Last Days Revival or End Time Apostasy?

The topic on the minds of many Christians and Messianic Jews today is revival. Christian TV, radio and best-selling books persuasively argue that we are in the midst of the greatest revival in the history of the world. Enthusiasts point to the signs and wonders occurring in such places as Toronto, Pensacola, Benny Hinn’s church in Orlando, Promise Keepers filling up stadiums, and their recent million man rally in Washington DC, as signs of this revival.

As a result, I’ve been thinking more about End Time revival. Knowing that we are drawing closer and closer to Acharit HaYamin (the Last Days), those days in which we can almost hear the footsteps of Yeshua approaching, I want us to consider the question, “Does the Bible predict there will be a great End Time revival that sweeps the world before the Second Coming?”

The twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew contains the Messiah’s most comprehensive teaching on His Second Coming. In it He gave us specific signs to look for that would immediately precede His return. Some of the signs include: false prophets and false messiahs, wars, earthquakes, famine, the persecution of God’s people, the moral decay of society, a great apostasy, or falling away from true Faith, the rise of the Anti-Christ, the rebirth of Israel, the rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple, a final outbreak of anti-Semitism, and unprecedented destruction on a world wide basis.

When you hear these precursors of His return, you might object, “Rabbi Loren, we have always had these things. We have had wars and rumors of wars from time immemorial. There have always been earthquakes and famines. Even in the first century there was the persecution of Messianic Believers. Humanity has usually been morally loose. There has been anti-Semitism since the time of Pharaoh. The people of God have always been plagued by false prophets and false messiahs.” It’s true that throughout history we have experienced many of these signs. But Yeshua gives us the key to understand these signs when He compares them to a woman in labor. He says that “all this is but the beginning of the birth-pains” (Mt. 24:8). Why does our righteous and wise Messiah compare the Last Days to a woman in labor?

A woman’s labor pains increase in two ways: in intensity and in frequency. The labor pains become more intense and the contractions come closer and closer together until the very end, when the pain is most agonizing, and the contractions almost continuous, one right after the other, and then the child is born. Rabbi Yeshua is telling us that the world is going to go through more troubles and disasters, which will increase in frequency and intensity, until the very end, when they are almost unbearable, and nearly continuous, one coming right after the other. Then He will return, bringing with Him a delightful new time in history, the golden age of man.

Since Israel became a nation once again in 1948, the intensity and frequency of these signs have increased like the birth-pangs of a woman approaching her time of delivery, exactly as Messiah foretold. The first sign Messiah gave us in His message on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24) has been largely overlooked and His solemn warning neglected, and that’s the one I want to focus on. While there has been spiritual deception ever since the Garden of Eden, we are forewarned that spiritual deception will reach its zenith in the Last Days.

“Yeshua answered and said to them, ‘See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name saying, I am the Messiah, and will mislead many'” … “Many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many”… “For false Messiahs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders; so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect” (Mt. 24:4-5, 11, 24).

In Matthew 24:4 Messiah issued this warning: “See to it that no one misleads you.” The repetition of this warning three times in this chapter underscores its seriousness. The nature of this warning is specified: false messiahs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders. His four-fold use of the word “many” indicates a deception that involves multitudes.

According to Yeshua, this End Time departure from the Truth will be spearheaded by apparent miracle- workers. The false prophets of the Last Days, to whom Messiah refers, will use signs and wonders to support their false teachings. The signs and wonders they are able to perform are apparently so impressive that without discernment by the Holy Spirit, even God’s elect sons and daughters would be deceived by them. Obviously, something more than mere trickery is involved. These miracle-workers are empowered by Satan, whom they unwittingly serve in the name of God.

Writing to the Thessalonians, Paul issued a similar warning: “Let no one in any way deceive you… (2 Thess. 2:3). Rabbi Paul goes on to explain that the deception of the Last Days will infect the professing community of believers. That is evident from the words “falling away,” or apostasy, that he uses in the rest of the verse: … “for it

[Messiah’s return] will not come unless the apostasy [falling away] comes first, and the man of lawlessness [Anti-Christ] be revealed, the son of destruction.”

Rabbi Paul assures us that the Last Days will be characterized by apostasy, not revival. We are not to be deceived into thinking that the apostasy won’t come; it must come first, or Messiah simply will not return! Therefore the teaching that there will be a world wide revival in the Last Days, however well intentioned, is biblically untenable. Paul’s prediction can only mean that in the Last Days many professing believers will reject the biblical teaching that apostasy is inevitable.

Other scriptures confirm that false signs and wonders will be an integral part of the Last Days apostasy. In the Sermon on the Mount, Messiah declared, “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness'” (Mt. 7:22-23).

These apostates about whom Messiah speaks are high-profile Christians and Messianic Jewish leaders, who apparently perform signs and wonders in the name of Messiah! Tragically, they seem to think that their ability to prophesy, cast out demons and perform miracles proves that they belong to Him. Their signs and wonders are so impressive that the accuracy and truth of their doctrine and the purity of their lives no longer seems to matter. They are able to delude others by emphasizing experiences over doctrine – exactly the situation we see today!

Speaking of what well describes our own day, Rabbi Paul gave this warning to his young disciple Timothy, “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths (2 Tim. 4:3-4). We seem to be in that time.

I’ve been a follower of King Messiah for almost twenty-three years, and there is no question in my mind that there has been a definite trend away from sound doctrine, to a religion based largely on personal experiences. When someone points out bad doctrine, they are told that they are being too critical and should focus on the positive (as if bad doctrine can be swept under the rug, where it won’t do any harm. But God’s Word says that a little leaven will leaven the whole batch). They are told it is enough to confess that Yeshua is Lord (which is essential to good doctrine, but it is not all of good doctrine). They are told to “judge not” (which is misapplied – Yeshua did not mean that we are to stop using our faculties to discern good from evil, sin from holiness, right from wrong – He meant that we must not act as if we are the final judge. We aren’t to condemn people to hell, thinking that God is finished with them, and that they are beyond redemption).

Clearly, the Bible predicts a “signs and wonders” movement of the Last Days, but it will be empowered by Satan, and thus a delusion that will deceive many. After a solemn warning that in the Last Days “difficult times [not revival] will come” (2 Tim. 3:1), Paul makes this remarkable statement: “Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men [false prophets] also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected as regards the Faith” (2 Tim 3:8).

Jannes and Jambres were the magicians in Pharaoh’s court who, through the power of Satan, duplicated (up to a point) the miracles that God did through Moses. Rabbi Paul thus declared that the Last Days opposition to the truth would be accompanied by demonstrations of power, though certainly not originating with God. These modern false prophets operate by performing apparent miracles in Messiah’s name. However, they are actually empowered by Satan. In that way, they deceive and lead many astray. Shrewdly, they don’t lead them out of the visible Community of Believers; instead they destroy them with false doctrine and thus false hope from within the Body of Messiah. Satan has no more effective tactic to damn souls!

The whole gamut of today’s so-called revival scene, from Toronto to Pensacola, must be seriously faced! Videos of the services show people crawling on the floor, howling like wolves, barking like dogs, roaring like lions, going through bodily contortions impossible without the aid of some spiritual power, unable to speak or even remember their names when they try to give a testimony, and worse. Many of those being baptized at Pensacola seem to lose consciousness or shake so violently that they must be carried out of the baptismal tank lest they drown. Others flail about so wildly as to require several men to handle them. Such manifestations were also found in past “revivals” among the Shakers, the Mormons and many other cults. That such things could now be widely accepted as evidence of the Holy Spirit only testifies to the extent of the delusion that is already permeating the Messianic Community!

Jude exhorts us to “contend earnestly for the Faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Contend earnestly against whom? Not against godless enemies outside the Messianic Community, but rather the warning concerns those who are within: “For certain persons have crept in unnoticed” (Jude 4). “Crept in” can only mean those who are inside the visible Body of Believers.

That we must earnestly contend for the Faith against those who have crept into the Messianic Community implies that the battle is not so much one of faith against unbelief, but rather of true faith against false faith. Those relatively few apostates who announce themselves as atheists or convert to Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism are not the primary focus here. Yeshua, Paul and Jude are instead warning of a falling away from the Truth from within the professing Community of Believers. That is precisely what we see today.

Is it possible for wolves in sheep’s clothing to creep in unnoticed, and assume positions of leadership in the Messianic Community? Paul confirms the words of Jude when he addressed the Ephesian elders: “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30). Rabbi Paul affirms that spiritual deception would arise within the Church.

Does the Word of God predict a great revival for the Last Days? It doesn’t appear that Yeshua thought so when He raised the question, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth” (Luke 18:8)? This does not bode well for a dynamic faithful Messianic Community when Yeshua returns.

Rabbi Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, also did not seem to think so. Instead, he predicted that the days immediately preceding the coming of the Messiah would be characterized by Anti-Christ, “whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive a love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness” (2 Thes. 2:9-12).

Again, the apostle to the Gentiles warns, “the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the Faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience” (1 Tim. 4:1-2).

Beloved brothers and sisters, the Holy Spirit is warning us that false teaching is demonic in origin and frequently promulgated by liars who occupy places of prominence in the Church. This deception will take place in the later times. In the Last Days there will be those who fall away from the Faith into demonic delusion as a result of listening to these treacherous pseudo- Christian religious leaders. Does the Bible teach that in the Last Days the Church will experience revival, grow increasingly numerous and powerful, faithful and pure, and that it will take over more and more of the political and social institutions of society? Hardly. According to Messiah, it’s a time for Anti-Christ to bring desolation. It’s a time of unparalleled tribulation so overwhelming that no life would survive unless the Almighty intervened. It’s a time of terrible persecution for Jews and Christians. It’s a time for those in Israel to flee to the hills. It’s a time characterized by false messiahs and prophets who deceive multitudes. (Mt. 24:15-24).

The book of Revelation gives us the most detailed picture of the Last Days, and it does not portray a powerful, faithful Church which has taken over the political and social institutions of the world. Yes, there will be a great harvest of humanity during that period known as the Great Tribulation, which immediately precedes the Second Coming. Yes, it will be a time of salvation for many, but it comes at a very high price. Revelation 7 records that a great multitude, so large that no one could count it, a multitude from every nation and all tribes and peoples and languages, will come to a saving faith in Messiah during the Great Tribulation. However, at the same time it will be given to the Anti-Christ to make war with the saints on earth and to overcome them (Rev. 13:7). There will be those who are beheaded because of their testimony about Yeshua and their faithfulness to Word of God. They will not worship the Anti-Christ or receive the mark of the beast on their forehead or hand (Rev. 20:4).

To summarize, the scriptural warnings foretell the growing delusion we find in our day:

1. A false signs and wonders movement led by many false prophets.
2. Many being deceived through these apparent miracles.
3. The replacement of sound doctrine with personal experience.
4. The rejection of the biblical teaching concerning apostasy and the insistence that we are in the midst of, or at least are building up to, the “greatest revival in the history of the Church.”

Such is the prevailing teaching today among most charismatics and increasingly among evangelicals and Messianic Jews. The promise of revival will be part of the Last Days deception, so beware. Don’t be part of it! Don’t assume that the apostasy of the Last Days will take place in the distant future. There are too many signs of Messiah’s return, and examples of false teaching and unusual phenomena taking place in the Church today, to make that assumption.

Instead, ask yourself a few questions: Is it not enough that Messiah indwells us? Is He not in our midst each time we meet? Are we not to be filled with the Holy Spirit at all times? Is not the Word of God enough for us? Is not His grace sufficient? Are we not complete when we are joined to Him by faith? Why then would we run after signs and wonders, as though they automatically prove that God is at work, while neglecting what the Lord has already given us?

It’s really so simple: we are to learn what the Bible says for ourselves. We are to be like the members of the synagogue at Berea, who were “more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word of God with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). We are to love one another, help one another, and reach out to a confused, lost, corrupt and dying world with the Good News of Messiah.