

## *The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK*

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Matthew 28:19-20*

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## Lessons of War

So - the Saddam regime in Iraq has collapsed. A quarter century of oppression by this modern 'pharaoh' has ended in the usual chaos of war's aftermath. But the Iraqi people are, generally, free for the first time in more than a generation. And muted celebration has begun.

As might be expected, freedom has brought an explosion of riot, looting, destruction - pure greed by a minority of the population. It happens in any society when the thin veneer of civilised behaviour cracks, when human nature is unrestrained. Ahead lies the immense task of healing the national wounds through new institutions, free from the hell of Saddam's iron-fisted, brutal and diabolic oppression.

The invasion by the allied forces (in essence the Biblical 'Joseph') treats a poisonous wound on the body of humanity - poison that infected surrounding nations and threatens to affect all nations. Whatever the Coalition motives, Saddam's reign 'needed killing'.

### Absentee God?

It's an almost universal fallacy that God has 'gone away', leaving us to our own devices. Yet the Bible makes clear that the Sovereign God has His hands on the reins of humanity. It records His interest in our affairs, and His readiness to intervene. Sometimes His hands 'get dirty' - He is not averse to changes of regime, even extermination. The Creator loves this world (*kosmos*), His creation, too much to leave its inhabitants to its own devices!

God has infinite patience - but when human wickedness plumbs the depths

He will intervene directly, or more usually He will 'stir up' other nations to punish. That doesn't necessarily mean, though, that His 'weapon' is itself a righteous nation!

One example of divine intervention is the Amorite nation. God had an eye on their iniquity for a couple of hundred years - but commanded Israel to 'utterly destroy' them (Genesis 15:16, Deuteronomy 20:17). Another example is God's use of the ancient Assyrians to chastise His own erring nation of Israel. The 'rod of My anger, and the staff in whose hand is my indignation', God said of them (Isaiah 10:5-11).

### A Message for Today

The conflict in Iraq carries a clear warning to all of us - both to nations, and to the men and women whose behaviour determines the kind of nation we are. Ancient Israel experienced the heavy hand of the Assyrians and the Babylonians because they were far from God. Nations today - especially those with an Anglo-saxon culture - are also subject to divine scrutiny. God's wrath may not be restrained for much longer!

But surely that's 'Old Testament stuff'? It's a popular - and dangerous - myth that 'gentle Jesus' changed all that. *Not so.* Some of the Bible's most blood-curdling statements are from the mouth of Jesus Christ!

*Jesus does, however, provide solace to anyone who comes to him, who takes on the responsibilities he lays on us. Peace of mind,, solutions to life's challenges, a 'spiritual home' - all are fruits of God's Spirit working in any individual who responds to God's calling. Even you!*

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## Reaping the whirlwind....

Why is there such an epidemic of illness? The received wisdom is that 'it's not my fault'. It's part of the debilitating notion that none of us is truly responsible for our actions.

Lung cancer, diabetes, much heart disease, some mental disorders - all result largely from personal life-style choices. We are warned by the authorities about the 'fat plague'. The lethal effects of tobacco - and now cannabis (said to be worse!) - have been known for nearly half a century. And alcohol over-indulgence is always with us.

Take, too, a whole range of diseases that stem from aberrant sexual behaviour. Chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, AIDS, infertility, cervical cancer...all rooted largely in our so-called 'permissive society' with its selfish bed-hopping and co-habitation. All are on a devastating soaring upward spiral, bringing misery to millions. *And they don't just happen!*

### Forewarned!

The divine instructions to Israel through Moses stress *prevention* and the exercise of *personal responsibility*. Whether the provision of hygienic latrines, or quarantine for infectious disease, or avoidance of personal injury or over-indulgence - all are clearly laid out in Scripture.

Such measures were ignored during the dark days of the Roman medieval domination. And they are the cause - linked with corrupt government - of much of the disease and suffering in so many nations to this day.

Embracing the Christian life-style - which is based on the Old Testament and on common sense - ought to be a vital path to a healthy life. Sadly, statistics draw little difference between the health of Christians and that of non-Christians. This is especially the case with our youth. Parents - *be alert and take action!*

## PENTECOST 2003

This year the Pentecost festival will be observed by the Churches of God on **Sunday, June 8**

## Trojan Horses

The apostle Paul was well aware that the churches he founded could be - and indeed were - infiltrated by men with a self-serving personal agenda. They 'entered in unawares' - *ie* the brethren were unaware of their nefarious plans. Some 'entered in' and some arose 'of your own selves', writes the apostle.

In their vanity, previously loyal brethren zealously mounted a doctrinal hobby-horse and began to subvert their congregation. Or they embraced the teachings of another 'guru' and promoted his philosophy. A bit like a GM car franchise exclusively promoting Ford models! They were a 'Trojan Horse' within the church. Too often, alas, their success drove out faithful brethren.

It was a problem in Paul's and John's day (III John 10) - and no less a problem in the twenty-first century Church of God.

### Action!

The 'perfect church' doesn't exist. Every congregation has a mix of 'good and bad', of 'wheat and weeds'. So every Christian must be alert to the possibility of being seduced by smooth-talking wool-covered wolves. Like a cancer, their destructive heresy starts unobtrusively but spreads to devour other parts of the body.

Whole organizations have been subverted through lack of vigilance and through toleration of such 'Trojan Horses' in their midst. All brethren - and especially their 'shepherds' - must be ready to make perhaps the hard choice of simply telling such to go! Wrote Paul: "*Avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions and strivings about the Law, for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned*" (Titus 3:9-11).

The 'admonition' is an attempt by the church and its leadership to counsel the individual to give up his (or her) divisive false teaching. If he persists, then for the sake of harmony in the assembly - or in his association - he is requested to take his teachings elsewhere. ف

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