

NEW

Horizons

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addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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**Churches of God Outreach Ministries
P O Box 54621
Tulsa, OK 74155-0621
USA**

***e-mail:* information@cgom.org**

1-800-611-8080

***Editor:* James McBride**

***e-mail:* coguk@aol.com**

The Churches of God, UK
PO Box 2525
LINCOLN LN5 7PF United Kingdom
Regd Charity No 283358
e-mail: coguk@aol.com

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries
100 Northcote Street
Aberdare NSW 2325 Australia
e-mail: icg.aust@netcentral.com.au

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries
PO Box 476 Don Mills Station
Don Mills Ontario M3C 2T4 Canada
www.canadianchurchofgod.com

or from:

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As Christians we 'seek first God's Kingdom'. But what is it? Is the Kingdom here, now?

'Kingdom of God' is a term unique to Christianity. Jesus urges us to seek for it. It's the goal to which we aspire. There is, however, some confusion as to what it is, how to get there, when it happens. Often viewed as merely a future earthly kingdom - ruled by the King of kings - yet it has a more far-reaching and eternal significance. It represents the very heart of the Gospel.

A 'kingdom,' in human terms, is a territory with recognized boundaries, a system of laws, and with subjects of the Sovereign or other ruler. By extension it applies to any sovereign and independent nation whatever its Constitution. Nations come and nations go, empires rise and empires fall.

But God's Kingdom, in reality His Family, has always existed, and always will. Writes the Psalmist: 'Your kingdom is

an everlasting kingdom, And your dominion

endures throughout all generations' (Psalm 145:13). Daniel, too, (ch 4:3) and Peter (II Peter 1:11) confirm. And Jesus: 'Your's [ie, the Father's] is the kingdom and the power and the glory to the ages' (Matthew 6:13). The Kingdom of God is not confined to the thousand-year reign of the Messiah, not just 'pie in the sky - or on earth - when you die.'

The Sovereign God

The sovereign territory of the Kingdom of God is unlimited - the en-

tirety of the Universe, with its seat of government presently located in Heaven; hence 'the Kingdom of Heaven.' Sings the Psalmist: 'Before time You founded the earth, and the heavens [all those galaxies!] are the work of Your hands' (Psalm 102:25).

The Father is the Sovereign of the Kingdom, with Jesus (the LORD of the Old Testament) His appointed divine interface with His Creation. Jesus is the instrument of creation: 'for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him; and he is before all things, and in him all things consist' (Colossians 1:16-17).

Earthly Representative

In the person of Jesus, however, the Kingdom was on Earth in first-century Palestine. Said Jesus: 'But if I cast out the demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has

come on you' (Matthew 12:28). John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2)

announced its imminence. And Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom throughout his ministry: 'And Jesus went around all Galilee teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people' (ch 4:23). Having voluntarily given up his place in the Godhead and become fully human (Philippians 2:5-8) Jesus represented the Kingdom of God while on Earth.

God's 'political' activities among

mankind are delegated to Jesus: 'For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son' (John 5:22). Jesus, of course, perfectly reflects the will of the Father. He will ultimately hand back this responsibility to Him: '...when all things are subjected to [Jesus], then the Son himself also will be subjected to the One who has subjected all things to him, that God [the Father] may be all things in all' (I Corinthians 15:28).

In time the Kingdom will be headquartered on Earth: 'And I heard a great voice out of Heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God with men! And He will tabernacle with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God' (Revelation 21:3). That is, for all the endless aeons of eternity.

A Spiritual Kingdom

God's Kingdom, however, is spiritual, for 'God is Spirit' (John 4:24). The Kingdom '...is not of this world [Gk. kosmos]' (John 18:36). It is a parallel universe. Said Jesus: 'Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God' (John 3:3). And Paul: 'Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption' (I Corinthians 15:50). To become a part of the Kingdom of God we must be transformed from flesh to spirit.

The members of the Kingdom are, now, both spiritual and physical. The Father and Jesus alone are Spirit - holy Spirit. But a portion of physical humanity - all men and women throughout history in whom dwelled the Spirit of God - are part of the Kingdom. Wrote John: 'Beloved, now are we the children of God, and

The Kingdom of God...when, where?

it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is' (I John 3:2). Although now flesh, Christians - *ie* those having the Spirit - are members of the Kingdom: *'So, then, you are no longer strangers and tenants, but you are fellow citizens of the saints and of the family of God'* (Ephesians 2:19). *'And I will be a Father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty.'* The God Kingdom is a 'family' - Father, Son and Christ's brethren.

Representative Israel

The nation of Israel, alone among nations, had been under this direct divine supervision Said the LORD: *'And you [Israel] shall become a kingdom of priests for Me, a holy nation'* (Exodus 19:5-6). And, *'I have caused the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to cling to Me, says Jehovah, to be to Me for a people, and for a name, and for praise, and for glory; but they would not listen'* (Jeremiah 13:11). The opportunity to be ruled by the Kingdom of God was taken away from Israel because of their behaviour: *'And Jehovah said to Samuel, Listen to the voice of the people, to all that they say to you. For they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from reigning over them'* (1 Samuel 8:7).

Addressing the representatives of Israel (the chief priests and elders Matthew 21: 23), Jesus said: *'The kingdom of God will be taken from you, and it will be given to a nation [ie people] producing the fruits of it'* (v.43). Those people are men and women in whom dwells the pledge, the advance, of the divine Spirit.

The brethren of God's church, now members-in-waiting of the Kingdom, are commissioned to 'herald' the message of the Kingdom - the Gospel or 'good news' (Luke 9:2, Matthew 24:14). It is God's good news of the ultimate fulfilment of His wondrous purpose for mankind, that we become fully a part of His Kingdom. Whenever it is proclaimed *'the Kingdom of God has come near'* (10:9). The Kingdom is internal, in the heart, and does not - at this time - appear visibly

Notice carefully John's words: *'Beloved, now are we the children of God'* (I John 3:2). Right now Christians *are* children - sons and daughters of God. We don't have to wait to become part of God's Family! And if we 'overcome to the end' - retain the divine Spirit until our death (and we alone can exclude ourselves) - we are assured of 'glory' through our resurrection or our transformation to spirit life for all eternity.

We will then be, fully, an integral functioning part of the Kingdom of God, His universe-ruling family. If we have repented, been baptized, and received the holy Spirit we have the 'earnest' (like an engagement ring) of the Spirit - the 'pledge' that if we remain faithful we will continue as part of the Kingdom (II Corinthians 1:22).

Comments one writer: *'The Holy Spirit is given to the believer now as a first installment to assure him his full inheritance as a son of God shall be his hereafter'* (Ephesians 1:13-14).

in the manner that the Pharisees expected. You can't see it. (Luke 17:20-21) [Note 'within' (Gk *entos*) means *inside*, as in a cup - Matthew 23:26]. Its presence will be manifest in events on the world stage. (Luke 21:29-36).

The Kingdom, represented by the returning Jesus (the Father's Vice-Regent) and the saints (then become spirit), will take back from mankind the reins of all human government (Revelation 20:4, Isaiah 2:1-4). Jesus will be *'king over all the earth'* (Zechariah 14:9). Wrote Daniel: *'I saw what looked like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven, and he was presented to the Eternal God. He was crowned king and given power and glory, so that all people of every nation and race would serve him. He will rule forever, and his kingdom is eternal, never to be destroyed.... But God Most High will give his kingdom to his chosen ones, and it will be theirs forever and ever'* (Daniel 7:13-18).

When the Father's Family is complete, His earthly plan finished, He will be *'...all in all'* (I Corinthians 15:20-28). All who remain will be Spirit - part of the vastly expanded Kingdom of God (II Peter 3:13).

Concludes the apostle John: *'And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcomes shall inherit all things [a reference to the Universe]; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son'*

(Revelation 21:6-7) **Ω**

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How can we be assured that we really are among those God has called and chosen

Steve Kieler

Recently I had a conversation with a fellow Christian during which it became clear that he had doubts about his faith, his calling. That brought to mind the scripture in II Peter 1:10 – where we read, “*Therefore my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure.*” The New Living Translation (which translation is used throughout) renders the same verse in II Peter 1:10 – “*So dear brothers and sisters work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen.*”

How can we make our calling and election sure? God’s Word, the Holy Bible, does provide answers for this question and by examining this matter more carefully we can indeed make our calling and election sure.

In this verse the Greek word for calling is *klesis*, which means an invitation, calling. Paul in writing to the Christians in Thessalonica wrote the following, “*With this in mind [referring to the Christians believing in Christ’s return], we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling (klesis), that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith*” (II Thessalonians 1:11). Notice this calling comes from God. We find further confirmation of this in Paul’s second letter to Timothy, “*For God saved us and called (klesis) us to live a holy life...*” (II Timothy 1:9). Again we find that God calls us.

Called To Salvation

As we learn from I Corinthians 1:24-26, our *calling (klesis)* is to salvation. What a tremendous gift God affords us! This aids our understanding of the parable given in Matthew 22:1-10: “*Jesus also told them other parables, He said, ‘The kingdom of*

heaven can be illustrated by the story of a king who prepared a great wedding feast for his son. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servants to notify those who were invited. But they all refused to come. So he sent other servants to tell them, ‘The feast has been prepared. The bulls and fattened cattle have been killed, and everything is ready. Come to the banquet.’ But the guests he had invited went their own way, one to his farm, another to his business. Others seized his messengers and insulted them and killed them. The king was furious, and he sent out his army to destroy the murders and burn their town. And he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, and the guests I invited aren’t worthy of the honor. Now go out to the street corners and invite everyone you see.’ So the servants brought in everyone they could find, good and bad alike, and the banquet hall was filled with guests.”

The original guests, the household of Judah and Israel, failed to accept God’s calling, His invitation. Thankfully, God invited us to this banquet, this wedding feast of “salvation.” Paul discusses this invitation in Romans 11. In this chapter he compares Israel to the natural olive tree and the rest of the world, the gentiles, to the wild olive tree. The natural branches - Israel - were broken off, when they failed to accept God’s invitation. This resulted in the gentiles; which includes most of the world, being grafted in. Or, in light of the parable in Matthew 22, we received the invitation to the wedding banquet, to salvation.

Now that we know God invited us, called us, what do we do about making our calling and election sure?

We’ve briefly examined the calling, the invitation from God, mentioned in II Peter 1:10, and now we will focus on *election*, (*ekloge*, in the

Make Your Calling and Election Sure

original Greek), which means *selected* or *chosen*. In other verses we discover that *ekloge* is often translated *chosen*. A good example is in I Thessalonians 1:4 – where Paul writes, “*We know dear brothers and sisters, that God loves you and has chosen (ekloge) you to be his own people.*” Again we discover that God does the choosing. He has chosen us to be his sons and daughters in Christ. Other Scriptures bear out this principle. I Corinthians 1:26-28 states the following:

Remember dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world’s eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considered foolish in order to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world; things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considered important”

God not only invited us, called us, but He also chose. So we can see that both our *election* or invitation and our being *chosen* involve God’s action not ours.

We know from God’s Word that we’ve all sinned and come short of the glory of God, Romans 3:23. God loved us while we were yet sinners as we read in Romans 5:8, “*But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*” As we discover in Isaiah 59:2 and other scriptures our iniquities, our sins, have separated us from God. Because our sins separated us from God, only God could bring us into fellowship with Himself. Only He could invite and call us!

So far we’ve seen that God does the calling, the inviting and the choosing.

But that still leaves us with the question, what do we do? What is our role in this process of invitation and choosing?

Prepare For the Wedding

The first part of our role involves accepting the invitation. We have to choose God after He has invited and chosen us. This is illustrated in the parable Christ gave regarding the marriage banquet in Matthew 22. Notice the new people invited by God came to the banquet. This is an issue of *faith*. In Romans 5:1, Paul writes the following,

“Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God’s glory.”

Our faith is demonstrated by accepting God’s invitation and calling, but is that all we do?

Reading further in Matthew 22:11-14 we read the following:

“But when the king came in to meet the guests, he noticed a man who wasn’t wearing the proper clothes for a wedding. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?’ But the man had no reply. Then the king said to his aides, ‘Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

This parable clearly shows that it’s not enough to simply have faith and accept God’s invitation. As the apostle James explains in James 2:17, *“So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.”*

Just as we learned from the wedding banquet parable, we need to be dressed appropriately, or as we read in II Peter 1:10, *“...work hard...”* So

what work should we be doing that allows us to be dressed in the wedding clothes? God has plans for us, plans that include doing good things:

“God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God’s masterpiece. He created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago”

Guide To Life

As James so eloquently puts it: *“What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith, but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say,*

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unsigned articles are by the Editor

‘Good-bye, and have a good day; stay warm and eat well’ – but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?...Now someone may argue, ‘Some people have faith; others have good deeds.’ But I say, ‘How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds?’ I will show you my faith by my good deeds.” James 2:14-18

Christ, our Messiah shows that our good deeds - the way we live our life - comes from God’s Word. In his response to Satan’s tempting him in the Wilderness, Christ says the following, *“...People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* Paul discusses this point in the following way to Timothy, *“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize, what is wrong with our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.”* II Timothy 3:16-17

It’s clear from God’s Word that our work involves living by God’s Instructions, His Word. We need to fan the flame of God’s Holy Spirit, to allow God to direct our steps from what He has given us through the Bible. We have to choose to accept God’s invitation and choose to wear the robes of righteousness that come from living as God instructs us.

If we continue to abide in Christ and follow the path God lights for us, we can be certain that our calling and election is sure. Our lives will be a reflection of Christ. We will be doing the good deeds for which God created us. I believe as Paul did, *“...I am certain that God, who began a good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns”* (Philippians 1:6).

See you at the wedding banquet. Ω

Satan...would you recognize him?

Satan the Devil is portrayed as evil and repulsive. Is this true?

Satan doesn't get a good press. He's variously and popularly described as the Evil One, Prince of Darkness, Beelzebub, 666, Devil, Fallen Angel. He is symbolic of all that's evil and wicked, the Tempter, the Destroyer of all that's good and upright. Amid the flames of hell-fire he strides around with horns, pointed goatee, blazing red eyes, tail, cloven hooves and, of course, a pitch-fork and red body sock. Clearly not someone you would pass without at least a glance!

These characteristics attract some of *homo sapiens*, for he has a following in some quarters. Some claim to have met him. Some sweaty preachers - perhaps a bit foolhardy - threaten to take him by that tail. But on the whole most of mankind are inclined to avoid him. Satan isn't thought of as a cuddly toy.

History of the Devil

Perhaps a majority of Western Christians are sceptical as to his existence. Certainly many of their leaders are. Turn, though, to the Bible and we catch glimpses of a very real being. Satan exists in a parallel universe - but in a world that intrudes into our own. Even in our age of scepticism, even among scientists, there's a growing realization of the reality of that other world.

But whatever his present appearance and disposition, Satan certainly wasn't always "ugly."

We can start at a mid-point of his career. Jesus - who had a real encounter with Satan - saw him "*fall from heaven*" (Luke 10:18). We may not be able to put a date to this, but it was certainly a notable event. And it tells us that Satan once had a place in

heaven. Jesus revealed more of the history to the apostle John - recorded for us in the book of Revelation. Satan is there identified for us as "*the great Dragon, the Serpent of old* [in John's day, a 'dragon' was a large snake], *the Devil*" (ch 12:9). [Devil - Gk. *diabolos* - accuser, refers only to this one being, though often the term demon is translated as *devil*]

In this passage we find (v.4) that Satan was ejected from heaven together with a third of the "stars," identified as angels (v.9), defeated in a battle with the archangel Michael and the angelic forces he commanded.

At that point he was clearly corrupted. But what about before?

Spirit Hierarchy

The Old Testament draws a veil over much of Satan's visible activity until he was thoroughly unmasked by Jesus. But we know he had been in heaven. It's the sixth century BC prophet Ezekiel who lifts that veil a little. He is exposed (ch 28) as a being highly exalted in the counsel of God - an "*anointed cherub*," in fact. [*Cherubim* were powerful angelic beings closely associated with the presence of God].

In a passage which uses the then Prince of Tyre as a type, Ezekiel soars into the past history of the spirit being which controlled that prince.

Those close to God anciently had insight into the spirit world. We learn from Daniel that there were spirits with limited but extensive power who have authority over nations. Some were God's agents while others were His adversaries (see Daniel 9).

Supreme over those who opposed God is the one identified by Isaiah (ch 12:14) as Lucifer. (Heb *helel* 'shining one'. Anciently the Greek

name was *Phosphoros*, their name for the planet Venus, the "morning star.") The king of Babylon was then under Lucifer's sway, and Isaiah saw the king as a type of this mighty spirit being. The prophet describes his plot to usurp the authority of God: "*How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations. For you have said in your heart, 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars [angels] of God...I will be like the Most High*" (vv. 12-15).

It was, of course, no contest. Lucifer was cast out along with those angelic beings he had persuaded to follow him in his rebellion. The account reflects the human archetype of this rebellion Nimrod.

As 'father of the gods' (also known as *Kronos*) he sought to ascend into heaven and was 'cast down' (Genesis 11:1-9). His spiritual descendants, the King of Babylon and the Prince of Tyre had the same motivation.

Angel of Light

Isaiah in vision slightly lifts the veil of Lucifer's origin in heaven. Ezekiel fills in more detail. Generations after the Isaiah vision, he notes that this being now controlled the Prince of the city of Tyre (ch 28). Addressing the "king of Tyre," the shadowy being behind the Prince, God's message was: "*You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God*" (vv.12-13). Clearly this was no human being! He continues: "*You were the anointed cherub that covers; I established you. You were on the holy mountain of God...you were perfect in your ways.*"

Lucifer, as his inspired name suggests, was an angel of light. The *Cherubim* are powerful spirit beings who attend on the throne of God.

That was Lucifer's original created

role. But...he sinned. Lifted up with pride and ambition he persuaded thousands of subordinate angels to fight God! As Ezekiel adds: "You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created...till iniquity was found in you. By the abundance of your trading [promises of high office when God would be overthrown?] you became filled with violence within, and you sinned. Therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God. And I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from [ie removed from] the midst of the fiery stones."

Since then he has - mostly behind the scenes - corrupted mankind through a systematic undermining of the true godly values for successful living. Lucifer, the shining one, is now Satan, the Adversary of all that's good and holy. His destructive philosophy has been universally insinuated into education and business and government. He holds sway in art and in entertainment. In the world's religions - where you would expect most opposition to him - Satan has confused mankind and all but obliterated the true faith. As Jesus told the apostle John - "he deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9).

Satan's Self-portrait

With such a reputation, his alleged fierce appearance would be well-earned. But Satan doesn't want you to see it that way!

Paul unveils the Devil's self-portrait. The apostle warned the Corinthian Christians against false teachers: "...for such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder. For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (II Corinthians 11:13-15).

Isaiah thundered: "Woe to those who

call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness" (ch 5:20). Leaders in government, leaders in entertainment, leaders in business apply this perverse and twisted philosophy. Worse, spiritual leaders through ignorance or greed or ambition wrap their congregations in this same destructive and suffocating blanket.

Be warned. God's arch adversary has a facade of righteousness and light. He has, too, ministers - servants - in all walks of life wearing the same cloak, says Paul! Don't expect the Devil to appear in a red body suit. Don't expect him to present his opposition to God in some grotesque perversion of the truth. Rather, check that your standards, your beliefs, your religious teachers conform to the Word of God.

Paul, again, warned that much false teaching is sourced from the world of adverse spirits: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the truth giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (I Timothy 4:1). It will be, he says, a special problem in our day.

Would you, as a Christian, knowingly embrace teaching from a demon? Of course not! But the arch-deceiver will inject his perverse doctrines through channels that appear to be righteous. Not a red body-sock, but perhaps a clerical collar!

Satan, since his fall from heaven, has lost none of his power, none of his craftiness or subtlety. He beguiled (deceived) mother Eve by the ultimate false teaching - that by disobeying God's express commands she would still live forever (II Corinthians 11:3).

Check Your Beliefs

The apostolic church was plagued by false teachers busily spinning a web of doctrinal deceit. Paul, again: "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and of-

fences contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:17-18). Few followers of Jesus Christ pay heed to what they believe, passively "going to church" and then forgetting all. Unknowingly, they may have imbibed a poison potion poured out by demonic beings intent on destroying faith. But what you believe - your doctrinal portfolio - is vital to your salvation!

There's a pure fountain of truth revealed in the Scriptures - a body of belief that frees us from fear (eg of hell-fire and eternal torment), that opens a glorious eternal future for the faithful children of God. Satan wants to veil that from you! Where do you expect to learn truth? We don't look to business, or to the world of entertainment. And certainly not to Downing Street or Capitol Hill.

But we do expect it from the pulpit, from the religious media *etc.* Given Satan's masterly use of disguise - isn't that where you should be particularly wary? That sweating TV evangelist - does he draw his words from the Word of God? It's your personal responsibility to check it out - *from the Scriptures.* For you wouldn't want to be taken in by a doctrine concocted by a foul spirit. Would you?

God's adversary - Satan the Deceiver - has effectively deceived the whole world. By elaborate, colourful and exciting ritual he blinds man to saving truth. Or by smooth spiritual-sounding words. Or by a cloak of good deeds.

Satan is indeed "ugly". But he still projects the image of himself as a "bringer of light." Especially, he masquerades as a bearer of Christian truth.

Beware. Check him out! Ω

Great Hope In Christ

Ian Hufton

In the near future, multitudes of truth-believers are going to rise up out of their graves to meet Christ in the air (1 Thess 4:17). Can you mentally picture these multitudes of “dead in Christ” coming to life and being born into the Spirit realm? They have gone into the graves in different countries over thousands of years. How would you like to walk through such a crowd of people and ponder their name tags? If each one had a name, date of birth, date of death and country of origin it would make for fascinating conversations at some huge after-resurrection party. You could walk through the crowd stopping to ask how a certain person came to a knowledge of God’s truth and what kind of trials they suffered prior to their death. The story telling could go on for days and days and we would be riveted to the spot until each story was told and more questions asked. How would your story be told?

The Key: Your Story’s End

God is the master potter and each of us is clay in His hands. He works differently in each one of us to build us to full maturity and welcome us into His glorious family. The critical part of each of these “first resurrection” stories is the “last leg” of their race. Christ and the Father insist that we all endure to the end.

And ye shall be hated of all men for My name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. (Matthew 10:22, 24:13)

And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, immediately they are offended. (Mark 4:17)

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a

good soldier of Jesus Christ. (2 Timothy 2:3)

We must remain faithful until our last breath.

Saved By Hope

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? (Romans 8:24)

How is it that we are saved by “hope?” Hope is the “engine” that causes us to overcome the pain of “the now,” in order to be there for the glory of “the future.” Since we will enter the kingdom through much tribulation, we must have a powerful “hope” to keep us moving through trials (faithful to Christ) until we reach our finish line (our last breath).

Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22)

The saints of old will be able to tell us many stories of how they held onto the hope of the kingdom and endured till their last breath -faithful to their Lord and Savior. Paul spoke to many of them directly or by his letters. Many times, he stresses the need for an unbreakable hope in God’s promises.

And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. (Acts 24:15)

But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. (Romans 8:25)

Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; (Romans 12:12)

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers

from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: (Ephesians 2:12)

If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard,... (Colossians 1:23)

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the Glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: (Col 1:27)

In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; (Titus 1:2)

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious Appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; (Titus 2:13)

But Christ as a son over His own house; Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. (Hebrews 3:6)

And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: (ch 6:11)

That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: (ch 6:18)

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure And steadfast, and which entereth into that within the Veil; (ch 6:19)

For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God. (ch 7:19)

Wherefore gird gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be

cont’d p.8

Roadmap for Israel

Sometimes we humans do things that God doesn't want, that He never asks. It applies to the irreligious, and to Christians, and to Muslims. It applies to each of us as individuals and it also applies to nations.

'The chosen people,' Israel, are not exempt. They sometimes get it wrong. Not just in personal morality, for the Israelis are in this sense no better than the rest of us. And as a nation their history records many clashes with Jehovah, with the LORD.

For example, Israel's forty years in the wilderness resulted from disobedience. On that occasion they were told to enter Canaan, but ran scared and refused (Numbers *chs* 13, 14).

Later they were clearly instructed not to attempt to enter Canaan. They did, and were defeated in battle (Numbers 14).

Again, six centuries before Christ Judah faced invasion from Babylon (Jeremiah 43). Very specifically they were warned by the LORD not to flee to Egypt to escape. They did, and suffered the consequences (*ch* 44:12-14).

The Scriptures, however, tell us that there will be a time in their national experience when Israel willingly obeys God's call to return to the Land.

Most Christians who think about it believe that time is now. And indeed in the last sixty years millions of Jews have returned to 'Palestine' claiming it as their inheritance. The return (*aliyah*) has not been a happy one, as a series of wars - not least the current conflict with terrorists in southern Lebanon - testifies.

Signs of Return

The prophecies tell us, however, that when the Jews return to their inheritance in Palestine they will '*dwell safely*.' (See Ezekiel 38:11) That certainly is not the case at this time.

They will return accompanied by 'the House of Israel' - the so-called 'lost tribes.' (See Ezekiel 37:19-22) That has not happened.

They will return with the LORD JHVH at

their head. (See Jeremiah 23:6-8). Certainly not now.

They will return, a mere remnant of *both* Houses, freed from a time of enslavement - largely from throughout the Islamic world and from 'the north' It will surpass the darkest days of twentieth century Europe - a time called '*Jacob's trouble*.' (See Isaiah 11:11-12, Matthew 24:21). *That is yet future*. ['Eurabia': Islam has 120 million adherents in Europe - including Turkey]

They will return 'broken-hearted' - sorrowing for their sin. Not so now.

Spiritual Dimension

Historically, Israel's security has had a spiritual dimension. As a unique nation - God's model nation - they covenanted to be in submission to JHVH, to follow His Laws. That's where their security lies. No longer, it seems.

Today Israel is 'like the nations around them.' Writes a former Speaker of the Knesset: "*The Zionist Revolution has always rested on two pillars, a just path and an ethical leadership. Neither of these is operative any longer. The Israeli nation today rests on a scaffolding of corruption and on the foundation of oppression and injustice. As such the end of the Zionist enterprise is already on our doorstep. There is a real chance that ours will be the last Zionist generation.*"

(This judgment applies equally to what James - *ch* 1:1 - calls '*the twelve tribes scattered abroad*.' He wrote in the first century. They are still scattered to the four corners of the world.)

It should not surprise us that the 'Israelis' seem to have lost their way. The 'last days' are predicted to be a time when the Middle East - and especially Israel - will dominate world news. Egypt, Iraq, Iran, North Africa (all Islamic) are predicted to seek the end of the tiny nation of Israel. They will succeed, but only for a short few years.

While the Scriptures tell us to expect the House of Judah to be settled in Palestine in the end-time, yet what we now see is not the *aliyah* that is so vividly foretold in the Scriptures.

But Israel remains in God's care.

HOPE...cont'd from p.7
brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; (1 Peter 1:13)

'In Christ' Means what?

The Scriptures tell us that only those "in Christ" at His return, will be in the first resurrection. If we do not have the spirit of Christ we are none of His. What does it mean to be "in Christ?"

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so Be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man Have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. (Romans 8:9)

We must have the spirit of Christ. What else must occur for us to be "in Christ?"

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, And is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall Ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. (John 15:5-7)

We can be solid in hope of the first resurrection if we live every day "in Christ" and His words live "in us". Nothing is more important than finishing the race — than being "in Christ" at our last breath. The glory of the first resurrection is going to be mind-boggling, so go all out for Christ and His words.

Nothing in this life has greater value. So, *hold fast* till your last breath and remember Peter's words...

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; (1 Peter 1:13) **Ω**

MiniStudy**WALK WITH GOD**

because of the time you are due to be teachers, yet you need to have someone to teach you again the rudiments of the beginning of the Words of God, and you came to be having need of milk, and not of solid food; for everyone partaking of milk is without experience in the Word of Righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for those full grown, having exercised the faculties through habit, for distinction of both good and bad (Hebrews 5:12-14)

exercise yourself to godliness (I Timothy 4:7)

Babies don't walk. So how do they learn? The first stumbling steps usually end in a fall - but they don't give up, nor do the parents. Eventually, by reason of habit the complex skill of walking is mastered. It's the same with learning to drive. The first moment behind the wheel is scary, but by persistence the complexities become habitual. So, too, with dressing or dental hygiene - we know how to unthinkingly put on our clothes, clean our teeth. They become habitual.

- as the children of God we are to '*become perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect*' (Matthew 6:33). Jesus is the perfect example, and a Christian should emulate him. But we have not yet reached that lofty goal, even though we are, now, God's children (I John 3:2)
- all humans develop what can be considered 'bad habits'. Our habits are our character. *What are yours?* How about anger? Or lying, pride, lust, vanity, selfishness, greed, laziness, an over fondness for strong drink? Are you struggling with such? If so there's a way, with God's help, to learn to safely and successfully walk a godly path
- habits (good or bad) develop in the same way. In every human there's a God-given inborn facility - habit formation - that enables us to by-pass unnecessary laborious effort. We don't have to daily figure out how to put on our shoes, tie our laces, clean our teeth. Godliness, too, can - must - become habitual
- every habit (behaviour pattern) develops by practice. We *lie* because we learned to get out of a hole by lying. We deal with our emotional turmoil by *anger* because we learned to deal that way, perhaps followed dad's example. The apostle Peter writes of those who are '*trained in greed*' (II Peter 2:14). Paul, of those who have '*exercised the faculties through habit for distinction of good and bad*' (Hebrews 5:14). And he urges Timothy (I Timothy 4:7) to '*exercise yourself to godliness.*' All use the same word - related to our *gymnasium* - implying training, focused effort
- in the Scriptures God provides a two-pronged principle for habit-forming success: *put off* and *put on*. We could ask *When is a thief not a thief?* Not because he has stopped stealing, for who knows what he would do under economic pressure. Rather, Paul emphasises, it is when '*The one stealing, let him steal no more, but rather let him labor, working what is good with the hands, that he may have something to give to the one that has need*' (Ephesians 4: 28). The apostle gives seven examples - read vv.25-32. Other Biblical examples may be found in I Peter 3:9, III John 11, Matthew 16:24 - an example from the words of Jesus, I Thessalonians 1:29, Isaiah 55: 7
- but change becomes permanent only by our persistent and enduring diligent effort to '*put off*' a wrong habit and to '*put on*' the desirable habit. We need to determine what are the 'good habits'
- recall Paul's admonition: '*exercise yourself to godliness.*' (I Timothy 4:7). *Godliness* - how God wants us to live, how Jesus behaved - is our goal. It is explained in the Scriptures: '*Wherewithal shall a young man keep his way pure? By taking heed thereto according to your word*' (Psalm 119:9). In the Scriptures is all we need to know about what behaviour is godly - and what is not (vv.19-21)
- by diligent effort some, unaided or with the help of wise counsel, may change an undesirable habit. But that's a serious but achievable challenge (*cf* the number who want to stop smoking *etc*): '*Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also may do good who are accustomed to doing evil*' (Jeremiah 13:23). It is possible to change our habitual pattern of behaviour!
- in-depth change, however, is a '*fruit of the Spirit*' (Galatians 5:22f). The character of God - perfectly reflected in Jesus - is summed up in those fruits. Only the indwelling Spirit can transform hatred to *godly love* (as described in I Corinthians 13), or impart *divine peace* (Philippians 4:6-7). '*And likewise the Spirit also joins in to help our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes on our behalf with groanings that cannot be uttered*' (Romans 8:26). Through confident prayer we find '*grace to help*' (Hebrews 4:16)
- '*cultivate your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is working in you both to will and to work for the sake of His good pleasure*' (Philippians 2:12f). That is, He works in us for our perfection

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