



"It is certain that whatever seeming calamity happens to you, if you thank and praise God for it, you will turn it into a blessing."
—William Law

24-Dec-10

Will the Church of God Be Thrown Down? (Part Two)

In Part One, we saw that the predominant focus of [Matthew 24:2](#) is on the physical Temple and its environs, and that Jesus Christ's words that "not one stone shall be left here upon another" already had one physical fulfillment in the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in AD 70. We also saw that, when Peter refers to individual [Christians](#) as "living stones," the sense of his teaching is that the spiritual house of [God](#) is being *built up*, not torn down. The church of God has the apostles and prophets as its foundation, with [Jesus Christ](#) as the Chief Cornerstone ([Ephesians 2:19-22](#)). Because the church is built on this, as long as there is a church ([Matthew 16:18](#)), there will also be at least one living stone upon another.

This does not mean that the church of God will always exist in the same form or that it will be without turmoil, division, and even scattering. These are natural byproducts of carnality, and so it follows that, unless every member of the Body rids himself of all vestiges of carnality at the same time, there will always be those forces that tend to divide. Intriguingly, God uses those same elements to work out His perfecting of us. Even when the church is in a relatively stable form, it is still subject to persecution from without, as Jesus warns in [Matthew 24:9](#) (see also [John 16:33](#)).

Switching metaphors, on top of this the Good Shepherd moves His sheep around in ways that we sometimes cannot understand until after the fact. Thus, the life of a "living stone" will never be static for very long, yet there are still biblical parameters to which we can look for guidance in understanding just how far afield we stones might end up. A key to understanding God's intention for the church is found in the letter to the church of Ephesus:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the [faith](#) and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ([Ephesians 4:11-13](#))

To understand the context for the word "gave" in verse 11, we have to back up to verse 7: "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and *gave gifts to men*" ([Ephesians 4:7-8](#)). In other words, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are *given as gifts* by Jesus Christ. He gives these gifts for the purpose of edifying—building up—the Body of Christ.

One implication of this, however, is that, as long as the Body needs edifying—as long as it has not achieved "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God," and its members are not yet up to "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"—then God will continue to work through such men to bring about that edification. The structure and cohesiveness may be more rigidly defined at some points in church history than at others, but where Christ's Body is found, there will be structure. Certainly, God works through isolation at times, but those times are limited, for members begin to die spiritually when severed from the rest of the Body.

The prophetic books of Zechariah and Revelation indicate that before Christ's return, a definite structure will be in place. Revelation records a vision of "the Lord's Day" ([Revelation 1:10](#)), that is, the time generally known as the Day of the Lord. As the vision begins, Jesus tells the apostle

John to write what he sees and to "send it to the *seven churches*." Turning to see the Speaker, John sees Jesus "in the midst of the seven lampstands," symbolic of the seven churches. Though the letters to these churches can be seen in terms of seven successive eras, it is critical to notice that each letter contains language that ties it to the end time—to the period around the Day of the Lord. Thus, one application of the letters found in Revelation 2-3 is that they are seven distinct groupings, all in existence during the Day of the Lord.

This end-time aspect of Revelation 1-3 is strengthened by one of the visions given to Zechariah:

Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I said, "I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left." . . . Then I answered and said to him, "What are these two olive trees—at the right of the lampstand and at its left?" And I further answered and said to him, "What are these two olive branches that drip into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden oil drains?" Then he answered me and said, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." So he said, "These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth." ([Zechariah 4:1-4](#), 11-14; cf. [Revelation 11:3-4](#))

While we may not fully understand all these figures until they begin shaping up, it is plain to see that a definite structure to the body of believers exists at the end time. There are still churches—groupings, congregations, or some other form of organization. The seven lamps all receive their oil from the same place. This is not a description of complete dissolution or maximum entropy, but one of order and providential care of the organized Body by the Head. To revert to the previous analogy, the stones are fitted together here, not isolated or standing on their own.

The church of God is a spiritual organism, and though corporate designations will come and go, there will always be a unity of the Spirit ([Ephesians 4:3](#)),

and Jesus' disciples will always be known by their [love](#) for one another ([John 13:35](#)). These attributes cannot exist in isolation. Physical organizations may be built up and dissolve away, but the church will prevail against the gates of Hades. Though all the living stones will not ever all be in the same place until the resurrection, they will also never be very far apart.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Two Witnesses \(Part Four\)](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The seven golden lamps (Zechariah 4:2; Revelation 1:20) are seven churches empowered by an abundance of oil (a symbol of God's Spirit, Zechariah 4:6), manifested as works or fruit. Zerubbabel, finishing the physical Temple, serves as a type of Christ, who finishes the spiritual one. The seven stars, lamps, and eyes appear to be interchangeable, representing the churches, the messengers of the churches, or the spirit of the churches (Revelation 1:16, 20; 5:6).

From the Archives: Featured Article

[God's Sovereignty and the Church's Condition \(Part Two\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Having shown that God is involved in world affairs, John Ritenbaugh concludes by showing that God's hand was definitely involved in the scattering of the church. Our reaction needs to be positive: that, if He felt it needed to be done, we should respond by growing and preparing ourselves for His Kingdom.

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