

The Church and the *New World Order*

Millions believe a sinister "new world order" is about to begin. Many believe there is a vast conspiracy involving the United Nations; that foreign troops are already in place inside the United States; that a takeover of our country is imminent. Believe it or not, Jesus Christ of Nazareth predicted a coming *new world order*! He said He was coming back to this earth to do just that—establish a *new world government* to replace the governments of this world! How will He do this? You will be *surprised*! Jesus Christ said "I will build my church....," and said He would never leave it, or forsake it. But why? Why did He build His church? What *is* the church? What is it supposed to do? There are tens of thousands of churches all across the land; hundreds of denominations; hundreds of non-denominational religious organizations. Some suppose that one might "belong" to any one of them, or belong to *none* of them, but simply visit with one or another as it appeals to them, and they will nevertheless attain to God's kingdom. Must you *belong* to the true church Jesus built in order to be *saved*? *Will the church* be involved in helping Christ set up a *new world order*?

by Garner Ted Armstrong

Where I live, only a few hundred yards from a non-denominational church, I can hear church bells all through the week. On various days, religious songs ring out across the landscape from a modern "bell tower," equipped with loudspeakers. *Come Thou Almighty King* is played, along with *The Old Rugged Cross*, and other religious favorites.

East Texas is festooned with churches. New ones are being built as I write. Along my route to town, I can easily count more than fifteen churches.

It is the same all over the United States—especially in the "Bible Belt."

But not all churches are so benign as they might seem. Here and there are small groups of survivalists, dressed in camouflaged military clothing, listening to their leaders invoking the names of Samson, King David, and Jesus Christ, yet preaching survival and resistance. They are armed with semiautomatic rifles, deer rifles, and shotguns. They believe they will be the very last defense against a "new world order" they believe is poised to take over the United States. The "sermons" they hear are talks about resistance; about tactics and fighting. Are these groups, though few, also bona fide churches?

In addition to all the church buildings, there are thousands of groups meeting in rented halls, private homes, or tents. Why all these churches? Why are they different? Do they all offer the same thing, but by a different method, or system of belief? Are all their members "going to the same place"? Is a church a halfway house to heaven? Must you *belong* to a church in order to be saved? Can you be saved no matter which church you attend? Is church attendance required for salvation, or can a person forego attendance at any church, and live his own life quietly, and still be admitted into God's kingdom?

You will be astonished when you read the *plain truth* about WHY Jesus Christ said He would build His church. Millions of churchgoers flock to the pews each week, and yet do not know the real reason Jesus Christ commissioned His disciples!

It will astound them to learn that Jesus Christ trained His disciples to become future *kings and priests*, rulers with Him in a coming *new government*, which will indeed be a "new world order." But it will not be the result of Christ's people trying to *physically overthrow* existing governments!

Organized Confusion

Everyone knows about religious differences. From our earliest recollections of our own church experiences, or from our civics and history books in school, we learned that Jews and Christians are different; that the Jewish race, generally speaking, reject Christ as the Messiah, while nominal Christians believe Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

We know there are Buddhists, Shintoists, Taoists, Confucianists, Hindus, and adherents of Islam. We know about most of the major denominations; Roman Catholicism, the Anglican Church, the Dutch Reformed Church, the Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, Nazarenes, Church of Christ, First Christian Church, Pentecostal churches, and dozens more. It requires a sizeable book or a large section in an almanac just to list them all.

It is plain, from simply informing oneself about how many different churches there are, that they are not all *together*. They hold different beliefs and customs. Does any one of them believe they are wrong? When thousands of people find their way to their neighborhood church building each week, are they entering a building and participating in a worship service they believe is *wrong*? No, of course not.

But can *all of them be right*?

Obviously not, for they are deeply divided, and ne'er the twain shall meet. There is deep-seated *division* between the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church. Division which caused the shedding of much blood; division which tore nations apart. Very large history books detail how and why the Church of England rejected the primacy of the popes in Rome, and how the Anglican church was formed. There is a vast amount of literature available about the Protestant Reformation; how many millions of members in dozens of denominations refused to submit to the popes in Rome.

Clearly, if any *one* of these churches is 100 percent *right*, then all the others are *wrong*. There simply cannot be *different* churches, teaching *different* doctrines, with *different* customs and practices, who are part of an *undivided church*.

Some believe in baptism by immersion. Others believe in "baptism" by sprinkling, or pouring a little water over the repentant believer. Some believe in the "christening" of a tiny infant, and others refuse to baptize children. Some believe the only proof of the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues, while others completely reject this doctrine.

How many believe they are in an intensive *training* program to help Jesus Christ *rule the world* for one thousand years? How many believe they will soon be involved in abolishing crime, carrying out the death sentence for murderers, outlawing divorce and abortion, and effecting massive, revolutionary changes in nations all over the world? How many believe they are learning *how to govern* under Christ?

After all, one of the important prophecies about Christ was that a future *government* would be on His shoulder: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the *government shall* be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of *His government* and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David [an earthly throne], and upon His kingdom, to order it [to set up Christ's *new world order*], and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Eternal of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9: 6,7).

Christ is prophesied to *inherit an earthly throne*, and to *rule this world* with a rod of iron: "And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him

the throne of His father David: And He shall reign over the house of Jacob [ten-tribed Israel] for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:30-33).

Christ's end-time disciples are looking forward and praying continually for Jesus Christ to *return to this earth*, and to set up His world-ruling *government* here below. They know this will be done by divine *miracles*, and the awesome power of God, not by any human governments, or by any human organizations of any kind. Some, however, believe they will bring about these massive changes by *force of arms*; that they will be the only survivors following a holocaust, the collapse of all civilization, and the death of hundreds of millions.

They are wrong. A new world order is coming, but it will not be brought about by human governments, or human churches, or human organizations such as militias. It will come about only as a result of direct, divine intervention of God; by the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile, there is nothing but *confusion* among the churches. Few see themselves as trainees for the Kingdom of God.

Many years ago I was told the following story by a young man from Canada. It seems he lived in one of the prairie provinces, and was trudging down a country road one Sunday morning, headed toward his neighborhood church, which was perhaps a mile or two away. A neighboring farmer came along in an old automobile, stopped, and asked the lad if he wanted a ride.

Grateful, the boy hopped in. When his neighbor pulled into the church yard and allowed the boy to get out, the boy looked at him curiously. Obviously, he was dressed in his "Sunday-go-to-meeting" clothes, and was intending to go to church.

Here they were in front of a church.

"Aren't you going to come in?" the boy asked.

"Oh, I couldn't do that," the neighbor replied. "My church is a couple more miles down the road."

The boy thanked his neighbor for the ride, and then, puzzled, watched him as he drove out of sight. It was some years later before the boy came to understand there were *differences* between those two churches out on the Canadian prairie—differences wider than the few miles that separated them by road.

Is the church of which Jesus Christ is living Head *divided*?

Most, including the leadership and the members of dozens, if not hundreds, of churches and religious organizations would say, "Absolutely not!" Most of them know the scriptures about division in the church. But, deep down inside, there are *reasons* why they are not unified with other churches or religious organizations. In each case, they feel those reasons are more than ample to justify their separate existence. Their reasons may range from minor doctrinal disagreements to administrative policies, to anger or miff over personalities.

God's Word asks, "Is Christ *divided*?" (1 Corinthians 1: 13). Thousands of professing Christians, divided into dozens of different churches and religious organizations, answer "No!" Yet, they belong to groups that have split off from other groups that may have split off from still a larger group, or they belong to a group that was formed as a separate church or ministry. Of course, each will be allowed to explain the rationale for such divisions to Jesus Christ at His return, but don't believe for a moment that they do not have a ready-made answer concerning division in the church—why they are "independent," or why they will *never* reunify and cooperate with the group from which they came.

It is all a bit puzzling, a bit confusing. Continually, I receive letters and telephone calls from people who want to know how to *find the true church*. A few years ago, it was somewhat simpler for these searchers to find what they believed to be the true church. Today, it is a bit more difficult, for the choices are many.

One True Church Built On A Rock

Jesus Christ did not build two churches, or three, or five. He built one true church. He said, "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter [Greek: *Petros*, a pebble, or stone], and upon this ROCK [Greek: *Petra*, a large rock] I will build my church; and the gates of hell [Greek: *hades*, the gravel shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

As you will read later on, Jesus called Simon by this "nickname" only *twice* in all the Gospels. The name was not a lofty title connoting great strength, but a name placed in opposition to the ROCK which was Christ; a name meaning "little pebble" by comparison; a name connoting *weakness*, not strength.

This one verse is easily the subject of a very thick book. Millions believe Christ was *building His church on Peter* as the first pope, the "chief apostle."

Millions more know better. The *Rock* upon which Christ was to build His church was *Jesus Christ Himself*. Jesus Christ is the living Head of His church, and not any man.

Jesus Christ was set at the right hand of God the Father, "Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the *church*, Which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:21-23).

Paul wrote to the Colossians, "And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist [study John 1 with Hebrews 1]. And He is the *Head of the body*, the church: Who is the beginning, the *Firstborn* from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence" (Colossians 1: 17,18). Peter did not have the preeminence, and was not the head of the church. Jesus Christ constituted His church, and has always been, as He is today, at this moment, the true Head of that church!

The "Rock" of which Jesus spoke was Himself, not Peter. The word He used for "Peter" is *Petros*, which means a pebble, or a stone, like one might pick up along a stream bed. Because Peter was to become *one of the chiefest* (not the chief!) apostles; because he had dynamic personality, and was a *leader* among the three leading apostles, Jesus Christ endowed him with an affectionate "nickname," *Petros*. His given name was Simon.

The Greek language has masculine and feminine *gender*, as do the Romance languages. In Spanish, "a table" is feminine, la *mesa*, introduced by the feminine *la*, and ending in the letter *a*. "The roof" is masculine, *el techo*, introduced by the masculine *el*, and ending in *o*.

Petra, in Greek, means a very large rock, a mountain of rock, or even a mountain range, *whereas Petros* means "pebble."

Jesus was saying, "You [Peter, or *Petros*] are a *stone*; but upon this ROCK [Myself! *Petra*] I will build my church!"

Christ is the Rock, not Peter.

"He is the *Rock*, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He" (Deuteronomy 32:4).

"Of the *Rock* that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee" (verse 18).

David wrote, "The Eternal is my *Rock*, and my Fortress, and my Deliverer; my God, my Strength, in whom I will trust" (Psalm 18:2). Later, in the same chapter, "For who is God save the Eternal? or who is a *Rock* save our God?" (verse 31).

David refers to the Divine Sovereign God as His *Rock* more than fifteen times throughout the Psalms.

He wrote, "He only is my *Rock* and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved" (Psalm 62:2).

When God caused Israel to trek through the wilderness for a testing period of forty years, He performed awesome miracles to feed them, and provide them drink. He brought water out of a *rock* for them. Paul wrote, "Moreover, brethren. I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were baptized unto Moses and in the cloud and in the sea [this is spiritual metaphor, a type]; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual *Rock* that followed them: and that *Rock* was Christ" (I Corinthians 10: 1-4).

Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the "Rock" upon which He built His church. No human being has ever been given headship over the true church. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, speaking of the Catholic claim of Peter's "primacy," says, "The Roman Catholic tradition that Peter was the First Pope is Fiction pure and simple. There is no New Testament hint, and no historical evidence whatever, that Peter was at any time Bishop of Rome. Nor did he ever claim for himself such Authority as the Popes have claimed for themselves. It seems that Peter had a divine foreboding that his 'successors' would be mainly concerned with 'Lording it over God's flock, rather than showing themselves Examples to the flock' (I Peter 5:3)" (*Halley's Bible Handbook*, P. 768).

Church history proves that *many centuries* passed before any claim was made that one man was head of the church. "Silvester I (314-335) was Bishop of Rome when, under Constantine, Christianity was virtually made the State Religion of the Roman Empire. The Church immediately became an institution of vast importance in World Politics. Constantine regarded *himself* as Head of the Church. He called the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325), and presided over it, the First World Council of the Church. This Council accorded the Bishops of Alexandria and Antioch full jurisdiction over their Provinces, as the Roman Bishop had over his, with NOT EVEN A HINT that they were subject to Rome" (ibid., p. 769).

Peter was *never* the head of God's true church. Paul, who was the apostle to the *gentiles*, wrote to the church in Rome. The book of Romans makes *no mention whatever* of Peter; his name is not included in the lengthy *personal greetings* Paul includes in the sixteenth chapter.

Paul insisted that he was in every way Peter's *equal!* He wrote, "For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very *chiefest apostles* [note the plural!]" (2 Corinthians 11:5). He said, "I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing" (2 Corinthians 12:11).

Who were the "very chiefest" apostles? They were James, Peter, and John. It was these three who were allowed to see the Transfiguration. *James* made the final decision at the Jerusalem conference about circumcision (Acts 15:13-19).

Peter was an apostle among *equals*, as the Bible makes clear. Notice how, when Philip preached the gospel in Samaria, and great miracles occurred, word reached Jerusalem. "Now when the apostles [note the plural!] which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, THEY SENT unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:14,15).

Notice *who was sent*. Peter and John were sent to Samaria. By whom? By *other apostles* who were at Jerusalem, without doubt including *James*, who was Jesus' half brother. Peter did not do the sending. He was not the "chief apostle" at all. He was *sent* by others.

The word *apostle* is not a lofty title. It connotes no special authority, or "rank." It is a very *humble* word which connotes a *function of service*, not an "office." The word merely means one sent." Bear this in mind when remembering the *commission* Jesus Christ gave to His disciples. He SENT them into all the world to preach the gospel.

What IS the Church?

To ask "What is the church?" seems elementary. Yet, look at all the confusion concerning the answer to such a question.

To millions of human beings the church is a *building*, such as a cathedral, a basilica, or a lofty structure of stone with tall steeples and signs of the cross. When one says, "I am going to church," he implies he is going to go to services in a *building* called a church.

To millions more, a "church" is a *denomination*, or a religious organization.

But the original Greek word means no such thing.

Jesus said, "I will build my *ekklesia*..." In the Latin languages, the similarity to Greek is more obvious. In Spanish, the word for "church" is *iglesia*. In French, it is *Iglize*. A more obvious English word is "ecclesiastic," or having to do with the "ecclesia." The original word means nothing more than "assembly," or "group." As Strong's *Exhaustive Concordance* explains, it also connotes a "calling out." The expression "called-out ones" is entirely appropriate.

How *different* this expression is from our commonly-used English word *church*.

Jesus Christ did not intend to build a large, political organization which would become involved with the governments of *this world*. He had called His disciples *out* of this evil world for a great purpose: "I have given them thy word; and the world [the present evil society, or social system] hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are *not of the world*, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14-16).

Jesus promised His disciples they would be *persecuted* in this world: "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Christ's fledgling group of "called-out ones," who were to form the nucleus of His *church*, were continually warned about false apostles, false teachers, persecutors, and detractors. They were warned that performing Christ's commission might result in their *deaths* in some cases.

"They shall put you out of the synagogues [churches]: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service" (verse 2).

One of the main thrusts of Jesus' message to His disciples was to *avoid being part of the world*. John wrote, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of

God abideth for ever. Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now there are *many antichrists*; whereby we know it is the *last time*. They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2:15-19).

Paul warned the Ephesian elders with similar words: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church [assembly of called-out ones] of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30).

Always, Jesus Christ described His church, or His fledgling group of specially-called disciples, as a "little flock," which would be *persecuted* by the world. He said, "Fear not, *little flock*; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). The Bible characterizes the great, politically powerful churches as "Babylon the Great" (Revelation 17:15). He commands His people, "Come *out* of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4).

As Halley says, "The Church was founded, not as an institution of Authority to Force the Name and Teaching of Christ upon the world, but only as a Witness-Bearing institution to Christ, to hold Him before the people. Christ Himself, not the Church, is the Transforming Power in Human Life. But the Church was founded in the Roman Empire, and gradually developed a form of Government like the Political World in which it existed, becoming a vast Autocratic organization, ruled from the top" (*Halley's Bible Handbook*, p. 767).

There is a vast amount of literature available in libraries and bookstores about "Babylon the Great," or the apostate, visible church. Hislop's *The Two Babylons* is among the best, but the *Critical and Experimental Commentary* by Jamieson, Faucet, and Brown is also a good source, as is *Halley's Bible Handbook*.

Never did Jesus Christ intend for His true church to become involved in *politics*. Never did He intend for it to become a powerful geopolitical organization, wielding control over people's individual lives, and over governments. Rather, His group of called-out ones was to carry the message of Christ's soon-coming, *world-ruling government*—the Kingdom of God—as a witness and a warning! His group would be like "ambassadors" of a yet future government which would bring this world peace at last.

What *is* the church? It consists of a group of *people called* out of this sin-sick, evil world; a group of people who will be engaged in fulfilling the commission Jesus Christ gave to His original disciples! It is only possible to understand *what the church is* when one understands what Jesus Christ told the church to do—what it was to *accomplish!*

How Jesus Christ Trained His Disciples

Jesus Christ trained His disciples for three and one-half years for a vitally important *purpose*. His time with them was not merely for their personal inspiration. It was not because He wanted to enjoy their company, or because He was lonely, or because He wanted protection.

He called and specially *chose* each of His disciples, including *Judas Iscariot*, for a great *purpose*.

He said, "Ye have not chosen me, but *I have chosen you*, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it you" (John 15:16).

Every parable, every healing, every example, every lesson, every rejoinder or rebuke, every miracle during those three and one-half years was intended by Jesus Christ to be *remembered* by His disciples so they could *put those teachings and examples to work!*

Christ's teachings and examples were *not* for their "spiritual benefit"! He did not intend for them to bask in His friendship, enjoy His fellowship, and then sink down into their own narrow lives and go nowhere and do nothing! He did *not* call His disciples so they could begin *twelve different, bickering, disagreeing, competing church organizations!*

No, He was *training* a special cadre of men for a great *purpose*, for a transcendental calling and commission!

From time to time, perhaps more than *two hundred men* followed along with Jesus Christ. Even after many left Him during His ministry, there were still *one hundred and twenty* who were His disciples at the time of the choosing of Matthias (Acts 1: 15-26).

Peter said, "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us at the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that He was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection" (verses 21,22).

Since there were still *one hundred and twenty* disciples who had faithfully companied with Jesus from the beginning, and yet many "went back," as we shall now see, that means a much larger group of men were accompanying Jesus Christ than most have understood.

Christ sent out His twelve disciples (Matthew 10: 1; Luke 9: 1), giving them power to heal, and power over demons. This was for their *training*, for their experience. They would learn many important lessons during this arduous journey. Read both chapters in their entirety. Matthew's account refers not only to the journey of the disciples then, but to the time in which we live, now, for he wrote, "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come" (Matthew 10:23).

Shortly after having sent out the twelve leading disciples, "the Lord appointed *other seventy*, also, and sent them two and two before His face into every city and place, whither He Himself would come" (Luke 10: 1).

Christ was *preparing* His disciples—eighty-two of them in these accounts. He was training and teaching them, and sending them out so they would gain invaluable experience.

What were they to do? "Therefore said He unto them, 'The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth labourers into His harvest...and into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you: And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The *kingdom of God* is come nigh unto you'"(Luke 10:2-9).

Jesus Christ mapped out extensive trips in which He would visit many, many towns and villages. He *sent out* disciples in advance of His arrival so they would *preach the good news of the coming Kingdom of God!*

Christ was *building His church*. He was teaching and training those who would become part of the *foundation* of His church (Ephesians 2:19-22), and teaching many other disciples who would help form the *nucleus of that church* on the Day of Pentecost. Some of these men are mentioned in Acts 6:5: "And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch...."

When we read of the great hearings and miracles of Philip and Stephen, we need to remember that these men *knew Jesus Christ personally*, and were no doubt among the seventy disciples He sent out a year or two earlier.

Jesus knew that many of His disciples were accompanying Him for the wrong reasons. He knew Judas would betray Him, and He understood how God would allow Satan to bring about His death on the stake. He knew Matthias and dozens of others.

For the first part of His ministry, Jesus knew that many of those who followed Him were disloyal; that they had their own ideas and concepts. Read the entire chapter of John 6. When Jesus spoke metaphorically of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, some of His detractors began to talk among themselves:

"Many therefore of His disciples, when they had heard this, said, 'This is an hard saying: who can hear [believe] it?' When Jesus *knew in Himself* that His disciples murmured at it, He said unto them, 'Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before? It is the Spirit that quickeneth [makes alive]; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not.' For Jesus *knew from the beginning* who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him. And He said, 'Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.' From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him" (John 6:60-66).

There is much insight available in this account. First, Jesus Christ was not precipitating a crisis among His disciples by calling a special meeting and informing them He knew that there were many who were merely "camp followers," or who were "hangers-on," following Him about because of their own vanity, or their own hidden agendas. That this is true requires no great grasp of history or human relations.

No, Christ was contending with the Jews—some of the *same people* from among the five thousand who had been miraculously fed only the day before! Study John 6:1-52.

Jesus did not precipitate a defection among His disciples. They reacted to some powerful statements He made to the *general public*, the Jews.

But some of those who followed Jesus Christ were smitten with their own grandiose ideas of their *special relationship with God*. Some of them wanted to get close to Him so some of His luster would "rub off" on them. Perhaps they could then go out and enjoy the power they felt when large crowds gave them their undivided attention. Perhaps *they* could become a prophet, or a prophetess. Perhaps they would soon lead a group, and bask in the admiration of followers.

Instead of going humbly to Christ and asking Him about His statements concerning His flesh and His blood, they *murmured* among themselves, talking, reasoning, drawing aid and comfort from seeing there were *others who felt the same way they did*. Now, they had their excuse!

Now, *think* about what you know of human nature. Do you suppose these disaffected disciples simply went back to their homes, hitched up the mule, and started to plant crops?

Oh, no. These people were following along with Christ for a *purpose*. But their purpose was selfish, vain, carnal! They wanted to share in the "limelight" for a time, but in hopes they would *be center stage* at some time in the future.

It is far more logical to assume these dissident disciples went about telling everyone they could, "Oh, *Him!* Yeah, I was with Him—I knew Him well! Why, I've talked personally with Him many a time. I remember one time, I really put some hard questions to Him! But when He started in on that flesh and blood thing, well, I knew right then I couldn't stay with that man. So I voted with my feet. I just got up and left."

Don't think for a moment that all those dissident former disciples simply went back to their homes and said not a word about their experiences, or did not attempt to justify their positions or explain why they left Jesus Christ!

Today, it is so very much easier for people to justify "leaving." Today, one can become angry with a mere *man*, or become "upset" over some corporate policy, or the real or imagined sins of human beings, and easily Justify

their decision to get up and *leave* this or that church, or religious organization, or small, in home fellowship group.

Many search high and low for a *perfect* human leader, one who has *never sinned*, or, if he has, he repented long, long ago, and they do not know how he sinned, or what particular sin, other than a "bad attitude," he may have committed.

Many cling to a human leader only insofar as they can believe he is *better* than they are, intellectually and spiritually; that he is *closer to God* than they are, or probably ever can be.

Most of us believe we would *never* have left Jesus Christ Himself! Most, perhaps all, of us firmly believe, no matter what decision we may have made concerning this or that church or religious organization, that we have not really *departed from Christ*.

No, we believe we have merely *left a group* which was not *as close* to Christ as we are, or as is the human leader of our new group.

For decades, I have received letters and telephone calls from, and have spoken personally to, people who have been members of many different churches; have gone from denomination to denomination searching for something that *satisfied* their feelings—their search for a "church home." This is commonplace throughout Protestant nominal Christianity. Like the "drifters" of the old West, many people drift from this group to the other, searching, comparing.

Most are looking for a *man, a human leader*, to follow. To many, associating themselves with a man requires a deep spiritual *endorsement* of that man. Should that man ever disappoint them, they fail to look to Jesus Christ directly; to look past a fallible human leader to Christ, but instead decide to go look for another man to follow.

How instructive it is to realize there were those who followed Jesus *Christ personally*; who looked into His eyes, heard His voice, saw His examples. They knew exactly what He looked like, how He conducted Himself. They were familiar with His stature, the color of His hair, His walk; and yet, in spite of all this, they turned away from Him, and left Him in scorn.

Most of us would believe, in our heart of hearts, that we could never turn away from Jesus Christ *personally*! We believe that if *we had been there* we would not have abandoned Him the way some of His own disciples did. Would God that were true but, sadly, in every case it is not. Familiarity, after all, does breed contempt.

Today, you and I can understand that Jesus Christ was speaking *metaphorically* about His fleshly body, and about His blood. We know He said, "I am that bread of life," and that He is symbolized by the unleavened bread we eat during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Not only this, but we see many scriptures which tell us we must *take in Christ*, and allow Him to live His life over again within us, as well as deeply understand that He said the "bread" from heaven was "my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).

Today, we know the *blood* of Jesus Christ was shed on the stake for the sins of all mankind; that the "life is in the blood thereof" (Leviticus 17:11,14), and that Christ *died* by the shedding of His blood. We can see and understand the type of the Passover lamb, and how Christ is called the "Lamb of God."

But then, many, not a few, of His disciples seized on this "hard saying" to *abandon* Jesus Christ. They simply left Him on the spot!

Jesus turned to the twelve, and asked, "'Will ye also go away?' Then Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? *Thou* hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are *sure* that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus answered them, 'Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?' He

spoke of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray Him, being one of the twelve" (John 6:66-71).

Nothing hurts quite so much as rejection. Most of us want to be *loved*. We do desperately wish to be liked, admired, accepted. When people we love *reject* us, the pain we feel is like the stabbing of a knife deep into our vitals. The most painful rejections come from close family members, or from a spouse, or from close friends and associates. When you have known and loved someone, shared many hundreds of hours with them, traveled together, enjoyed wonderful meals together, played sports together, talked together, and then they *reject* you, and never speak to you again, it *hurts*.

Is anything more painful than a divorce? When two people, who used to look into each other's eyes and say, "I love you," are now hateful, angry, spiteful, bitter—when love has been replaced with rage—it is painful beyond our ability to describe. When a beloved family member turns against a father, or mother, a sister or brother, a son or daughter, it *hurts* worse than any physical wound.

When you have known someone intimately, and that person completely *abandons* you—shunning you when you need him or her the most—it causes one of the deepest, most agonizing pains. This is true *suffering*. It does not truly dull with the passage of time—it is something that lasts for life.

Our Savior has been there. He *suffered* all these things for us, to set us an example. His church was founded through *suffering*, not through happy, ebullient committee meetings, or board resolutions, or organizational conventions.

"Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Eternal revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. 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 hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted" (Isaiah 53:1-4).

Jesus Christ poured out *love* upon His disciples! He *loved* this world enough to die for it! He lived a sin-free, flawless, *perfect* life. Yet, He was *despised and rejected* of men! Is it perhaps a *requirement* Jesus Christ lays upon His disciples that, unless they, too, have experienced the suffering of rejection, of hatred, of having beloved brethren *turn away*, they cannot be truly qualified for His work?

The hammer, the anvil, and the forge that pounds malleable human character into a useful instrument in God's hands is sometimes the hammer of hate, pounded out on the anvil of rejection, in the fiery forge of trial.

Is it because Jesus Christ knows that His true servants will need the courage of David, the patience of Job, the wisdom of Solomon, and the love and mercy of Jesus Christ to overcome the terrible trial of martyrdom, if that is to be their fate?

Must they be tempered like the finest *steel* through fiery trials and *suffering* to be prepared for what awaits them?

Jesus Christ said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than His Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you: if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also ... He that hateth me hateth my Father also ... but this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, 'They hated me without a cause'" (John 15:18-25).

Jesus Christ was hated without a *cause*. But suppose you or I provide haters with what they believe to be a *cause*? Are they then justified in their hatred?

God hates *sin*, but He *loves* sinners! Thank God, and great praise to His Holy Name, that when we go to Him in heartbroken repentance, with tears streaming down our faces, and bodies wracked with sobs and crying, He does not say to us, "Well, I have no problem with forgiving you. I just don't trust you anymore. I want nothing further to do with you."

What if God Almighty were to say that to every human being who ever sinned *after being baptized*? Would there be *any* who would make it into God's kingdom? What if God Almighty applied the kind of selective judgments to we stumbling, failing, fallible human beings as that are applied by the modern Pharisees of today?

Jesus Christ prepared His disciples for *rejection*.

How? By causing them to *deeply repent* of their own *rejection* of Christ!

Why They All Forsook Him and Fled

If you were the president of a company that manufactured a special product that could save human life, like an artificial heart or a breathing machine, wouldn't you want the engineers and designers, the specialists working on the various parts, and the salesmen who demonstrate your product to *know* the product? Would you want them to be *meticulously careful* in the delicate manufacture of each part, because you knew that some day a human life would depend on the functioning of your machine?

How would you find such people? You would be especially selective in looking at their resumes, would you not? Wouldn't you want to know about their education and former work experience? Wouldn't you want to know if they were highly skilled and capable of *being trained* to manufacture this new machine you had thought out and designed?

Wouldn't you want those who were going to the clinics and hospitals and doctors' offices to really *believe* in the life-saving capabilities of your machine, and to enthusiastically sell it to them?

What if you had a worker on the assembly line who was very careless; who was only there for the money; who was indolent and lazy; and who allowed defective parts to slip by? What if you had a salesman who was selling a machine of his own in direct competition with your machine, when you were *paying him to sell your machine*?

You would *weed out* such people, would you not? Yes, you would, especially in today's environment of gigantic malpractice insurance settlements. If the family of a loved one who died sued and won a judgment against you for millions of dollars because your machine proved defective, your entire business could go bankrupt and you would be ruined.

Jesus Christ was carefully *training* His disciples. Like a Master Builder, He was painstakingly building into each one of them special qualities, unique experiences, poignant memories, knowledge of the Scriptures, which would cause them to fulfill the great commission He would lay upon their shoulders.

Jesus did not "fire" a one of them! No, some of them left *Him*, and even the most loyal eleven disciples, following Judas' betrayal, fled out of sight on the night of His arrest; utterly forsook Him! Why?

There were many times when Jesus Christ saw carnality among them; jealousy, spite, many different human weaknesses, including being overcome with sleep. He saw them angry, wanting to cause fire to come down and

destroy people in a horrible death; saw Peter's lack of faith when he nearly drowned; saw their tears at Lazarus' tomb; saw them openly arguing over who would be "the greatest" in His kingdom—just when He was greatly burdened with the nearness of His own torture and death.

He saw all their carnality, all their vanity and ego, and all their mistakes. Yet, His Word tells us, "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having *loved His* own which were in the world, He *loved them unto the end*" (John 13: 1).

Then follows the account of the "Lord's Supper," Judas' betrayal, and all the events of the night of Christ's arrest, His torment, and His death on the stake the following afternoon.

Each disciple saw and heard the events of that night from his own perspective, from his own point of view. Each sat in a certain place. Each saw and heard what took place from a different vantage point.

Have you ever been out to dinner with a group of at least thirteen? If so, then you know that such a group will tend to break up into smaller groups for conversation; that some will be talking together about one subject, and others will be discussing other subjects. Not everyone can hear all the other conversations at once. We cannot know all that was said and done at the Last Supper, but God's Word informs us of the essential knowledge we need to know about that great historic night.

Two days earlier, Judas' constant influence with others of the disciples resulted in a minor disagreement, one which Jesus had to settle: "Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, There came unto Him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on His head, as He sat at meat. But when His disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, 'To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.' When Jesus understood it, He said unto them, 'Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always'" (Matthew 26: 6-11).

When He said she had used the ointment in anticipation of His burial, Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests, and agreed to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver!

When the night of the Lord's Supper came, Judas had already covenanted with the priests to betray Christ. Now, he was merely waiting for the right opportunity.

Jesus spoke aloud of the fact that there was a traitor in their midst. John leaned over on Jesus' bosom, and Jesus told him, as he dipped slivers of meat and juice into a sop, that it was the one to whom He handed the sop. He then handed it to Judas.

Just before this happened, Christ had said, "But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom He is betrayed!" And they began to enquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing" (Luke 22:21-23).

As Jesus handed Judas the sop, *Satan entered personally into* him. Jesus then said, "That thou doest, do quickly!" (John 13:27).

The others, further away, did not know what had happened. "Now no man at the table knew for what intent He spake this unto him. For some thought, because Judas had the bag [carried their common purse], that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor" (John 13: 28,29).

Of course, Judas was a *thief*. He was entirely dishonest about money, and so, to quiet his own conscience, continually complained about Jesus' "extravagance," and attempted to influence the other disciples about how money was being wasted.

You and I both believe we would *never* have judged or criticized Jesus Christ! We believe, from our vantage point of history, that we would have been in *awe* of Him; loving, respecting, worshiping Him as the very Son of God!

But *familiarity breeds contempt*. After describing *demonic* men who were "crept in unawares," and who were "ungodly men," Jude wrote, "These are *murmurers* [some of the disciples, led by Judas, *murmured* against Christ!], complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaking great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of [in order to gain] advantage" (Jude 16).

Sycophants "cuddle up" to people in positions of authority—those who have power, or money—in order to *gain advantage*. There has never been a powerful politician, a wealthy man, or a *religious leader* who has not experienced *Sycophants trying* to flatter him in order to gain advantage for themselves.

Judas *judged* Jesus, because Judas himself was a *thief*! His screaming conscience could only be quieted when he pointed the finger *away* from himself—at Jesus Christ!

He was *envious* of Jesus. He wanted His power, His position among the disciples. A typical sycophant, Judas continually attempted to solidify his position with Christ, all the while undermining Him, criticizing Him, vilifying Him before the others!

Christ knew what Judas was, and that further galled Judas, because Judas *knew that Christ knew*!

At the Last Supper, when Jesus spoke openly of his impending betrayal, Judas snippily spat out. "I suppose it is I!" (Matthew 26:24,25). Jesus calmly said, "You have said it," indicating that the language would have been more like our English retort, "I suppose it is I?" as said sarcastically.

But Jesus also knew that all His disciples would forsake Him at the last moment.

"Then saith Jesus unto them [on the Mount of Olives, following the Last Supper], 'All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, "I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee" (Matthew 26:31,32).

Why should the *disciples be "offended," when it was Jesus Christ who would be arrested, and beaten nearly to death, and then hung on the stake?* This is a vitally important point!

These men had eagerly anticipated Jesus Christ *taking over the government*, overthrowing the Sanhedrin, raising vast armies from among the masses, ejecting the occupying Romans, and seeing Christ ascend to the throne of Judaea, and all the provinces of Palestine.

Only when you understand the attitudes of these young, would-be revolutionaries can you truly comprehend the events of the night of the Last Supper, their watch in the garden, Jesus' arrest, and why they all forsook Him at the last minute.

During the supper, as an example, Jesus had spoken of selling one's cloak and buying a sword, saying "that this that is written of must yet be accomplished in me, 'And He was reckoned among the transgressors': for the things concerning me have an end" (Luke 22:37).

They did not understand that He was saying there needed to be swords present among the disciples to give His persecutors and murderers an *excuse* to call Him an armed criminal. to reckon Him among the transgressors."

There was not a one of them who did not know of Judas Maccabaeus, or of Theudas, who gathered a band of four hundred insurrectionist, only to be hunted down and killed, and his disciples scattered; or about Judas of Galilee, who led a tax revolt at the head of many people, who was also killed, and his followers scattered (Acts 5:36-38).

Attempts against the government were not so unusual. Those men lived in the "*here and now*" so far as their lives were concerned. At the feeding of the four and five thousand, an attempt was made to hoist Christ upon the shoulders of the crowd, and march on Jerusalem. Christ put a stop to it, much to the disappointment of the crowd and the disciples.

At the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, when Jesus rode on the white foal whose hooves were not allowed to touch the ground; with vast crowds shouting that He was the *King*, His disciples must have believed this was, at long last, the final moment; that He would ascend to the Temple, overthrow the religious leaders, the puppet government, and then eject the Romans (Luke 19:28-46).

Their spines must have fairly tingled when He went into the Temple and cast out the moneychangers for the *second time* (Luke 19:45,46). But instead of setting up His kingdom right then, He merely "taught daily in the Temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy Him" (Luke 19:47). This was not the only occasion when His disciples thought the moment had come.

Continually, for three and one-half years, His disciples assumed the moment had come for Him to establish His *kingdom* over Israel. They saw His powerful miracles; saw how vast crowds gathered, and were astonished by what He did. To them, it would be at the next Passover, when huge masses of people from all over the Mediterranean world would be collecting in Jerusalem; or it would be at the Feast of Tabernacles, when the same thing would happen. Jerusalem had a population of about 100,000, which was swollen to *twice* that size during major annual feast days.

They argued over which one would have the highest office in His government! Not for a moment did their minds interpret His statements about His kingdom as a very distant prophecy, not to be fulfilled for perhaps two thousand years!

No, to them, it was *here and now!* To us, from our modern vantage point, it was "then and there." We tend to think of the apostles as elderly men with long beards, probably because of religious art and sculptures. But this is a totally false concept. They were called in their prime, in their late twenties and early thirties. Some were professionals, like Luke the physician, or Levi (Matthew), who was a tax collector. Some were working men, like Peter, who was a commercial fisherman.

They lived in a time of terrible oppression and overtaxation. Their land was occupied by a foreign power. Poverty, squalor, sickness, and disease were rampant. When Jesus Christ called them, they believed they were part of something which was destined to *replace the existing government* in Jerusalem! He continually spoke of His *kingdom*, and they did not for a moment expect to live into their 80s or 90s, die as old men, or as martyrs, and then molder in their graves for over two thousand years while the Dark Ages came and went; as the Renaissance occurred; as the Industrial Revolution took place; as the world struggled through World War I and World War II: as nuclear weapons were invented.

Not a one of them foresaw such a scenario. No, they fully expected to become *co-rulers* with Christ over an *earthly* kingdom during their physical lifetime The absolute *proof* of this is inescapable, as you shall see.

When Jesus spoke enigmatically of His disciples buying swords, some of them, not named, said, "Behold, here are two swords. And He said unto them, 'It is enough... (Luke 22:36-38).

One of those who spoke had to be Peter, for he used his sword in an attempt to kill the servant of the high priest only hours later.

Obviously two swords were not "enough" to fight so much as the palace guard, let alone an army! He said it was "enough" so that the *prophecy*, would be fulfilled that He would be "numbered among the transgressors."

Now, think! Remember! During the famous Last Supper, Jesus had spoken of a traitor in their midst. He had given Judas the sop, and Judas, with a spiteful remark, had suddenly gotten up and departed.

Jesus Christ was becoming increasingly burdened as the hour of His arrest and horrible scourging approached. True to human nature, His disciples failed to see His terrible heaviness; were unable to truly *empathize* with Him in His hour of great trial. Instead, they thought of *themselves*.

"And there was also a *strife* among them, which of them should be accounted the *greatest*. And He said unto them, 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship [domineering autocracy—headship] over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as He that serveth. Ye are they which have continued with me [many had left!] in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a *kingdom*, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel'" (Luke 22:24-30).

This gentle rebuke about "lording it over" one's subjects did not dissuade them from assuming He was speaking of a kingdom which would be set up *very soon*!

It is only with this understanding that one can comprehend why His own beloved disciples, including John, the "disciple whom Jesus loved," would flee *into the night and utterly forsake* Him after He was arrested!

To them, *Jesus had let them down*! To them, He *could* have used His mighty power as did Elijah upon the captains of fifty (2 Kings 1:9-13). Instead, He meekly allowed them to arrest Him.

"As Jesus returned the third time [from His agonizing sessions of prayer to His Father], He heard the clatter of an approaching group, and saw the torches they carried as they forded the creek below. He cried, 'Get up! We'd better be going, because the one who will betray me is right here!' He had no sooner finished the statement to Peter and John when Judas materialized out of the dancing light of the torches held by the nearest of the group, followed by a large number of others, including the chief priests and elders, a number of soldiers, the officers of the Temple, all of them obviously heavily armed, carrying the lengthy lances, Roman short-swords, and some wearing helmets and breastplates.

"It was well known among the disciples that Jesus resorted to the area of Gethsemane, and Judas knew precisely where to find Him since he had heard Jesus discussing His plans for the later evening.

"Jesus stepped out from the gloom into the flickering glare of the torches and lanterns and said, 'Who are you looking for?' "Those in the nearest ranks answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' "Jesus said, 'I am He!'

"When those words came out of His mouth, the strangest phenomenon you could imagine occurred!

"Several ranks of the group seemed to quickly stumble backward and actually toppled over and fell to the ground! A babble of excitement went rippling through the crowd as they tried to disengage themselves from each other. One or two leaped about, slapping wildly where a torch had touched their garments!

"While reasonable order was being restored to their ranks, Jesus waited. He then asked them again, 'Who are you looking for?'

"Again, one of them said loudly, 'Jesus of Nazareth!'

'Fine,' He said, 'I told you I am He, so if I'm the One you're looking for, then let these others go,' indicating His frightened disciples standing nearby. 'Let these go their way.' John later wrote that Jesus said this to fulfill the word that He had spoken in His prayer when He said, 'Of those whom you had given me I lost not one.'

"About that time, Judas came directly up to Jesus and in the most cheerful possible fashion said, 'Hello, Rabbi!' And, taking Him by the shoulders, kissed Him quickly on the cheek.

"Jesus stood rigidly, looking at Judas in scorn and hurt, and said, 'Judas, do you mean to tell me you would betray the Son of man with a kiss?'

"Peter and some of the other disciples had drawn protectively about Jesus, as if to try to conceal Him from the leaders of the mob; Peter said, 'Lord, shall we attack them with these swords?' "Several of the soldiers leveled their pikes and spears, and one of the officers of the high priest made as if to seize Jesus. Peter took a step backward, and the whisper of his sword coming out of his sheath had barely been noticed when the flashing blade descended with a vicious arc through the air!

"The servant of the high priest dodged nimbly, or Peter's Roman sword would have split his head open like a ripe melon! The priest's officer stumbled backward, and Peter's blade barely sliced through his ear, completely severing it from his head! Peter was raising the blade for a second blow as a wild yell went through the crowd behind.

"Jesus quickly spoke with great authority, saying to Peter, 'Put your sword away into its sheath! All those that take the sword will perish with the sword! Don't you think that I could turn to my Father and beseech Him and that He could send me more than twelve legions of angels?' Saying this, Jesus stooped down to the ground, picked up the officer's severed ear, and touching it to his head, spoke briefly. The officer, amazed, put his hand to his ear and found it as whole as the other! Peter, mumbling, put away his sword and stepped back with the other disciples.

"Jesus said, 'Have you come out here to arrest me as if I were some robber? Do you believe you have to be heavily armed with swords and spears to seize me? Here I was, sitting daily with you in the Temple, teaching, and you didn't arrest me; but this is all being allowed to happen that the scriptures the prophets wrote might be fulfilled: but this is your hour and the power of darkness and desolation shall prevail. However, your time will be short.'

"The mob moved forward with several of the soldiers trotting quickly left and right with their spears at the trail, intending to surround the whole group. Quickly, the disciples all melted into the darkness, and fled as fast as they could.

"Years later, young John Mark (the author of the second Gospel), admitted that he had been among the group when he wrote about a 'certain young man' who had followed along after them, being clothed only with a linen cloth about his naked body, and when they mistook him for one of the disciples, grabbing at his clothing, he left the linen cloth and fled away naked (Mark 14:51,52).

"This took place probably either a little before or a little after midnight."

Peter's actions in attempting to kill Malchus, the officer of the high priest, are only understandable in the context of Peter's frustration at seeing Jesus allowing Himself to be arrested. Always boisterous, brash, displaying a rough and ready bravado, Peter had vowed He would go to the death with Jesus if necessary! Peter had been frustrated time and time again when it seemed as if Jesus would seize a certain, wonderfully appropriate moment to begin His *coup d'etat*, and set up His kingdom.

His actions are also understandable when one considers the words of Christ only hours earlier, just after the disciples' argument over who would be greatest in the kingdom.

"And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have You, that he may sift you as wheat [a satanic winnowing," in opposition to the "winnowing of the chaff" accomplished by the Holy Spirit; this in reference to Satan's desire to completely corrupt Peter]: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and *when thou art converted* [Peter was yet *carnal*; he did not have God's Holy Spirit], strengthen thy brethren.' And he said unto Him, 'Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death.' And He [Christ] said, 'I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me'" (Luke 22:31-34).

This is exactly what took place (Matthew 26:69-75). Three times, Peter cursed and swore, denying that he had ever known Jesus.

"Then began he [for the third time] to curse and to swear, saying, 'I know not the man.' And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, 'Before the cock crow, thou shall deny me thrice.' And he went out, and wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:75).

Each one of the disciples experienced his own broken-hearted chagrin after Christ's resurrection. Remember, "then *all the disciples* forsook Him, and fled" (Matthew 26:56). Even John, that "disciple whom Jesus loved," forsook Jesus and fled.

As Jesus Christ was dying, He saw John and the others standing well back in the crowd. Mary, His mother was there, as was her sister, and "Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved [John], He saith unto His mother, 'Woman, behold thy son!' Then saith He to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home" (John 19:25-27).

What was going through John's mind? What were the thoughts of *all* His disciples? We can well imagine the feelings of guilt, remorse, and self-doubt, as well as their conflicting feelings of *fear*, for they did not want to be arrested and murdered. We can imagine their terrible shame, for they must have felt that they had shown themselves cowards.

So it was that Jesus Christ called, shaped, molded, trained, and tested His disciples. He knew the terrible *trials* they would face. He knew, and plainly prophesied, that some of them would meet horrible deaths, even as they would kill the Savior of the world.

By all these tests, Christ was hammering, shaping, tempering the spiritual *character* that would form the building blocks of His "church," or group of specially "called-out ones."

The Great Commission To the Group

At the time of Christ's resurrection, the disciples were incredulous. None of them truly believed He was alive. They were unwilling witnesses, having to be truly *convinced* that Jesus Christ had indeed risen from the dead.

The evening of the first day of the week following His resurrection, Christ materialized before His disciples inside a room where the doors had been shut, because they feared discovery and arrest.

"Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and said unto them, 'Peace be unto you' (John 20:19).

Later, when Thomas heard of it, for he had not been there when Jesus appeared, he said, "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe. And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut [He was now *born of God by the resurrection* (1 Corinthians 15:20,23; Romans 8:29), and was able to literally dematerialize into spirit, or materialize into His physical form!], and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace be unto you.' Then saith He to Thomas, 'Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.' And Thomas answered and said unto Him, 'My Lord and My God!' Jesus saith unto him, 'Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed'" (John 20:26-29).

Jesus had appeared earlier to Mary, near the sepulcher. He appeared to two of the women, one of whom was Cleopas, on the road to Emmaus. They sadly related to Him all the events of the past days, not knowing Who He was. "Then He said unto them, 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?' And *beginning at Moses* [the first five books of the Bible] and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:25-27). When He opened their eyes to understand who He was, He "vanished out of their sight" (verse 31).

Christ instructed them to go to Galilee, saying He would see them there (Matthew 28:10). The account of this third appearance to a sizeable group of them is given in John 21. Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James and John, and two others were offshore in the Sea of Galilee, fishing. "And that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said unto them, 'Children, have ye any meat?' They answered Him, 'No.' And He said unto them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.' They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes" (John 21:3-6). Read the entire chapter slowly. Peter finally recognized Jesus, cast himself into the lake, and swam rapidly to shore, to find Jesus standing over a fire, with fish already cooking.

Then follows the moving account of Jesus asking Simon Peter three times whether Peter loved Him, and *three times* saying to Peter, "Feed my sheep!" Christ also prophesied that Peter would be martyred (verses 18,19), and that John would live into his old age (verses 20-24).

Later, on a mountain overlooking the Sea of Galilee, perhaps the site of His "Sermon on the Mount" three and one-half years earlier, Christ appeared to His group of men, and gave them the *Great Commission*.

"Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but *some doubted* [not all had been present in the boat; not all had seen Him each time—some few still doubted, even now]. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, 'All *power* is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach [enlist as students: make disciples of] *all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world [Greek: *aeon*, meaning age"], Amen'" (Matthew 28:16-20).

What had He taught them? A *massive* amount of information! Notice, "And He said unto them, 'These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that *all things must be fulfilled*, which were written in the law of *Moses*, and in the *prophets*, and in the psalms [writings], concerning me'" (Luke 24:44).

The books of the Old Testament are arranged in this precise order in the "Hebrew Old Testament." The Law, or the "Torah," the Prophets, and the Writings. The proper ending of the Old Testament should be II Chronicles, not Malachi.

How many churches and religious organizations pay any attention to the *Old Testament* today? Yet, these were the *only Scriptures extant* during the life of Christ, and for about twenty-four years after His resurrection.

Christ opened their understanding concerning all *the prophecies* in the Bible about Him! That means He expounded to them such prophecies as Daniel 2, 4, 7, 11, and 12; Isaiah 2 and 11; Micah 4 and Zechariah 14, as well as *many other prophecies* in which Jesus Christ and *His coming world-ruling government* are the central theme!

He showed them that He, Jesus Christ, is the "Stone that was cut out without hands" that is to smash the final, ten-nation, world power at the time of His second coming (Daniel 2:44). He showed them that He will *rule* all nations with a rod of iron; that He will put an end to war (Isaiah 2:1-5; Micah 4:1-5). He would have expounded to them the wonderful *good news* of how the whole world would be *changed* during His millennial reign on earth (Isaiah 11: 1-16); how He would gather all the " outcasts of Israel" from around the world, and how all the gentile nations would seek Jesus Christ (Isaiah 11:10-12). He would have expounded Daniel 12, about the Great Tribulation and the resurrection of the dead; about the "abomination of desolation," and the time of God's intervention into human affairs.

Christ's commission to His group of specially called-out ones was not a brief statement. It may have consumed many *hours* of intensive instruction! There is a *great deal* of information concerning Christ and His kingdom in the scriptures He expounded to them!

These men *knew* the true meaning of the "GOOD NEWS" Christ was instructing them to preach. They had been trained, educated, tried, and tested. They had been shamed and humbled by their rejection of Him at the moment when He needed them most. They had been made *deeply repentant* as a result of their experiences. Remember, these men *never heard* the word *gospel*. Jesus spoke to them in *Aramaic*, not in English. The English language was not to emerge for many centuries. Our English word *gospel* comes from *two* old Anglo-Saxon words. It means, simply, "good news"!

Notice Mark's account of the Great Commission: "And He said unto them, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the *gospel* to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned [Judged, or condemned] '" (Mark 16:15,16).

Today, the word *gospel* is almost universally misunderstood. To millions of professing Christians, it means the story *about* Jesus Christ; that Christ died to save sinners; that we must believe on Him to be saved.

But this is only a *part* of the good news Christ brought. There is a vast difference between the *message Christ brought* from His Father, and a message *about the Person* of Christ! Neither can be left out!

Jesus Christ commissioned His disciples to *preach* the message He had delivered to them. What was that message?

The Real Gospel

After John's ministry, when he had been cast into prison, Jesus Christ began to preach. "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, 'REPENT: for the *kingdom of heaven* is at hand!'" (Matthew 4:17).

Mark's account says, "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel [good news] of the *kingdom of God*, And saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the *kingdom of God* is at hand: REPENT ye, and believe the gospel [good news]" (Mark 1: 14,15).

Luke wrote, "And He said unto them, 'I must *preach the kingdom of God* to other cities also: for therefore am I sent'" (Luke 4:43).

Mark, Luke, and John all use the term *Kingdom of God*, while Matthew used the term *Kingdom of Heaven*. All wrote of the same thing. Jesus Christ spoke of His coming kingdom, which is to be a world-ruling kingdom (Isaiah 2; 11; Micah 4).

Briefly, any kingdom must consist of at least *four major parts*. It must have a king who rules over his kingdom. The King of kings and Lord of lords who will *rule* for one thousand years is Jesus Christ (Revelation 20:4). It must have *territory* over which the king rules. Christ's territory will be this *good, green earth* (Isaiah 2; 11; Micah 4; Zechariah 14:4; Revelation 2:26; 5:10; 20:4). Many chapters of the prophecies of your Bible describe conditions which will prevail *on this earth* when Jesus Christ sets up His kingdom. His kingdom will indeed be a *new world order*, for Christ will completely *reorder civilization!*

Next, it must have subjects over which the king rules. The subjects of Christ's kingdom will consist of *all nations* of the entire world! "And out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should *smite the nations*: and He shall RULE them with a rod of iron: and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Revelation 19:15,16).

"And His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south ... And it shall be in that day, that living waters [Ezekiel 47:1-12] shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea [Mediterranean], and half of them toward the hinder sea [the Dead Sea]: in summer and in winter shall it be. And the Lord shall be *King over all the earth*: in that day shall there be one LORD and His name one" (Zechariah 14:4-9).

There are *dozens* of scriptures—whole *chapters* of your Bible—describing the millennial reign of Jesus Christ as King of kings on this earth. It will be a totally *autocratic* government, but in the hands of very God, Jesus Christ of Nazareth and His born-again brothers and sisters, members of His own divine family, who will be *ruling over towns, cities and countries with Him* (Revelation 2:26). It will be a *kind and gentle* government, yet a government which will *enforce* its laws—one which will bring *true justice for all*.

Finally, a kingdom requires a king who rules over His subjects by law. What will be the laws by which Christ rules?

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain [a symbol of a *government*] of the Eternal's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills [lesser nations]; and *all nations* shall flow unto it. And many *people* shall go and say, 'Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Eternal, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths': for out of Zion shall go forth *the LAW*, and the word of the Eternal from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:2-4).

There will be no more nuclear weapons. No chemical and biological weapons. No SCUDs or long-range nuclear bombers or intercontinental ballistic missiles! There will be *total world disarmament!* The King of kings will outlaw all war, and all war-making technology will be destroyed, and forever banned!

God will *punish* the sinning nations of this world because they have *broken His laws!* Jesus Christ will govern and rule by imposing God's *holy and righteous LAWS* upon all of mankind.

"Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto My words, nor to my LAW but rejected it" (Jeremiah 6:19).

The good news Jesus Christ taught His disciples was a vast, globe-girdling message of mind-boggling, awesome proportions! He spoke of a time of the complete destruction of civilization as we know it; the time of the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21,22), the Day of the Lord, and His second coming to *rule* all nations with a rod of iron!

It is the *good news* that Jesus Christ died to save all mankind from the penalty for sin, which is death by Gehenna fire! It is the *good news* that God is a loving, *merciful* God, who *will forgive* us when we repent, who will beget us as His children, who will admit us into His great, world-governing kingdom when Christ returns.

What *good news* it is to the teeming populations of Zaire, China, India, Sudan, Iraq, Brazil, Mexico, Canada, Germany, Russia, Bangladesh, Bosnia, the United States—all the nations of the world—that *Jesus Christ of Nazareth* is soon going to return to this earth, this time in the *power and majesty of Almighty God!*

You cannot think of a terrible problem Jesus Christ will not solve! Today, we live in a world of tragedy, accidents, infant mortality, crime, drugs, divorce, sickness and disease, squalor, poverty, brutality, and war! Our daily news is *heartbreaking!* The problems of the world are simply *too big* to be solved by any government of man!

But none of this world's problems are too big to be solved by Jesus Christ! He has *unlimited* power. He told them, 'All *power* is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and *teach all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world [age]. Amen" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Christ's great commission to His group of called-out ones came in two *important parts*. First, they were to announce the *good news*—meaning preach the gospel—to all the world as a witness. Second, they were to *feed the flock, to care for the church* that would be formed as a result of repentant believers.

The book of Acts is a history of the growth and development of the early church

It details how they were virtually overwhelmed with thousands of newly converted believers on the Day of Pentecost; how there had to be organization to *care for* these people, especially the widows and the elderly (Acts 6:1-7).

Today, God's church continues to perform *both* of the two-part commission Jesus Christ gave it. We strive to preach the *good news* of Christ's soon-coming kingdom as far and as wide as possible, within the means God Himself makes available.

Then, we strive as best we humanly can, with God's loving and patient help, to *care for the church*.

God's true church has *come out* of this world. It is "apolitical," in the sense that it does not attempt to influence government; it has no lobbyists in Washington or anywhere else; it does not attempt to influence the outcome of elections: it does not plot to intervene in the human governments of this world.

God's true church will *never* be involved in violence! It will never stockpile arms, or engage in "paramilitary" maneuvers, or be involved in any attempts to overthrow the government by force, whether local, county, state, or national governments!

God's people are commanded to *pray for their leaders*, not become engaged in conspiracies to overthrow them by force! Even during the cruel days of the Roman Empire, Paul, writing to the *church in Rome itself*, said, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation [judgment]. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same. For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister [servant] of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans 13:1-4).

The heart and core of Christ's teaching was to *love even your enemies*, to "turn the other cheek," and to pray for those that would despitely use you and persecute you.

Jesus Christ did not come *to forcibly*, overthrow the governments in Palestine during His physical life. He has never intended His own "called-out ones," who form His true church, to be involved in *armed violence* of any kind!

Instead, He commissioned His apostles to go into all the world and *announce the good news* (preach the gospel) that Jesus Christ Himself will *return to this earth*, and rule it with a rod of iron!

As such, God's church is the *instrument* in His hands to do *His work*!

Finally, when Jesus Christ decides His witness and warning message has reached enough people—when He decides to intervene in human affairs—He will return to this earth in all the power and glory of God.

John saw this *happening* in vision: "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and He that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth judge and *make war* His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns, and He had a name written, that no man knew, but He Himself. And He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should *smite the nations*: and He shall *RULE* them with a rod of iron: and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He hath on His vesture on His thigh a name written, **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS** ... And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him that sat on the horse, and against His army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of Him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of His mouth [by divine fiat, or command]: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh" (Revelation 19:11-21).

Jesus Christ is coming back to this earth at the head of vast millions of angelic hosts. He will catch up His saints to *meet Him in the air* (2 Thessalonians 4:17). His feet will stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4). He will *smash* the ten-nation combine (Revelation 17:12-14) that is the beast power, and establish His *kingdom* on this earth, in His new world capital, New Jerusalem!

The work of His church is to *prepare the way* for this globe-girdling, awesome event; to *announce* this great, wonderful, *good news* to the suffering millions of this earth!

Never forget that our Savior commanded us, "WATCH ye therefore, and *pray always*, that ye might be accounted worthy to *escape* all these things [the things of the Great Tribulation] that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36).

He told us we are to pray, "Thy *kingdom come*, thy will be done, on *earth*, as it is in heaven."

Even so, *come*, Lord Jesus!

-End-

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The Garner Ted Armstrong Evangelistic Association
P.O. Box 747
Flint, TX 75762
Phone: (903) 561-7070 • Fax: (903) 561-4141

More FREE literature is available at our Internet Web Site:

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