

# ‘Rise Up, O Men of God!’

By PAUL J. SCHARF

It has often been noted that—tempted as we as preachers might be—we can never preach to the crowd that is not present. This column might be a bit unusual, then, as one might say that it is presented for the person who will never read it. At least in the case of the written word, however, it can be posted for all to see—and *share*.

Let me also preface my remarks by stating up front that many of the best responses we have seen in our service with The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry have been in small churches—sometimes to such an extent that it is almost beyond comprehension.

I will say it again—small churches (speaking of churches in the broadest sense) remain the backbone of this nation. Many of them are located in small towns, or even out in the country—but they are, in a very real sense, still holding the whole country together. Speaking more narrowly, in terms of the true body of Christ, I believe that many of her members attend smaller local churches.

The worldly mind might describe these churches as *old-fashioned*. When we get to spend a day with them, however, we often find that such a depiction is undeserved.

Many of these small churches—often with older congregations—have energetic and enterprising, sometimes younger, pastors. Some of these pastors have impressive credentials, exemplary families and a true desire to “labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim. 5:17). They preach enthusiastic, expository messages—faithfully, week after week—and they pour their hearts into it.

Some of these churches have a real legacy of teaching the Bible that goes back for decades. Every so often we find one that once had a pastor who went on to achieve notable accomplishments, and others have “(built) on this foundation” (1 Cor. 3:12).

Yet, over the decades, the church declined. I suppose it happened for a myriad of reasons. So often now it’s the baby boomers, the sons and daughters of our World War II heroes, who make up the majority of the congregation. These people have grown up loving Israel, and The Friends of Israel, and supporting both. It is from this group of people that I hear two types of statements, on a regular basis, which trouble me greatly.

First, on occasion, when I preach on Biblical prophecy, these senior saints will tell me wistfully that they haven’t heard anything like that in years. That always makes me happy—for the moment—but sad concerning the state of the church.

But there is another response that simply leaves me speechless. Their request goes something like this: “Pray for my son and his family. They go to Church X. That church has lots of \_\_\_\_\_, but it doesn’t talk about Israel, or prophecy. In fact, I don’t think that my grandkids are really learning the Bible there, at all.”

Perhaps the criticism is overstated in some instances. But the pain in their hearts is very real. It is almost like they are asking me to pray for an unsaved loved one.

What am I to do with these burdens? Perhaps I could write a column—speaking first to the pastors who were trained at dispensational schools, and took the pastorates of dispensational churches—claiming to be dispensationalists. Yet, now, at least practically, they have abandoned any semblance of preaching on Bible prophecy. Dear pastor, may I respectfully entreat you to consider the great need for this kind of teaching—at this pivotal time, perhaps very late in the history of the church age? If you are in need of help in these areas, I know that The Friends of Israel, in particular, stands ready to assist you.

I will speak more pointedly to the second group, the sons and daughters who have led the grandchildren away from the little country church. Dear friend, I would ask you: Was your decision informed purely by Biblical principles? Or did you leave mainly in the quest of something bigger, brighter and shinier? Was it based on the amenities they offer the family? But what will this choice mean for your family in the long run? And what will it mean for that little church that you left?

I can't answer these questions for anyone, let alone everyone, and it is not my role to judge or fix all the problems. But if you are someone for whom these prayers are prayed, I would ask you to reflect on Paul's restatement of the Great Commission in 2 Tim. 2:2, and then take the time to examine yourself, before the Lord, as to the place you are taking in that Divine equation.

I would also ask you, pastors and all people—especially asking myself first—to spend some time meditating on William Pierson Merrill's classic hymn.<sup>i</sup> Perhaps we could even sing it in our little church this Sunday. One verse is persistently haunting:

Rise up, O men of God!  
The church for you doth wait,  
Her strength unequal to her task;  
Rise up, and make her great!

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<sup>i</sup> "Rise Up, O Men of God!" (1911). Public domain.