

# God's Church of the 1990's

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The Lord is moving in unprecedented ways in His church today. Everywhere we travel the word is going forth! We are entering the Decade of Harvest of souls. Millions of souls are hungering for Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour even though they may not yet know His name. The time is now! The harvest is ripe!

Let's take a quick graphic look at the world's population. Assuming the biblical historical view, looking at Figure 1 we see that it took over 5,600 years for the world's population to reach one billion. It only took 90 years for it to reach two billion, 30 years to reach three billion, then only sixteen years to reach four billion, and only fourteen years to reach five billion!

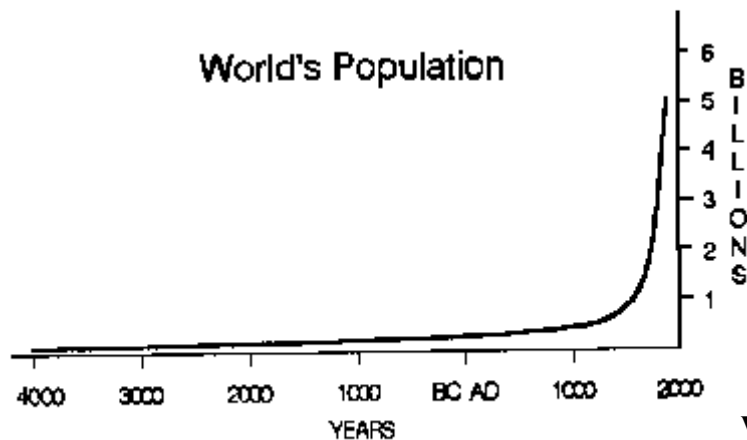


Figure 1

From these statistics it is easy to see that the world's population is experiencing astronomical growth.

With the enormous population on earth today, we must ask, "How is this decade's great in-gathering going to take place?" Through the centuries God has used His church or His people as the vehicle through which He accomplishes His purposes on earth. Thus we ask, "What kind of church is God calling us to be in this great decade of Harvest?"

I believe the answer, at least in part, is:

1. His church must be focused on His Kingdom and not on what the world has to offer.
2. His church must be prepared to allow its offerings to be tested by fire.
3. His church must be without sin.
4. His church must seek His presence.

The Feast of Tabernacles in Deuteronomy 16 is a kind of blueprint for God's church today and in the next decade.

*Celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days after you have gathered the produce of your threshing floor and your winepress. Be joyful at your Feast--you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns. For seven days celebrate the Feast to the Lord your God at the place the Lord will choose. For the Lord your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete. Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. No man should appear before the Lord empty-handed: Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you. (Deu 16:13-17 NIV).*

This feast ordered by the Lord was the last of seven feasts. It came at the end of each liturgical year. It was directly related to the harvest and was meant to be a time of great joy for all the people.

Let's examine these instructions to the Israelites and draw a parallel for the church of the 1990's.

## We Must Live in Booths.

Because of the instructions Moses received from the Lord, he commanded all Israel to erect temporary "booths" or small wood and straw huts in which they were to live for the duration of the seven day feast.

What did this mean? To Israel this was an annual reminder that they were strangers in the land after they left Egypt and during their 40 year journey to the promised land. They lived in tents, temporary dwellings, during that 40 years. God wanted these booths to be an annual reminder that they were in bondage in Egypt and that He delivered them, and that they were thereafter sojourners, or strangers, awaiting entry into the promised land.

What does this say to us today? To us the dwelling in booths is a symbolic statement regarding our residency. We have been delivered from the bondage of sin and we have no permanent dwelling here on this earth. We are, as King David said, "...a stranger on earth." (Ps 119:19 NIV). We are citizens of another Kingdom, the Kingdom of God. This world and all its kingdoms are temporary. The Apostle Peter said. "...the heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by

*fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." (II Pet 3:10 NIV).*

If we are truly strangers in this world, then any bond to this present world is wrong. The Apostle John states it this way, *"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (I John 2:15 NIV).*

If we are fully committed to Christ then we must live in a booth, figuratively speaking. Does that mean we can't own a nice home or drive a nice car? Does it mean we cannot partake of the pleasures offered by our society?

No, it doesn't. But it does mean that things cannot have a hold on us. A Christian can possess most anything in the world - so long as it doesn't possess him (or her)! There are many things capable of possessing us. The list is long: positions, titles, intellectual pursuits, carnal pleasures, money, jobs, homes, things, authority, one's spouse or children... even one's own ministry is capable of possessing us.

Thus to live in a booth today means to recognize that we are aliens in this earth and that it offers nothing worthy of placement ahead of Christ. We are to be willing to turn loose of anything that we hold or own if He commands it.

### **We Are to Make Offering by Fire.**

In the Old Testament there were two categories of offerings for worship at the tabernacle: those made with fire and those made without fire. Offerings without fire were things such as grain or drink offering. The offerings by fire were primarily meat or flesh of an animal.

What does "offering by fire" say to us today? We are God's church. The church is not the building in which we meet. The church is God's people, all those who are redeemed. We are to let the light of our fire be seen by all who observe us.

When and where are we to do this? The Lord tells us, *"...But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in All Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8 NIV).*

To repeat what has often been said, "We are all witnesses...but the question is: What kind?" How do we test our "witness" offerings? The Apostle Paul instructs us:

*"By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood hay or straw, his work will be shown*

*for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." (I Cor 3:10-15 NIV).*

Obviously this means all our "works" or "offerings" will be fire-tested. What works will burn and what works will withstand the fire?

The answer is simple. All our work (i.e., witnessing, teaching, etc.) that is motivated by love of the Lord is gold, silver and costly stones - it is eternal work. While all our work that is motivated by self is wood, hay and straw - it is temporary.

"But, Lord, all my work is for you...isn't it?"

How I wish it were so! We are such poor judges of our own deeds. The Prophet Jeremiah said, *"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? 'I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind...' (Jer 17:9-10 NIV).* "Alright, Jeremiah, you're right. Lord, I want my offering to stand the test of fire."

The key to this testing of our works is found in the heart. An example I often use in leadership seminars illustrates the heart motive clearly. Suppose you have a friend who was deathly ill and you fasted and prayed for days for his healing. Then you sensed the Holy Spirit urging you to go lay hands on him and pray. When you did he was miraculously healed. The next Sunday he went to church and gave a glorious testimony about his healing...and never once mentioned your name!

How do you feel? What's going on in your mind? Is it, "Glory to God! Isn't Jesus faithful? I'm so glad God healed my brother! Hallelujah!" or is it rather, "How ungrateful! After all my fasting and praying he didn't even mention my name! It'll be a-cold-day-you-know-where before I pray for him again!"? If we care not who gets the credit for our work we are on the right track. It doesn't take a genius to recognize which of the above thoughts are gold, silver and costly stones, an offering acceptable to the Lord, and which are not.

### **We Are to Have No Yeast.**

During the Feast of the Tabernacles there was to be no yeast in the Israelite's booths or food. They weren't even allowed to touch any yeast.

Throughout the Old Testament, yeast is a symbol for sin. The analogy between yeast and sin is a powerful one. When yeast is worked into a lump of dough, at first it can't be seen or detected. But as time passes its presence becomes obvious by its visible effect on the

rising dough. Sin works the same way in our lives...at first it often cannot be seen or detected. But as time passes, it's ugly, decaying work becomes all too evident.

Today's American society tells us, "There is no such thing as 'sin.'" Anything is OK as long as it doesn't hurt anyone." Tragically, the end results of that philosophy are what we are seeing today are in the form of broken lives, broken homes, lives destroyed by incest, drugs, alcohol... the list seems endless.

Today we are experiencing God's prophetic words as said by the Apostle Peter, *"...It is time for judgement to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Pet 4:17 NIV)*. By this we conclude that it's not the devil who has made the church in America a perpetual media event. It's God purifying His church.

What "no yeast" says to us today, during this last, great harvest, is abundantly clear. God is going to mightily use those harvesters who have put sin out of their lives.

He is preparing His church for harvest today.

*"...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." (Eph 5:25-27 NIV)*.

Recently I spoke about "no yeast" in a church. At the end of the message, just as I asked the people to stand for a closing prayer, a prophecy came forth. In the prophecy the Lord very lovingly (and Scripturally) commended the people for their love and worship of Him. But then He went on to say, "There are those in this church with sin in their lives. There are those here who are adulterers, those who are fornicators, those who are involved in pornography, those with idols, those who are double minded, those with lusts and greed..." He then called for repentance and a turning away from all sin.

God is serious. In times past He has tolerated yeast in the church. No more. His harvesters are going to be doing His mighty work...without yeast.

### **We Are to Appear Before the Lord.**

During the Feast of the Tabernacles all men were commanded to appear before the Lord. Since men were the only ones counted in the census of that day, it is clear that all were to appear before the Lord.

Yes, today that does mean church attendance. The Bible says,

*"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day appearing." (Heb 10:25 NIV)*. King David said, *"I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord.'" (Ps 122:1 KJV)*.

In my early Christian walk I was a mugwump." A mugwump is a Christian who sits on the fence between the church and the world. He has his mug in the church and his wump in the world! He smiles and says, "Praise the Lord!" in church but those who work with him can't tell him from any other "sinner." The Lord is calling us to be 100% Christians, all the time and wherever we are.

But "appear before the Lord" also means entering into Divine presence. It means laying everything aside and entering into His presence. It means spending time with Him. It means setting life's problems aside, finding a place of solitude, and spiritually entering in before Him.

Many years ago I went early to a Sunday evening church service. As I stepped through the door the overwhelming presence of God met me. I sat quietly weeping tears of joy as I "appeared before the Lord." I didn't have to go early. My early attendance was in response to the still, small voice, quietly inviting me, "come." A voice so gentle and undemanding it is easily overpowered by many of life's demands.

Since that time I regularly put my busy schedule aside and "appear before the Lord." It's not He that needs it. It's me, I need it. It refreshes, edifies, purifies, cleanses and strengthens me. It sharpens my harvesting skills.

In the same sentence of the Scripture that commanded all to appear before the Lord there was further instructions, *"...don't come empty handed." (Ex 23:15 NIV)*. In other words, He commanded an offering. Today He commands that we give our money to Him as tithes and offerings.

Let me make one thing clear. God does not need our money! He owns the cattle on a thousand hills - He even owns the hills. He doesn't need our money! Then why the command to give? Because He has created us with a "built-in" need to give. We are the beneficiaries of giving. Yes, that's right, we benefit. Obedience to His command to give brings benefits to us as the givers.

There are stages of giving: 1) Grudging, but obedient. "OK (grumble, grumble) God says I should give, so here it is." 2) The steady and obedient. Those who have learned, *"...it is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35 KJV)* and 3) The cheerful giver! The cheerful giver is the person who has joyfully learned that it is he who

gets the benefit from giving, "...for God loveth a cheerful giver." (II Cor 9:7 KJV).

Let us then come into His presence with a gladness and expectancy in our hearts...and our gift cheerfully held in our hand.

### **The Feast Was at the End of Harvest.**

In my childhood my family were farmers and we lived largely on what we grew. My fondest memory of those years is the joy that came at harvest time. The tilling of the soil, the planting and the watering had been hard work indeed. But now the reward for all the labor was ours. What joy and delight shown from the faces at harvest time of all who labored hard those long months.

Another fact about harvesting is that it takes little effort to pick ripe fruit. Often all it takes to pick ripe fruit is just a touch and the fruit falls into your hand. That's the way ripe fruit is.

In this decade of harvest there is going to be ripe fruit such as we have never before seen in our lifetime. God is preparing hearts by the millions. All we need to do is touch them and they will fall into His hands.

Some years ago I taught a home Bible study. One evening I taught on the sovereignty of God. After the study a brother was politely taking the opposing view stating, "Yes, but God has to have us to prepare hearts, sow the seed, water it...then in due time harvest the souls for the Lord."

Before I could respond, there came a knock at the door. Expecting a late comer to the Bible study I opened the door. There stood a young man whom I had never before seen. As I was about to ask what he wanted he looked anxiously into my eyes as these words came from his mouth, "Sir, I need Jesus in my life. Someone told me if I came here I could be told how to find Him." And indeed he did! Not only did God prove His sovereignty, He gave an example of what ripe fruit is. All I

had to do was touch.

God's harvest is ripening. There are millions of people who have never been inside a church, yet who are turning to God. He is readying countless millions for His mighty harvest. There are five billion souls on earth and the number is growing daily.

*"...the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Luke 10:2 NIV).*

How is He going to do this? He is going to empower us with His Spirit.

*"On the last and greatest day of the feast [Feast of Tabernacles!] Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive..." (Jn 7:37-39 NIV).*

This is indeed the Decade of Harvest. At the same time He is preparing souls for harvest He is also recruiting harvesters. Harvesters who are living in "booths," not possessed by things of this world. Harvesters whose offerings stand the test of fire. Harvesters who have put aside the yeast of sin in their lives and are walking uprightly before Him. Harvesters who appear before the Lord regularly and allow Him to instruct and enable them for service. Harvesters who are quick to hear and obey His voice.

*"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." (Mk 1:17 NIV)*

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