

15. A SPIRIT OF ERROR III: MONTANISM

In the previous chapters, we told you about Gnosticism and Marcion. Many errors crept into the church in those days. In this chapter, I'll discuss one more of these errors.

BACKGROUND

Towards the end of the second century, the Roman empire endured terrible calamities. They fought many bloody wars, and epidemics broke out in many places. Thousands and thousands died from those awful diseases. Men, women, children, old and young were carried to the grave. The plague spread rapidly across the Roman empire.

Many thought that the Lord Jesus would soon appear on the clouds of heaven. Hadn't the Lord Jesus foretold that there would be wars and rumours of wars in the last days? Hadn't the Lord

Jesus prophesied that pestilences would break out? So, wasn't this prophesy being fulfilled now?

Therefore ... it would not be long till judgment day would come!

A bishop in a large city predicted that the Lord Jesus would appear within a year. So, the farmers no longer went to work in the field. They stopped ploughing, sowing and planting. There was no purpose to that anymore, as they believed they would not harvest the crop anyway.

In Syria, a bishop and his entire congregation withdrew to the desert, and there they waited for the Lord Jesus to appear...

Nothing happened!

All those people were wrong; the Lord Jesus did *not* come! We do not know when the Lord will return. Even the angels in heaven don't know.



Montanus had many followers in Asia Minor, but also in Europe and Africa. He was a member of the Christian church in Pepuza.

The city was destroyed by the Roman emperor Justinian I in 550.

But one thing we do know — that day *shall* come.

Unexpectedly, suddenly! For that reason, the Lord Jesus said: "What I say to you, I say to you all: *watch*."

MONTANUS' FALSE DOCTRINE

In central Asia Minor there was a city called Pepuza.

A Christian church had been instituted in that city. Bizarre things were happening there in the time of



Montanus lived during the second century, very little is known about his personal life.

the early church. A man called Montanus lived in Pepuza.

He had recently converted to Christianity. Before his conversion, he had been a pagan priest, serving idols, but he had farewelled the idol service and became a member of the Christian church at Pepuza.

Let's go and visit the home of Montanus. Look, there he sits in his living room. He is speaking about the dark times in which they are living. He talks about the bloody wars raging and the terrible plague spreading. But see how strangely he acts: he begins to speak louder and faster. Beads of sweat appear on his forehead.

His body shakes and trembles. Suddenly he rolls off the chair and falls to the ground. His arms and legs convulse. Finally, he lies still, completely unconscious. His friends try to resuscitate him with some water, and sure enough, their efforts are successful. He raises his eyes in astonishment, stands up and goes to sit on his chair again. Then he tells his friends that the Lord Jesus has called him to reform the church. His friends listen very respectfully.

Another time, he tells them that he has seen all sorts of strange sights and visions. Of course, Montanus is a great and important man. At least, that's what he himself thinks. He tells his friends that the Holy Spirit works so powerfully in him that he falls unconscious every time.

And ... they believe him!

What a pity!

For what Montanus says is not true!

It was not the Holy Spirit working in him; no, the *devil* made him believe all those things!

He also began to predict the future.

He said: "It won't be long now, it really won't! The Lord Jesus will appear on the clouds of heaven anytime now! Soon, very soon, the day of judgment will arrive."

Yes, Montanus can easily *say* that, but the Lord *Jesus* had said that no one knows when that day will come.

Revelation tells us that the new Jerusalem will descend from heaven. Montanus says: "The Lord revealed to me that the new Jerusalem will descend in my dwelling place, in Pepuza. For that reason, all believers must come to Pepuza."

And do you know what was the worst?

Thousands believed his lies. Two women, who claimed to be prophetesses, supported him. Everywhere he went, Montanus claimed that he was the *true* comforter who the Lord Jesus had promised would come. Yes, everything which Montanus said was 'so important' that people believed *him* rather than what the *Bible* taught. Montanus taught that because the Lord Jesus would soon return, the church had to be holy. He demanded that Christians must fast often. He

insisted that nobody should get married anymore, for that was better. When a man lost his wife or a woman lost her husband, they must not marry again.

And if persecutions arose, Christians must *seek* the martyr's death. Montanus proclaimed all those bizarre things. You can easily see that Montanus taught a false doctrine.

MONTANISM REJECTED

It is true, the Lord Jesus *will* return on the clouds of heaven, but no one knows when, and that the new Jerusalem would descend into the city of Pepuza was his *invention*.

Yet, many believed the teachings of Montanus.

Many honoured him as a great prophet.

In Asia Minor, Europe, Africa, and even in Rome, Montanus had followers. But the Lord watched over His congregations and made sure that they rejected the teachings of Montanus.

The bishops met together to discuss these things. They had meeting after meeting, or in today's words: 'they had synod after synod.' There they discussed the teachings of Montanus and finally decided that Montanus was a *false* prophet, for the things he taught were not in the Bible.

Then Montanus said: "The Bible? The Bible is far from finished. Everything I am saying must also become part of the Bible!"

Then the bishops shook their heads and answered: "No, Montanus, you are wrong. The Bible *is* complete; the Bible *is* finished, and all those things which you tell us are not true."

God watches over His Church. The teachings of Montanus finally disappeared. In this struggle, too, the Lord was victorious. Life was not easy for the Christians. They were often terribly persecuted and divided by satanic attacks, including this one. But all these struggles were unable to destroy the work of the Lord.

QUESTIONS

1. Which error did early Christians make regarding Christ's return, and what were the results?
2. Read Matthew 24. List some of the signs of Christ's return.
3. God's people are called to work 'while it is day before the night comes in which no man can work.'" How did the Syrian bishop disobey this command?
4. What does God command of us as we do not know when He will come?
5. List the errors of Montanus.
6. Prove that he was a false prophet. Where were his errors condemned?
7. What do we read in the Revelation to John about the new Jerusalem?
8. What did Montanus say was revealed to him about the new Jerusalem?
9. What error did Montanus teach regarding the Word of God?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Find a text which proves that no man can predict the hour of Christ's return.
2. Did the errors of Montanus die with him, or can you prove that there have been other groups who have tried to predict the day of Christ's second coming?