

**G**OD promised the prophet Zechariah that in the last days, He would be a protective wall of fire around His people: *"For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about..."* (ZECH 2:5).

Likewise, Isaiah testifies: *"For thou hast been a... shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall."* (ISA 25:4). *"And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain."* (ISA 4:6).

These promises are meant to comfort us beforehand - because all the prophets warn of a great storm coming in the final days, which will beat against God's wall of protection with ferocity!

Indeed, Jesus says this coming storm will be so frightful and overwhelming, people's hearts will fail them as they see it developing (see Luke 21:26). Now, if Jesus says this storm is going to be ferocious, we can know it will be an awesome moment in history. Yet, the Bible assures us God never sends judgment on any society without first revealing to His prophets what He plans to do: *"Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets."* (AMOS 3:7).

This is a marvellous expression of our Lord's great love for His people. And if you study the biblical prophets' writings carefully, you'll see that God acts this way consistently. Just prior to an impending storm of judgment, He always commands His prophets to warn the people to return to Him: *"I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and... by the ministry of the prophets."* (HOS 12:10).

# The Only Hope in the Coming Storm!

Moreover, God is faithful to speak in times of prosperity, just before the fury of His judgment strikes. While the storm clouds are still gathering, He raises up prophetic voices all over the land. And, according to scripture, whenever a sinful nation was prosperous and at peace, God told His prophets to warn that the good times soon would end: *"... the LORD hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity..."* (ZECH 7:7).

At times God made His message so strong, He instructed His spokesmen to issue cutting, searing warnings: *"Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth..."* (HOS 6:5). In other words: "The word I bring will be so clear, it will smite you if your heart is open at all. It will cause you to fall on your face and repent!"

We always have to keep in mind, God's only purpose in lovingly calling us back to Himself is to protect us in such times of storm. Yet often in biblical history, when He gave these warnings, the peo-

ple refused to listen: *"Yet he sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the LORD; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear."* (2.CHR 24:19).

Almost always, God's people grew weary of these warnings. This was especially true if a prophet cried out about a coming storm over a period of years, but the society only continued to be prosperous and at peace. Over time, the people simply switched off to the prophet's voice. They simply didn't want to hear it anymore.

We see this in the Israelites' response to the prophet Isaiah. They told him: *"... Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits..."* (ISA 30:10).

Can you imagine ever falling to such a condition? These people knew Isaiah was telling the truth - that a great storm was coming - but they got tired of hearing about it! They preferred to hear "smooth things." And the Hebrew word for "smooth" here means "pleasant, unperturbed." They were telling Isaiah, in other words: "Don't

preach anything to us that will upset the status quo or make us nervous!"

This very condition is creeping into the church of Jesus Christ today. Believers who have been devoted to Jesus for years now turn on their television sets only to see more horrible reports of violence, disasters, hunger, crime, immorality. After a while, their minds become satiated with all the bad news, and their hearts become hardened to it. To them, even the worst news reports are "just another news story."

I often wonder: Can anything move us anymore? We've already heard every type of bad news we could possibly hear. What disaster or calamity is left that could shock us?

Beloved, God is appalled by this kind of response among His people! We see this in the warnings of the prophet Ezekiel. At the time Ezekiel prophesied, Israel was prosperous and at peace with the surrounding nations. Yet the Lord told Ezekiel to give the people this message: *"For I will lay the land most desolate, and the pomp of her strength shall cease; and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate... because of all their abominations which they have committed."* (EZEK 33:28-29).

The prophet went up and down the land, preaching God's warnings over several years. But the people grew weary of listening to him. After all, over the years not one of Ezekiel's words had come to pass. On the contrary, the nation only grew more prosperous!

Over time, Ezekiel's prophecies became a source of entertainment for the people. They began calling him names behind his back - names that were probably similar to the ones I've been called over the years: "Doomsday preacher," "The man who never smiles," "Mr. bad news." Finally, Ezekiel finally got fed up and said, "Lord, you've deceived me. Nothing you told me has come to pass. And now everyone's mocking me!"

(Israel) is saying, "... *Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words,*

*but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after covetousness... they hear thy words, but they do them not. And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them."* (EZEK 33:30-33).

Let me ask you: Have you come to the place where you've said in your heart, "I've already heard it all! I don't want to hear any more!" If so, beware!

### **As It Was With All Past Societies and Church Bodies, The Church Today Is in No Mood to Receive Bad News!**

The majority of churchgoers today soundly reject all prophetic warnings of a coming storm. Indeed, the American church today is the most blatant "feel good" church in all of history. But, like Israel, we're only experiencing the calm before the storm!

While Moses spent forty days on the mountain-top, Israel indulged in a spirit of lawlessness. The people wanted to play and relax, so they abandoned all godliness. You remember the result: It ended in a drunken, naked orgy around a golden calf.

Likewise today, Christians by the multiple thousands are casting off the yoke of Christ, tossing aside all limits and restrictions. This attitude is prevalent in many of the books and magazines you find in Christian bookstores. It's almost as if our leaders are saying, "Relax! God isn't hard. He's our Daddy, we're all his kids, and we're meant to have a good time. Don't let anyone disturb your fun!"

A few years ago, three pastors of large charismatic churches publicly stated they believed God would use rock-and-roll and rap music to bring in the next great revival. One of these ministers even declared that God used the Beatles to open people's hearts to the Holy Spirit. No - never! Those young men glorified sex and drugs. How could that ever be the work of the Holy Spirit?

One Christian magazine predicted that the next big movement in the church would be a "night-club" approach - including services that feature dancing, "near-beer" alcohol, and comedians. One pastor

told me this is already happening in churches throughout England and Europe. The churches can't hold the people's interest - so they turn them into night-clubs!

In addition, many "sinner friendly" churches in America now serve coffee during their morning services. The people sit with their feet propped up on chairs, never standing up for worship. At one such church, a visiting gospel singer was advised not to sing anything that mentioned sin or Christ's Blood, because it might offend the visitors. That church's leaders were trying to create a "comfort zone" for sinners!

You may find it hard to imagine the Israelites dancing naked around a golden calf. But don't for a second think the same thing couldn't happen in the church today. Soon we're going to witness lewd, sensuous, blasphemous forms of religion, straight out of the pits of hell. Indeed, the Bible says a time is coming when God's people will no longer blush. And right now, the church's blush is gone - because we've seen and heard so much already. yet this is just the beginning!

You may ask - why are so many ministers and believers being deceived? Why is there so little discernment in God's house? Why do the most bizarre, worldly movements attract so many followers? I believe the answer lies in a prophecy from Amos:

*"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."* (AMOS 8:11). Notice, this verse doesn't say there will be a famine of preaching. The fact is, God would never hold back His warnings from His church - because only His truth can set us free. That's why He sends His prophets, teachers and evangelists to speak truth to us.

No, Amos' prophecy is not about all the shallow, light preaching we hear today; it isn't saying there will be a shortage of truth. Rather, what the church today is experiencing is a famine of hearing! There is an unwillingness to hear the true word of God. Instead, people are closing their eyes and ears, hardening their hearts, and

saying, "I don't want to hear any more!"

**I Believe Right Now We Are Experiencing the Calm Prior to The Greatest Storm America Has Ever Suffered!**

I first delivered this message as a sermon to Times Square Church on April 4, 1997. Just two days before that, on Friday, April 2, the stock market reached an all-time high of over 7,000. Newscasters and magazines boasted:

"America is enjoying its greatest prosperity ever. Unemployment has fallen below 5 percent, and there is very little labour strife. Profits are at an all-time high, and people's purchasing power is up. At the same time, interest rates are low, and home sales are increasing. America is riding the crest of a booming wave of good news, prosperity and peace."

It all sounds like good news, doesn't it? Yet the Bible says whenever people are crying, "Peace and prosperity!", sudden destruction is about to fall.

Over the years, I have received letters from people saying, "You've been prophesying for years about 'gathering storm clouds' and a 'coming crash.' Yet all you've done is scare a lot of Christians who trust your word. The truth is, the opposite has happened. Instead of experiencing a storm, we've seen a boom, with record-breaking prosperity. There isn't one sign on the horizon to suggest a coming crisis."

The fact is, the apostle Peter warned that many believers would react this way: *"...there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."* (2.PET 3:3). In other words: "People will say, 'Where's the so-called storm? Everything is continuing today as it always has!'"

Beloved, God has judged every past society for lesser sins than America's. Consider:

\* No other nation has killed more babies than the United States has through abortion. Our soil cries out with the blood of these children!

We'd rather save the life of a whale than one of our own babies.

\* America has the world's highest rate of illegitimate pregnancies.

\* Teenage crime in this country is the highest in the free world.

\* Americans now spend more money on dog food than on foreign missions.

\* We have begun to glorify homosexuality and lesbianism. Our media applauds the "bravery" of gays who declare their sexual orientation - but we ought to weep over it! TV's "Ellen" was hailed as a heroine when she came out of the closet on national television. Yet at one time, Christians across the country would have been on their faces crying out to God for mercy over such immorality.

\* Network newscasts showed images of half-naked gay women in Florida celebrating "Lesbian Pride Week." An estimated 30,000 women gathered to indulge in drunken orgies all night long for a whole week. And local officials applauded it, saying, "It's wonderful that they're all together here." But it must have been breaking God's heart! Radical homosexuals cry out to society, "In your face!" Yet what they're really saying is, "In your face, God!"

\* America has brazenly kicked God out of its schools and courts. Now there's even a movement to remove His name from the Pledge of Allegiance and from all U.S. coins. People no longer want to hear even the mention of His name!

\* Fifty million Americans now smoke pot, and millions more are hooked on heroin, crack and other hard drugs.

\* Our schools have become bastions of blasphemy and agnosticism. Our children have been robbed of all moral standards, denied all access to God - and they're reacting by becoming more violent and rebellious.

**Beloved, God destroyed Noah's generation, as well as Sodom, all for lesser sins than ours. What arrogance to think that while these societies were judged severely, we might be spared!**

**Very Soon, America Is Going To Wake Up to a Sudden News Report of Calamity - and the Storm Will Be Upon Us Suddenly!**

The psalmist describes how God's rod of judgment will fall overnight: *"For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them... all the horns of the wicked also will I cut off..."* (PSA 75:8,10).

In Revelation, this cup is called *"...the cup of his indignation..."* (REV 14:10). In other words, it's full of God's wrath. Simply put, America's cup of iniquity is overflowing - and all of our sins are going to turn into His holy wrath!

You may be saying, "Why do you have to put such a scare into people? Why shouldn't we just enjoy this prosperity while it's here? You should be glad about all the good things that are happening, especially in New York City. Walt Disney has moved in and taken over the once-seedy 42nd Street. Now all the smut and porn shops are gone, and everything in Times Square is family-oriented. There won't be any riots here, as you predict, with over a thousand fires burning. Relax, pastor, and enjoy it!"

No - Mickey Mouse can't stop the coming storm! The fact is, Disney has become one of the world's most corrupt media systems. Its movies are rife with homosexuality, violence and the occult. Indeed, such businesses are the very reason God will send the storm - and it will come quickly!

I remember as a young boy hearing a sudden news report that instantly changed America's peaceful slumber. Our family was riding along on a beautiful, peaceful Sunday afternoon to a country church where my father was going to preach. We had just stopped for ice cream when a sudden news flash came over the car radio: "We interrupt this program to bring you this news report: Japan has bombed Pearl Harbour!" I still remember the look on Dad's face; he was in utter disbelief.

That night at church, everyone was baffled. "What's happening?" they wondered aloud. "How could we

suddenly be bombed? In the days that followed, we had "blackouts" in which we all had to cover the windows in our homes and schools. Everyone feared a sudden bomber attack!

And, beloved, so it will be suddenly when the storm hits. It will come like a thief in the night, bringing sudden panic and disbelief. Right now you may be thinking, "Let it come! If calamity strikes, I'll deal with it then. After all, I'm in God's hands. I'll be ready - so I'm not going to worry about it. Jesus will see me through."

Yet, let me ask you: Why does God tell His prophets to shout their warnings from the housetops? He wants to warn His people - to stir us up to seek Him! He wants to convict us of all our attempts to cast off Christ's yoke and cosy up to the world. He wants us to keep our eyes on Jesus - to seek heavenly things - because those are the only things that will stand in the coming storm!

### **Now Let Me Give You the Only Hope in the Coming Storm!**

Just before His death and resurrection, Jesus stared into the face of a horrible coming storm. He saw what was just ahead: Jerusalem would be surrounded by powerful armies, the temple would be destroyed, the city would be burned to the ground, and thousands of people would die on crosses erected by the invading enemy. Their entire society was about to collapse!

Now, Jesus was the very embodiment of God's love. And yet He warned, prophesied and wept over His society, because He saw what was coming: *"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved..."* (MATT 24:21-22).

If you think about it, Jesus' day was very similar to ours: Peace, calm and prosperity ruled. Children

played in the streets. There were no signs of judgment anywhere. Yet Jesus described His society as a generation of vipers: priests who robbed widows, scoffers, blasphemers, adulterers, child offenders, a corrupt church full of moneychangers, a ministry filled with wolves in sheep's clothing, false accusers, liars, cheats, hypocrites, lovers of pleasure, fornicators, corrupt children. He warned, "You're about to be surrounded by enemy armies. Now, prepare your hearts - because there's a storm coming!"

When I first prepared this message, I was overwhelmed by a spirit of foreboding. All I could think of was the church's terrible condition and how the devil was using subtle evils to deceive God's elect. Christians seemed focused mostly on their own needs - "my needs, my problems, my past, my future - how my parents hurt me, how the church has wounded me, how my friends have failed me..." God's people were no longer weeping over a dying world!

For a while, this truly overwhelmed me. Then the Holy Spirit showed me how our Lord reacted in the face of the coming storm. The apostle John writes, *"... as he is, so are we in this world."* (1.JN 4:17). The simple fact is, we have to have Jesus' mindset in all things - or our hearts will fail us!

The Bible gives no evidence of Christ being downcast, fearful or hopeless. He didn't panic or despair. In spite of all He saw coming, Jesus knew the final outcome. He knew the gates of hell wouldn't prevail against God's people!

David gives us a clear picture of Jesus' attitude in the face of the coming storm. He speaks prophetically of Christ, saying, *"... I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved..."* (ACTS 2:25). The literal meaning here is, "I was always in His presence, beholding His face." David quoted Jesus as saying, *"Therefore did my heart*

*rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope..."* (verse 26). Here is the secret: Jesus kept the Father always before His face!

Jesus continually sought out secret places to be shut in with His Father. And it was only after being in God's presence that Christ came forth to minister, fully persuaded that His Father was always with Him: "He's at my right hand - and nothing on this earth can move me!" The Greek word for "moved" here means "agitated or shaken, disturbed." Jesus was saying, "None of these problems, evils or coming events can cast me down or shake my confidence. My Father is in complete control!"

Beloved, if we're going to face the coming storm, then we need to be prepared so nothing disturbs our spirit. And the only way to do that is to spend time in the Father's presence, beholding His face. We have to be shut in with Him - on our knees - until we're thoroughly persuaded He's at our right hand!

God is clearly telling us, "Don't be moved or agitated by anything you see. Keep your eyes focused on me - and you'll retain your joy!" And according to David, Jesus testified, *"... thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance."* (ACTS 2:28).

It's as if Christ is telling us, "I faced everything you're going to face in the closing days of time. I had the same foreboding feelings, because I saw the coming storm. But I ran into the presence of my Father, and He lifted all my concerns! He showed me the outcome to it all. And in His presence I found all the joy, hope and rest I would ever need, to the very end. I have peace and joy because I've been with Him! *"... my flesh shall rest in hope."* (verse 26).

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