of the church.

During the time of Emperor Constantine, the church and the state became very close at about 313 AD. There began to be government’s involvement in the affairs of the church which led to a great departure from the apostolic teaching and practice of church organization, which is one of the most striking apostasies, which we are experiencing even till today. Some congregations came to be ruled by one “bishop” with a group of elders and deacons under him. Listening friend, you may wonder and want to know how this came about, since this organizational ranking system was a stark contrast to what is revealed in the

Scripture. No man during the first century A.D. could claim to be head of any congregation, not to mention the church at large. None of the apostles dared assume an office or position reserved for only Jesus CHRIST who died for men. No man wore any religious title that elevated him above other Christians. The word 'apostle' was not used as a title and the irony of it is that the word means 'someone sent with a commission' or a sent servant - Never a 'Father', 'Papa' or 'Baba' of the church, General Overseer or all the other high-sounding and bogus religious titles men wear today. The historians Mattox and Ferguson in tracing this history, narrated that elders, in their meetings to discuss the work of the church, had one to be chairman of the meeting. This chairmanship eventually became a permanent position and the word bishop was reserved for the one who occupied this position. He was sometimes called the "president of the church and gradually assumed the responsibilities that originally and divinely rested upon all the elders. This position, by the year 150 A.D, had developed into the monarchical bishop, that is, one man bishop arrangement in a local church.

This order continued for hundreds of years, after which the authority of this one-man bishop extended to congregations other than the one that appointed him. This happened when the city church would establish congregations in the neighbouring towns and villages. Instead of recognizing the new congregations as independent bodies of Christ as seen in the Bible, the city church would control them through the bishop. Gradually, as the city bishops extended their authority, they became what is known as Metropolitan Bishops. History revealed that this departure grew and that by 190 A.D, Victor of Rome claimed to be a "universal bishop." From here, the Old Testament pattern of priesthood developed and the idea of clergy and laity emerged.

Where was the Bible during these times? It was lost in Latin and Greek which many of the people could not read. People today still cannot read the Bible even though it is in their language. They prefer to listen to a man who asserts himself over them telling them what they want to hear!

Listening friend you can see that this history is also repeating itself today. We see so many people establishing churches in several places, and instead of allowing these newly established churches to be independent with their own leadership as set forth in the Bible, they control the churches through headquarters, bishops, pastors, General Overseer's office and many other unbiblical offices and titles.

Furthermore, after the 2nd century A.D., there began to be a combination of churches of a large area under a single government or oversight. The area became what is known as a diocese. One of the metropolitan bishops graduated into a diocesan bishop. Dear listener, is it not what is happening today? We see churches having dioceses controlled by diocesan bishop. The prophecies of apostasy is still fulfilling even as men love to have control over other men and women and are establishing their own churches under the guise that God told them to so do.

Really? Will God change His words and become the author of confusion? When did God ever change or modify His words which He said will judge the world? (Joh 12:48)

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May the Lord our God bless you this week and answer your prayers in Jesus' Precious Name! Amen.