

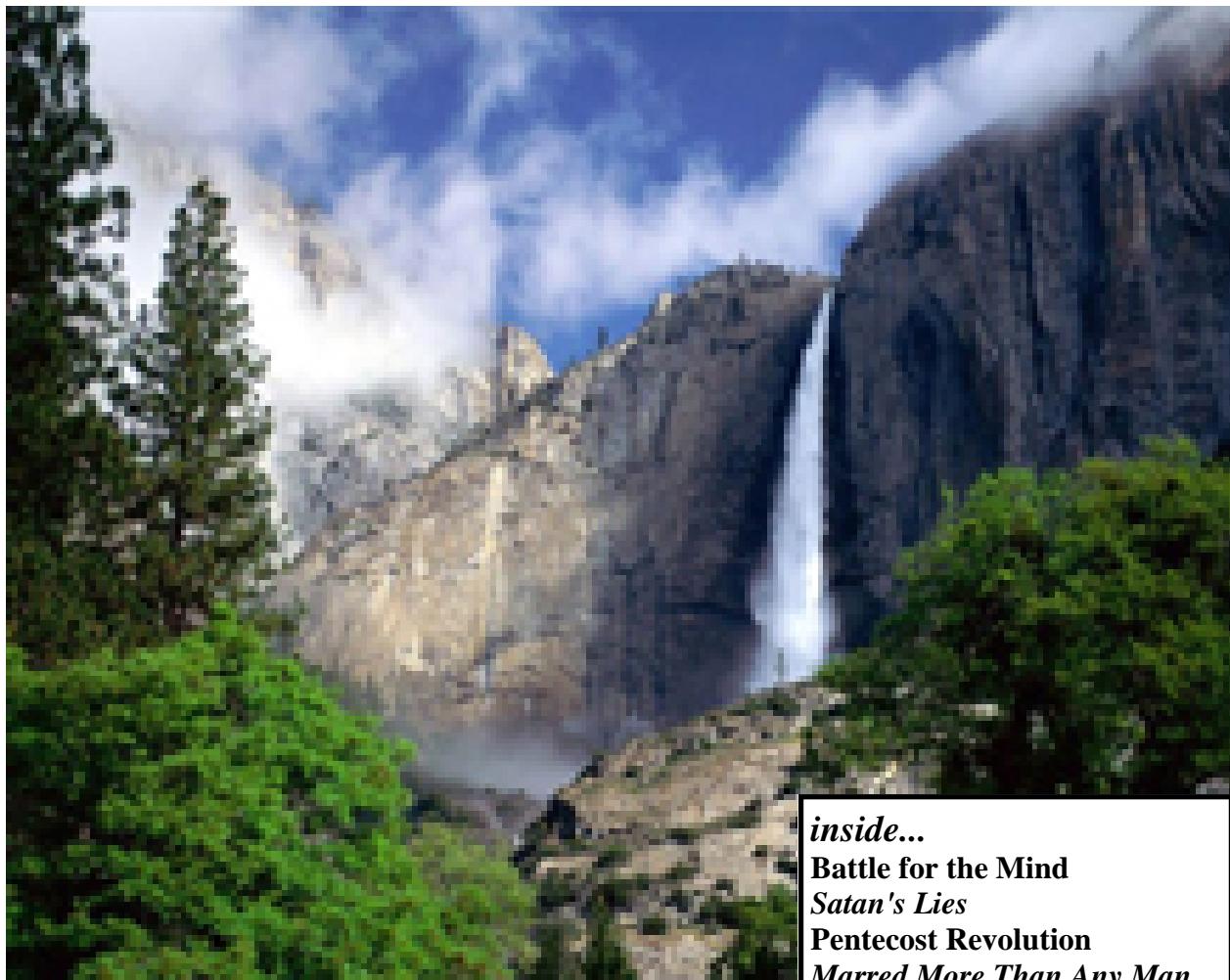


Horizons

Vol 11 No 3

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow

May/June 2007



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CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

With around two thousand Christian denominations vying for your attention, it's easy to miss the important issues of life and religion. It's our hope that through *New Horizons* our readers will come to understand the true meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and by his apostles in the clearest of terms - and recorded for us in the Scriptures. Over the centuries that truth has been buried, dug up, buried again. Our desire is to restore the simple apostolic message. We hope you will be excited by what the Scriptures reveal about life, and the horizons beyond

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new Horizons

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Governments do it. So, too, the Press. And the entertainment industry, business, education. Even religion. Every individual daily faces a battle - for influence, for our attention, the battle for our mind.

Psychological techniques are deployed to induce change. Advertising seeks by variety of means to manipulate us to 'buy ours.' Psychiatrists seek to change attitudes in the disturbed. Governments pressure suspected terrorists to 'confess' or indeed labour to change the mind-set of a whole population (think 'global warming'). The forces of law and order induce by various techniques an admission of guilt. In our schools, colleges and universities

Battle for the Mind

there's an ongoing battle to alter what we think. And be it said, Government Ministers, all evangelists employ similar techniques to induce 'conversion.'

Clearly, with so many weird notions in circulation, so many myths, so many false ideas, not least in religion, influence of a positive nature is essential for a sound society. Given the foundation of a reliable standard, education to achieve that standard is a praiseworthy goal. But to identify that standard is mankind's challenge. Ignored is the Author of that standard.

Mankind is designed to function according to the 'Maker's Manual'. [Request the free article **The Law of Life.**] Tear up the Manual, 'I can do it my way,' and the problem cannot be fixed. States the Creator: 'For my

thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says Jehovah' (Isaiah 55:8). The human mind apart from divine wisdom (best expressed in the Christian Scriptures) is not on God's wavelength. And He, Says God: '*...I will proceed to do a too, seeks to influence us: "...so shall marvelous work among this people, My Word be, which goes out of My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in what I sent it to do*' (Isaiah 55:10-11).

der: for the wisdom of their wise men but it shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid' (Isaiah 29:14). Ignore God's way and another force steps in.

Look at how Government deals with government. Says God:

'Heterosexual marriage - or, alternatively, celibacy - is the norm for human relationships': 'And away from the faith, giving heed to you shall not seducing [i.e. deceiving] spirits and lie with a doctrines of demons, through the male as one hypocrisy of men that speak lies, lies with a branded in their own conscience as woman; it is a p e r v e r -

Decisions taken by Government are not mere stupidity, not ignorance, not simply gross error. Not all their decisions are self-serving, not all are pork-barrel politics. Like most of mankind, our leaders are duped, deceived. They have bought into the false notion that what God says doesn't matter. Despite the incontrovertible evidence that His ways make perfect sense. Despite the lessons of history. Why should smart men and women be so blind?

erbs 22:15 CEV). Don't lay a finger on the little darlings, says Government; impose a sentence and wait. Says God: 'Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil'

(Ecclesiastes 8:11). (Ever wonder why the death penalty doesn't deter?)

The answer? There's an unseen, and unrecognized, power that's dedicated to subverting mankind. It inhabits a 'parallel universe' yet manipulates our material world and all its institutions. It undermines the sound foundations of society, influencing every phase of human endeavor: education, government, psychology, entertainment, religion. Its natural realm is the

world of spirit. The apostle Paul was excluded from access to Heaven of education, unwholesome identifies it as '*...the god of this world*' which has '*blinded the minds of them which believe not*' (II Corinthians 4:4). And '*...the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience*' (Ephesians 2:2).

He is, said Jesus, '*the prince of this world*' (John 12:31). Put to the test by this evil adversary, he recognized this territorial claim over mankind's governments: '*...the Devil said to whole world*' (Revelation 12:9). He adds, '*...the whole world lies in their glory to You, because it has evil one*' (I John 5:19).

been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish' (Luke 4:6). The

denied, sometimes even in the reli-

gious community.

Stage evangelists boast of 'twisting the devil's tail.' In reality Satan the Devil is a powerful force in the Universe, beside which mankind, aided, is but a puppet. Since man's beginning the Devil has wielded a usually subtle, influence on us. Jesus Christ alone of mankind has perfectly resisted his wiles.

The Scriptures reveal Satan as a powerful angel-spirit being. These were created by God as '*...ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*' (Hebrews 1:14). Under the guise of a 'dragon' Satan is portrayed as '*...that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan*' (Revelation 12:9).

Since the Serpent (Satan) deceived mother Eve he has been active in the world. At the head of a third of the angelic beings (v.4) he has been delegated restricted authority to test mankind - Eve, Cain, Job, David, Joshua (a High priest), Paul, and of course Jesus experienced Satan's interest.

At some moment, the archangel Michael (Jude 1:8) has, at the head of a host of loyal angels, fought with him and his fallen angels, forever excluding them from Heaven. [When Satan

dual exclusion.]

The Art of Deception

Deception - when deceived you don't know it! It affects secular leadership and it affects religious leadership. It affects all people everywhere, whether they recognize or not. And through the apostle John, Jesus warns

the Devil, Satan '*...deceives the governments: ...the Devil said to whole world*' (Revelation 12:9). He adds, '*...the whole world lies in their glory to You, because it has evil one*' (I John 5:19).

To be deceived you must be fed false information. The masters of propaganda say: 'Tell a lie big enough and often enough and it will be believed.'

Pound into the collective mind, for example, that God doesn't exist, that the material world 'evolved' from nothing - and even the 'wise' will come to believe it. Deceived.

Our world is warming up, but a campaign of invective is projected against anyone, no matter how eminent in a relevant scientific field, who won't accept that the warming is wholly man-made but is a natural climatic cycle. *Someone* is deceived.

Then there's the concerted attempt to brainwash us to accept homosexuality as a 'normal human activity,' merely one lifestyle choice among many. Or, the prevailing culture of so-called 'free sex without consequence.' Again - deception.

Deliberate deception is always based on a lie or a half-truth. The perpetrators may themselves be deceived! Not surprising, for the Devil is '*the father of lies*' (John 8:44). He sows worldwide his brand of distorted philosophy, perverse psychology, religious confusion, ignorance in place

The devil, himself the first rebel, foments rebellion. Satan (LXX *diabolos*), the adversary of all God's works: '*...your adversary the devil*' (I Peter 5:8). Satan, '*...the accuser of the brethren*' (Revelation 12:9). He is real. He's not a 'social/cultural construct,' not a figment of tortured imagination.

Heart of the Matter

Deny Satan exists and you won't fear his power, won't comprehend his influence over your thought processes. You won't pray for deliverance from his clutches. You won't resist the devil' so that '*...he will flee from you*' (James 4:7). You won't see the necessity to '*...put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles [trickery] of the devil*' (Ephesians 6:11).

Why should we be prey to these devi-lish influences?

Through his malign influence on all of man's institutions the Devil has undermined the principles of Godly government. We tend to passively accept the culture in which we are born, so all these institutions, social, religious, the prevailing culture, education, for the most part go unchal-lenged. But there's more.

As our accuser, Satan weighs us individually, discerning our character weaknesses and our vulnerabilities. He seeks to ensnare us (II Timothy 2:26), to trap us into sin. Better than ourselves he understands the human heart. And because of our alienation from God, indeed our hostility to Him: '*...the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*' (Romans 8:7), because we are physically-minded we are vulnerable.

*Request the free article:
Would You Recognize Satan?*

cont'd p.8

Everyone on the planet is hearing Satan's lies. These lies are everywhere. Some are blatant and many are very subtle. How can you discern truth?

by Ian Hufton

A huge theological lie from Satan is that the great loving Father God of the universe has purposely planned that those who do not live with Him for all eternity in glory will instead “live” for ever in agony and torment in the flames of an every burning “hell-fire.”

Strange as it may seem, millions know, by heart, a great verse in the Bible that would clear up this lie, yet they pass over it by focusing on another part of the verse: “...that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:15-16)

Study these two verses for a minute or two and ask yourself, how can this support the idea of non-believers living for ever in an ever burning hell fire?

Satan and those who promote his lies have been telling this lie for thousands of years and hence many have believed it to be true. All who truly want to follow Jesus the Christ should hunger and thirst after truth. They should test all major teachings against the verses in the Bible.

Three areas of these verses reveal God’s truth regarding “hell fire.” The first has us focus on “not perish” in verses 15 and 16. A complete study of the word “perish,” as used in the New Testament writings, makes clear that to “perish” is to die, not continue to live in torment for ever and ever.

God’s true plan for nonbelievers is revealed in the Book of Revelation:

“But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” (21:8)

[By contrast, those who will have “everlasting life” are described (v.7) as: ‘He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son’.]

This clearly tells God’s truth on this matter. The wicked will end up in the “lake of fire” which is called ‘the second death.’ What happens to the wicked is that they will be forever dead. There will be no resurrection from the second death. Jesus says (and all should strive to believe Him and disbelieve men who differ) that humans have either of two destinies (John 3:16). The best is you get to live for ever. The worst is unrepentant sinners will end up dead forever.

Look again at John 3:15 (above): ‘...but have everlasting life.’ The third area to discover truth in these verses is by looking at the word “but.” Why is it there? Why did Jesus say “but”? It is obvious that Jesus is saying condition (a) is everlasting life..... “but” (or on the other hand) a second very different condition is (b) those who perish or, do not have everlasting life.

The third area to consider is “everlasting life.” Jesus was saying that some will get everlasting life and some will perish. Those who perish do not receive everlasting life because they will be dead for all eternity.

Many do not see that it is their job (1) to evaluate scripture, (2) to decide

Each quotation from the Bible in New Horizons is from the translation which most clearly expresses the original language

Satan's Lies

what God is saying to them and (3) to determine to follow and obey what they see. Sadly, many of these people must be reminded that Jesus warned us all to let no man deceive us:

“... Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.” (Matthew 24:4-5)

If we are not prepared to study and decide scripture for ourselves we make it easy for those we follow to deceive us.

Called From the Grave

Many believe that, at the moment of death, people go to one of two places. They think some go up to Heaven and others go down to a burning Hell and go on living for ever.

Said Jesus: “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” (John 5:28-29)

If this lie from Satan were true, there would be no one in the graves now. Jesus would be very embarrassed after calling people out of the graves to discover that no one came, because the graves have been empty all the time.

Truth Sets Free

Our loving Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus are super eager to welcome humans into their kingdom to live forever. But to do this, humans must break free of lies and deception. Jesus provides a way for us to be fully free from Satan’s lying ways: “Then Jesus said to those Jews who be-

*lied Him, If you abide in My word, “dead” forever.) “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” (John 8:36)
you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32)*

Note that in verse 31, Jesus reveals a part of how He makes people free. We need to a) believe in Jesus, then b) stay in or abide in the true word of God. This makes people disciples of Christ.

And in v.32 He says that “believing” and “in the Word” disciples will be coming to know more and more truth and it is knowing God’s truth that will be making people free of Satan’s world of lies.

From what, does Jesus want people to be free?

“Jesus answered them, Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.” (John 8:35)

If we have believed Satan’s lies and are lawless towards God’s commandments (like violating Leviticus, chapter 23), we habitually sin even if we don’t think of it that way. (v.35 above is another reference to being

THE PENTECOST REVOLUTION

The resurrection of Jesus the long-sought Messiah revolutionized the world. His coming had been predicted since our first parents threw out divine authority for unaided human reason.

At the close of the weekly Sabbath following his death on a cross he burst from the rock tomb to change not just the lives of a handful of followers but the course of the entire world.

At that moment history fulfilled ancient symbolism. A millennium and a half before Jesus walked the Earth He, known to Israel as the LORD,

The symbolism of firstfruits is rooted in a little-known ceremony enjoined on Israel. It heralded the beginning of seven weeks of harvest. A sheaf of

Jesus is saying we can be free from grain was harvested by the priests at Satan’s lies and from being slaves to the end of the weekly Sabbath during sin. He wants to free everyone from the *Unleavened Bread* festival. This sin and the eternal death penalty of ‘*wavesheaf offering*’ was prepared sin. He has provided the way for people to follow His teachings that will lead out of the bondage of sin and the following morning was offered in the Temple, after which general harvesting could begin.

(Satan’s darkness based on lies) into

Firstfruits Harvest

The symbolism was fulfilled by Jesus. He is the firstfruits from among the dead and is alive forever more. What is this way? “*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.” (John 8:31)*

On that Sunday morning he was received by the Father in acceptance of his finished mission. It was, however, the beginning of a revolution that

The Way is simply to abide in Jesus’ word, the truth, and to continually reject Satan’s lies. By following this way we will be set free.

In the six weeks following his resurrection, Jesus further instructed his apostles. ‘*Jesus therefore said to them again, Peace unto you: as the Father has sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and says to them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit*’ (John 20:21-22).

(All Scripture references are NKJV)

Request: When Someone Dies

introduced a ceremony that prefigured that momentous time. It was called the *Feast of the Firstfruits*. [See p.9]

Until that time prophets had, rarely, raised a few dead folk to a resumed *human life*. The resurrection of Jesus was different. He was the first human to shake off his humanity and be resurrected to an unending life. In Scripture he is called ‘*the firstfruits*’: ‘*But now has Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep*’ (I Corinthians 15:20).

Ask us for the articles:
The Empty Tomb
The Resurrection - a Hoax?

Into the World

Having imparted the Spirit to his apostles and having revealed more divine truth to their now enlightened minds Jesus commissioned them to continue his work and take the ‘good news’ around the world.

This seven week period following the ‘*wavesheaf offering*’ was a time for Israel to harvest the new barley crop. It symbolized the spiritual harvest ahead, centuries when the ‘good news,’ the Gospel, experienced times of drought and times of plenty, poor harvests when the Word was corrupted by heretical teachers, and abundant harvests when the Word burst upon the world afresh.

But it signifies, too, a world in process of revolution, the preparation for

cont'd p.6

Isaiah predicted that the world would be astonished at how the visage and form of the Messiah would be marred.

John Morton

Over seven hundred years before Christ, Isaiah prophesied that the world would be astonished when the promised Messiah, who is to be exalted above all, will be marred more than any man, "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men" (Isaiah 52:13-14).

Christ's followers were amazed when the man they expected to be king was cruelly scourged and crucified three and a half years into his ministry. Many in this modern world still commemorate the suffering that Christ experienced at that time. Some filmmakers have portrayed the event with such graphic violence, that the horrors of his beating and crucifixion have a profound emotional impact on the audience.

However, the surprise his followers experienced when they saw his marred visage and body at the time

he was crucified is only a shadow of the astonishment the world will experience when the truth of Isaiah's prophecy is revealed in its fullness. The degree to which this world has marred Christ's visage and form is truly astounding!

Scourging

What did Isaiah mean when he said Christ's visage and form would be marred more than any other man? Was Christ's disfigurement to be worse than that of the most extreme burns victims for example? Or was the prophet talking in terms of deliberately inflicted disfigurement?

Consider some of the sadistic cruelty that has been inflicted on victims under various regimes of brutal tyr-

anny throughout the history of this violent and bloody world. We have a shameful history of atrocities and tortures carried out in times of both war and peace - under the guise of punishment, to extract information, for revenge, or for the sheer pleasure by psychopaths. Some of the world's most sadistic atrocities have been carried out in the name of religion.

When Christ was crucified was he literally marred more than any man in physical sense? Or is there a more profound meaning to Isaiah's prophecy than first meets the eye?

After he was mocked and buffeted by the Jews (Matthew 26:67-68, Mark 14:65, and Luke 22:63-65) Christ was still able to stand and answer Pilate's questions (John 18:36). And when the Roman soldiers had scourged him (Matthew 27:27-30, Mark 15:16-20 and John 19:1-5) he was still able to walk with Simon of Cyrene who carried the stake on which he was to be crucified. According to John's account he carried the stake himself (John 19:16-17).

While Christ's scourging was horrific and extremely painful the gospel accounts do not confirm that his physical beating was worse than any other man has suffered. So what did Isaiah mean when he said that Christ's visage and form would be

marred more than any man?

Visage and Form

Having predicted that God's Servant, who was to be exalted above all, was going to be marred, Isaiah then went on to explain how it would occur. It must be remembered that Isaiah was speaking on behalf of God in prophetic terms seven hundred years prior to Christ.

The nation of Israel had been established by God as a model to portray His plan for the salvation of mankind which He revealed when He told Abraham that through one of his descendants all families of the earth would be blessed (see Genesis 12:3 and Galatians 3:16). The Israelite culture with its temple, law and ceremonies portrayed future events in God's plan to redeem mankind. It foreshadowed a future kingdom over which the promised Messiah will rule, their High Priest himself represented the promised Messiah (Hebrews 9:11).

It is the significance of both Christ's spiritual and physical roles that have been marred, or corrupted beyond recognition.

Unrecognised by the Jews

Isaiah warned the Jews that because of their rebellious attitude toward God and their corrupt form of worship (Isaiah 1:2-4) not everyone would recognise the Messiah, nor would many believe what he said, "Who has believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he has no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." (Isaiah 53:1-2).

Marred More Than Any Man

unsigned articles are by the Editor

He said that instead of being esteemed the promised Messiah would be despised, rejected, stricken, afflicted, wounded, bruised and beaten:

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed

(Isaiah 53:3-5)

When Jesus was alive he was despised, oppressed and afflicted, judged and imprisoned, then killed as a common criminal (verses 6-12) at the behest of his own people.

Despite his willingness to die for their transgressions he was rejected by the very nation that was established to foreshadow the future outcome of the promises that can only be fulfilled through him. Even today the Jews deny that Isaiah's prophecy concerning the marring of God's servant is about Christ.

While many have condemned the Jews for what they did, the rest of the world is just as guilty because even in death Christ's image and message have continued to be corrupted by the very people who now claim to be his followers, the so-called 'Christian' community.

Some worship him as a baby, others worship his mother instead and most portray him as a weak and sickly, effeminate man. His gospel of the Kingdom of God has been watered down as a vague, ethereal kingdom that exists in the minds of men. His teachings have been relegated to a series of unrelated, quaint 'Bible stories' for children. His law has

been rejected and to this day, some two thousand years later, his name is widely used as a profanity.

The so-called 'Christians' of this world have a form of religion but deny the power thereof. Will Christ find faith when he returns (Luke 18:8)? His image and message have been corrupted to the extent that he is the most maligned, humiliated, vilified and misrepresented man in the entire history of this planet.

Significance of the Prophecy

Many do not realise the significance of Isaiah's prophecy:

Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at you; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider

(Isaiah 52:13-15)

When he shall 'sprinkle many na-

tions' refers to the time when the exalted Christ, in whom all nations of the world are to be blessed, returns at the end of this age to reveal the truth about God's plan of salvation and His Kingdom. The world will be dumbfounded at how much the image and form of the Christ they thought they knew had been marred.

While Christ's visage and form were marred during the beating and scourging, the physical injuries did not seem to fulfil the prophet's prediction that he would be marred more than any man.

However, when considering how Christ has subsequently been portrayed and his message corrupted beyond all recognition, the profound meaning of Isaiah's prophecy becomes apparent. No man has ever suffered such prolonged, undeserved humiliation and degrading treatment as Christ, for two millennia, has had to endure.

The world will be astounded at how much they have marred the visage and form of Jesus Christ. He has truly been marred more than any man.

Ω

Pentecost ...cont'd

the thousand-year reign of the King of kings.

Ingathering

The Father is at this time inviting men and women to take part in His master plan for eternity. Those who accept His call, through repentance and baptism, He trains hands-on through our life experiences. They, too, are part of the firstfruits harvest - a '...kind of firstfruits' (James 1:18).

The harvest symbolism climaxed in the annual *Day of Pentecost* (the *Feast of Firstfruits*, also known as

Whitsunday), a day observed by many churches as the 'birthday' of the church, the sole surviving festival in Christendom enjoined by God for all His people.

Like Jesus Christians, too, will be taken from the grave by a resurrection to spirit life. No longer will they be subject to the restraints of a physical body, but will reign with Christ.

As Christ's co-workers the resurrected Christians will be engaged with Him in a great ingathering from all nations during the thousand-year reign. It is symbolized by a further harvest - held annually in autumn as the *Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering*. A world transformed.

Ω

Pentecost 2007: May 27

Evident from the New Testament writings, the early church experienced material distress. What about Western Christendom?

The apostle Paul said to the Corinthian brethren: '...we are now going through hard times [KJV present distress]' (I Corinthians 7:26). Today many who hold to the name 'Christian' still experience persecution at the hands of other faiths - notably Islam.

the prophets foretell that before Jesus returns conditions would mirror the days leading to the universal flood. Then : '...Jehovah saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that for her sins have reached even unto every imagination of the thoughts of heaven, and God has remembered his heart was only evil continually' (Genesis 6:5). And now: 'as were the days of Noah, so shall be Jesus recognized our challenge: 'And the coming of the Son of man' (Matthew 24:37).

In the West, overt acts against Christians are rare. But there is widespread 'distress' from other quarters. Or, should be - if we truly are followers of Jesus Christ.

Comfort Zone

Life in the western world is, in comparison with past centuries, easy. Earth's bounty has showered on us untold blessing. We live in relative comfort. We don't suffer hunger. We benefit from extensive welfare services. And Christians here '...have not yet resisted to blood striving against sin.'

It's so easy in such circumstances to just 'go with the flow,' to just drift along. So easy to stay safely in our comfort zone. To 'paddle our own canoe.' So easy to delegate our Christian responsibilities to 'paid helpers.'

Where, then, is the 'present distress'?

Lawless World

Older folk, Christian or not, tend to reminisce about the 'good old days.' It was all much better fifty years go, it is said. Indeed that's what every aging generation will say. But don't despise it. For the apostle Paul tells us 'this know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come' (I Timothy 4:1ff). In the last days.

Life, in Paul's day, was indeed hard. But he tells us that it would become 'perilous.' Perilous for Christians, for

the problem then? Wickedness, corruption was endemic. But it was just accepted by everyone. It was 'normal.' So they just got on with life '...eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage.'

We may not yet have sunk to their level of corruption. But isn't that a fair reflection of modern life? (It's in some cases worse. For marriage read co-habitation!)

So where does that leave Christians? Just look at the Christians you know. Are they zealous? Does their life-style reflect the teachings of the Bible? Does how they live provoke fierce opposition? Classed as 'old-fashioned'?

In such a world it's a battle to keep our integrity. Said Paul: 'Evil companionships corrupt good morals.' He says, though, that we should 'use to the full' the world's institutions - but only in a balanced way (I Corinthians 7:31).

We are enveloped in a culture that believes 'anything goes.' We have to live with that, says Paul, else we would have to go to another planet (I Corinthians 5:10)! But we ourselves follow after righteousness.

The apostle John exhorts us: 'Come forth, my people, out of her, that you have no fellowship with her sins, and see the good that you do and will that you receive not of her plagues; praise your Father in heaven' (Matthew 5:13-16). **Ω**

...the present distress

Jesus recognized our challenge: 'And because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall grow cold' (Matthew 24:12). We must, then, be constantly vigilant, for: '...he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved' (v.13).

Resist!

A flood of corruption and lawlessness is sweeping the world. To 'endure' it's vital that we erect barriers against it, that Christians resist.

The prophet Ezekiel prophesied at a time when the House of Judah was, for its 'abominations' before God, on the verge of being conquered by a foreign power. JHVH sent angelic forces to slaughter the civil and religious idolaters. But first He commanded them to set apart with a mark the 'resisters': 'And Jehovah said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry over all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof' (ch 9:4). This minority grieved over the idolatrous state of affairs surrounding them.

Noah, Lot, Israel at the exodus from Egypt, all 'sighed and cried,' were ' vexed' by the all-encompassing sin (cf II Peter 2:3-9).

We, too, Christians today, must have that same characteristic, that same horror at our sinful society, that same resistance to evil. Let's not 'let our love grow cold,' but let's '...make your light shine, so that others will have no fellowship with her sins, and see the good that you do and will that you receive not of her plagues; praise your Father in heaven' (Matthew 5:13-16). **Ω**

Battle for the Mind...cont'd

As the prophet Jeremiah exclaimed: '*...The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*' (ch 17:9). Well, not men, but Satan does! And he exploits our every weakness.

Cosmic Battle

The apostles of Jesus were opposed and obstructed in their ministry. Not just persecution by man - but, worse, from spiritual forces: '*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against [the] principalities, against [the] powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*' (Ephesians 6:12).

There's an unseen world of darkness, a 'government in waiting' ready to take control should Christ fail. (He won't!) The frustrated Devil (knowing his time is short) and his, now demonic, angels are at war: '*...the dragon was enraged over the woman, and went away to make war with the rest of her seed, those keeping the commandments of God, and having the testimony of Jesus Christ*' (Revelation 12: 17).

In the end-time an all-powerful religious/political power (portrayed as a 'Beast'), a front for Satan, will indeed establish a short-lived world government: '*...it was given to it to war with the saints, and to overcome them. And authority was given to it over every tribe and tongue and nation*' (ch 13:7).

Satan, it seems, will have won. He will indeed have deceived the hearts and minds the world's small and great: '*...And all those dwelling in the earth will worship it*' (v.8). Those who refuse will be hunted down.

His victory, however, his dominance of mankind, will continue but three and a half years. (v.5). For the one he, Satan, sought to replace, Jesus the Christ, will, in an explosion of spiritual power, leave His heavenly throne to unseat the Devil, restraining him for a thousand years. He will

dispatch a powerful angel to '*...[lay] hold of the dragon, the old serpent who is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and that ye may be able to stand against threw him into the abyss, and shut him up, and sealed over him, that he should not still lead astray the nations, until the thousand years are fulfilled*' (Revelation 20:2-3).

Strategy for Victory

How then can we, Christians, avoid being led astray, deceived, by man's arch-enemy?

Christians live in the real world; but our transformed way of life in Christ makes us target practice, for man and for Satan. Jesus warned: '*Don't think that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came to bring trouble, not peace*' (Matthew 10:34 CEV).

We can enjoy what the world offers within the bounds of righteousness, '*...and those that use the world, as not using it to the full: for the fashion [culture, mode] of this world is pass-*

ing away' (I Corinthians 7:31). The apostolic strategy for victory is an example. Paul told the Corinthian brethren: '*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh (for the weapons of our warfare*

are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds), casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (II Corinthians 10:3-5).

Paul adds (Ephesians 6:11-18 CEV): 'Put on the whole armour of God, who is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.'

So put on all the armor that God gives. Then when that evil day comes, you will be able to defend yourself. And when the battle is over, you will still be standing firm. Be ready! Let the truth be like a belt around your waist, and let God's justice protect you like armor. Your desire to tell the good news about peace should be like shoes on your feet. Let your faith be like a shield, and you will be able to stop all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Let God's saving power be like a helmet, and for a sword use God's message that comes from the Spirit. Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. Stay alert and keep praying for God's people. ♫

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MiniStudy

Spring Harvest

'...unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall you number fifty days' (Leviticus 23:16)

'Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures' (James 1:18)

The Biblical 'types' can be based on historical events (*Passover*, for example). Or, as in this case, in a natural event - the early grain harvest. Our physical life depends on the produce of the ground, and it is surely right that we recognize the source of this abundance with thanksgiving to the Creator. But the types have a spiritual fulfillment, and the seven weeks of the grain harvest in ancient Palestine are of momentous significance.

- The Biblical festivals are rooted in the physical laws that govern our planet: '*...and God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years*' (Genesis 1:14). Note that word 'seasons'. In Hebrew it is *mo'ed*, denoting a 'fixed time'. The word is used of the divinely-appointed feasts: '*...These are the feasts [mo'ed] of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons [mo'ed]*' (Leviticus 23:4). They are appointed times for the people of God to assemble before Him in worship, and their place on the religious calendar is governed by those 'lights.'
- Earth's produce, too, is dependent on these 'lights,' our sun and moon. The Creator uses these harvests as an object lesson for His creation. They depict His plan for mankind, and the spring grain harvest is at its heart. In Israel, the new corn could be consumed only after special offerings were presented before the LORD. It was called the *Firstfruits* or the *Wave-Sheaf*. Jesus fulfilled this ancient type on the Sunday morning after his resurrection. Because of the Christian's place as the '*brethren of Christ*' (Hebrews 2:11), we are called '*a kind of firstfruits*' (James 1:18). [See MiniStudy 43]
- It is these latter, faithful Christians, who represent the 'fifty days' of the spring harvest: '*... you shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall you number fifty days*' (Leviticus 23:15-16). The fifty days of the early harvest represent the present era, when the Father is inviting the willing to be the firstfruits of His spiritual harvest. The symbolic fifty days of harvest represent the need for the people of God, throughout the year, constantly to be spiritually nourished, to grow to Christ-like maturity: '*... but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*' (II Peter 3:18). And to '*be fruitful and multiply*' - evangelize (Matthew 13:8).
- The apostle Paul explains the significance of the *Firstfruits* offering: '*...now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept*' (I Corinthians 15:20, 23). It represents the resurrection from among the dead. He continues: '*...for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then comes the end*' (vv.22-24). Jesus was the first to be resurrected in spirit form. Then, at his return, all those in whom is the Spirit of God will be resurrected, in the same spirit form, to reign alongside the returned Christ (I Thessalonians 4:14-17, Revelation 20:6).
- The fiftieth day, Sunday, is the *Feast of Pentecost*, familiar to most Christians as the day the holy Spirit came with power upon the disciples (Acts 2:1). The word means *fiftieth*. (This 'seven plus one' theme is common in Scripture. 7 days of *Unleavened Bread* plus 1 (Pentecost); 7 day of *Tabernacles* plus 1; 7 x 7 years plus 1 to the *Jubilee* year.) The *Day of Pentecost*, also called the *Feast of Weeks* (e.g. II Chronicles 8:13), represents the culmination of the divine plan for this age. It is also the forerunner of the time of Christ's return, when the entire remnant of mankind will have the veil of deception removed (Acts 2:17, Isaiah 25:7, II Corinthians 4:4) - the late harvest, the ingathering of the nations.
- *Pentecost* is the only Bible festival for which no calendar date is given in Scripture. It has to be calculated, counted. Contrary to this, in Judaism the date is fixed at the sixth day of the third month, based on fifty days from the first annual High Day of the *Feast of the Passover* (Nisan 15). Note that the *Day of Pentecost* is a 'holy convocation,' a High Day, but is not here (Leviticus 23) termed an annual Sabbath, thus making clear that the Sabbath referred to is the weekly one. Jesus, however, fulfilled the typology as the first of the *Firstfruits* harvest. On the day following that High Day (that year a Friday) he was still in the grave having been crucified on Wednesday. He could not therefore have fulfilled the type. God always acts 'on time'; He does nothing prematurely. For example: '*...when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son*' (Galatians 4:2, 4; also Ephesians 1:10; Acts 2:1; Exodus 12:17, 41; Daniel 12:7).
- In sum, Jesus as the firstfruits to God by his resurrection was accepted by the Father next day, on the '*morrow of the Sabbath*', Sunday morning. From that day we are to count fifty days, and that (Sun)day is *Pentecost*. He is '*...declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*' (Romans 1:4). As ever Jesus Christ is the focus of the festival. The seven weeks represent Christians of this era - '*a kind of firstfruits.*' Ω

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