

The Gospel of the Kingdom

A Message For Our Time and the Twenty-First Century!

Millions have heard what they believe is the "gospel." Most have heard a gospel "about" Jesus Christ, but they have NEVER HEARD the gospel HE BROUGHT! Jesus Christ came preaching the "gospel of the Kingdom of God." Few know WHAT He preached! As shocking as it may sound, as UNBELIEVABLE as it may seem, millions of professing Christians *have NEVER HEARD the real gospel!*

by Garner Ted Armstrong

To most, the word *gospel* refers to the distant past. Like the familiar old hymn, "Tell Me The Old, Old Story," it is something old, something ancient. Those who believe they are hearing the "gospel" from radio and television preachers, or from the pulpits of local churches, hear about "Jesus and His love," again and again. They believe they are hearing a very *old* story, something that took place about two thousand long years ago.

Millions assume this "old, old story" about Jesus is the "gospel." Yet, as surprising as it may sound, millions have *never heard the real gospel!* Such a statement sounds incredible. Yet, it is true.

Far from being *only* the story about Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, the gospel is *also the message He brought*. The gospel Jesus Christ preached has to do with *our day, now*, and with the immediate future. The word *gospel* itself conveys a *futuristic message*, a description of the world in the next century, and on into the future for all eternity.

The real gospel includes the answers to the most perplexing questions confronting mankind for his entire existence on earth: Who are we? *What* are we? WHY are we here? Are we a conscious "soul," inside of an aging body; a "soul" which lives on consciously after the body dies? Do we live on a "soul factory," where thousands of "souls" are coming into existence each day all over the world, while thousands are flitting up to heaven, or going down to "hell"?

Is God like an "absentee Landlord," who set all this in motion, and who now waits somewhere "up there," with "Saint Peter at the pearly gates" busily welcoming the incoming souls, while the Devil dances with glee as he welcomes those who descend to "hell"?

The real gospel *answers* the most profound questions of life. Christ's message explains how we can be changed from flesh to spirit; how we can be *reborn* into *spirit*; how we can become *coheirs* with Christ, sharing with Him the wondrous power of eternal life, judging, ruling with Him during His millennial reign on earth. What you are about to read is the truth. It stands proved beyond the shadow of a doubt in your own Bible.

"*Repent*," said Jesus Christ, "for the *kingdom of heaven* is at hand!" (Matthew 4:17). All three of the other Gospel writers, Mark, Luke, and John, used the expression *Kingdom of God*. "Now after that John [the Baptist] was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel 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" (Mark 1:15).

Contained in those words is a globe-girdling, centuries-long *prophetic* message, a message about *our time now*, and the years just ahead of us, which millions of professing Christians have never understood! Notice that Christ's gospel was not entitled "The Gospel About Me." Instead, it was the gospel of the *Kingdom of God*.

The English word *gospel* might as well be deleted from most dictionaries, and expunged from the language. Millions, while believing they have "received Christ," and while they "believe on Jesus," have not the faintest idea of the *real meaning* of the word. The English word *gospel* carries with it many different "religious"

connotations. As stated above, the first and foremost meaning attached to it is the story about Jesus Christ. People who go to an evangelistic campaign or a revival service to "hear the gospel" expect to hear about Jesus Christ, not a message about wars and rumors of wars, droughts, famines, earthquakes, plagues, and a great false prophet calling down fire from heaven.

People say, "That's gospel, brother," meaning "that is the truth." There are "gospel" churches, where the real *message* Jesus preached is never heard, but where hundreds of sermons about Christian living, love, joy, peace, faith, and other Bible themes are preached. "Gospel" music means a huge, multi-billion-dollar industry of dozens of singing stars, quartets, and family singing groups.

Countless numbers of professing Christians have gone to church services all their lives, participating in responsive readings and prayers, song services, and baptisms; reciting the "Apostles' Creed," and listening to sermons. Yet, they have rarely, if ever, heard about the future destiny of all nations; about the cataclysmic time of the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord. The hair-raising scenes described by Jesus Christ are not popular material for sermons. That is why most preachers avoid prophecy, and prefer to stick to sermons about the three graces of love, joy, and peace, and sundry religious philosophies.

Christ certainly spoke about love. He spoke about forgiveness and humility. He gave mankind the "golden rule," that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us. But Christ also continually referred to *His coming kingdom*. His was a message about the coming resurrection from the dead; about massive *wars*, droughts, famines, and destructive earthquakes; about signs in the heavens, and the nations of the earth staggered by imagination-defying plagues. His message was about His return to this earth in the splendor, power, and glory of God; a message about smashing the God-defying governments of this world, and establishing His globe-girdling, wonderful kingdom, bringing *world peace* at last!

The word *gospel* comes from two old Anglo-Saxon words. It comes from "good," and "spell," or *spiel*, in the German. Simply, it means "good *news*." Not understanding the main thrust of Christ's message, most have concentrated on the *Messenger*, and *ignored* the *message He brought*. It would be as if a family answered their doorbell to find a Western Union messenger boy at the door. As he attempted to deliver to them the *message* he had been sent to deliver, the family ecstatically embraced him. Then, they wanted to know all about him: Where was he born? How old was he? What were his favorite tastes? How did he wear his hair? Was he a nice boy? Was he gentle and kind? What did he believe? How about his dear mother? Then, after he left, they turned away from the door, oblivious to the telegram he had dropped on the porch. As the years passed, they continually spoke of the "wonderful messenger boy" who had come to their home that day, so long ago. Millions of nominal Christians have adoringly "believed on" the *Messenger*, while remaining ignorant of His *message*. To truly understand the gospel message Jesus Christ brought, we must understand each of the following points:

- (1) Who, or what, was Jesus Christ before His human birth?
- (2) *Why* did He come into this world?
- (3) What was the *message* He delivered to His disciples?
- (4) Why did He speak in puzzles (parables) to the general public?
- (5) Why did He die?
- (6) Was He resurrected?
- (7) How long was He in the tomb?
- (8) Is He alive today?
- (9) What has He been doing ever since His resurrection?
- (10) Is He going to return to this earth?

Each one of these vitally important questions must be answered. Each one of them bears directly upon the main elements of the gospel, and each was addressed by Jesus Christ Himself.

Who, or *What*, Was Jesus Christ Before His Human Birth?

Not only is this question one of the most important that could be asked, the answer to it unlocks to our understanding many, many fundamental truths from God's Word. It answers questions about whether the law of God is "done away," whether the "Old Testament is done away," whether the New Covenant means a Christian need not *obey God's Ten Commandments*, whether the Sabbath day is required to be kept.

Now, notice this important passage of Scripture from John's Gospel. Read it slowly and carefully, and *believe* God's Word:

"In the beginning was the Word [Greek: *Logos*, meaning "Spokesman"] and the Word was with God [Greek: *Theos*, the equivalent of the Hebrew *Elohim*], and the Word *was God*. The same was in the beginning with God. *All things were made by Him*; and without Him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:1-3).

There are only two places in the Bible where the phrase *in the beginning* is used: here in John 1:1, and in Genesis 1:1. Here, we read that the One who created the universe, the One who "spoke and it was so," was the same Personage of the Sovereign Godhead who *became Jesus Christ of Nazareth*.

Notice further: "He was in the world, and the *world was made by Him*, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own [the Jews], and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the *sons of God*, even to them that believe on His name: Which were born [Greek: *gennaio*, which means either "begotten" or "born"], not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was *made flesh*, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:10-14).

There is simply no argument whatsoever that these plain words mean anyone except Jesus Christ. He was the "Word," or the Divine Spokesman, who said "Let there be light," and "Let the dry land appear," and "Let us make man in our image" (Genesis 1:3,9,26). For centuries, nominal Christians have assumed that God of the Old Testament was the *Father*.

They assume that Jesus Christ came to this earth many centuries after Moses and the prophets to *do away* with His Father's old law! But why would anyone assume such, when these scriptures, in the very first chapter of John, one of the four Gospel accounts, absolutely *prove* that the One who became Jesus Christ is the One who did the creating?

Then what are the logical consequences of this truth?

They are that millions do not know that Jesus Christ, in His prehuman form, was the One who called Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the One who wrestled with Jacob, and renamed him "Israel"; the One who spoke to Moses out of the burning bush; the One who wrote the Ten Commandments with His own finger! He is the One who proposed the Old Covenant to Israel; the One who inspired the prophets; and the One who sent both Israel and Judah into captivity for breaking His laws!

Notice further proof from your own Bible: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, *by whom also He made the worlds*; Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:1-3).

The entire book of Hebrews magnifies the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ. The first chapter, which sets the stage for the twelve chapters to follow, exalts Jesus Christ as the One "for whom, and by whom, are all things." Read now, with some inset explanations for clarification, the beautiful words which extol and exalt our Savior; how He is the One through whom the divine Father created all things:

"Being made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee? And again, I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to me a Son? And again, when He bringeth in the firstbegotten [Jesus Christ, born of the virgin Mary] into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him. "And of the angels He saith, Who maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers ["servants," another expression for angels, not humans] a flame of fire. But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O GOD [Greek, *Theos*], is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy *kingdom* [Jesus Christ will rule on this earth for 1,000 years (Revelation 2:26; 3:21; 20:4)]. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. And, *thou, Lord* [referring to Jesus Christ], in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the *works of thine hands*" (Hebrews 1:4-10).

There is simply no question whatsoever about the meaning of both John 1 and Hebrews 1. Both reveal that Jesus Christ, in His prehuman state as a divine member of *Elohim*, was the Creator of the universe, of this earth, and of all life upon it!

Notice the eternal inheritance of Christ: "They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail. But to which of the angels said He at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Hebrews 1:11-14).

If millions of professing Christians knew these profound yet simple truths, they would have an entirely different concept of Jesus Christ. They would recognize Him as the One who gave His law to Israel, and they would come to know that Jesus Christ is "*the same*, yesterday, today, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8), and that He says He "*changes not*" (see Malachi 3:6). Now that we know who Jesus Christ was prior to His human, physical birth, let's see *why* He came into this world.

Why Did Jesus Christ Come Into This World?

Millions have puzzled over the plan of salvation. They wonder, "Why did Jesus have to die for the sins of mankind?" And many wonder, "How could the death of just one man atone for the sins of so many?"

First, we must understand that God Almighty is reproducing after His own kind! Creation was not finished in the Garden of Eden, it was just begun! The creation of the universe and our earth took place perhaps nearly five billion long years ago, the way man counts time. When God (the One who became Christ in human flesh) created our earth, He created a beautiful, perfect world, and then placed an archangel, named Lucifer, over His creation.

The world was lush, verdant, teeming with pre-Adamic life; it was a place of precious stones and metals, a fabulously beautiful place. Notice how God's Word describes this pre-Adamic world, and tells us what happened:

"Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius [ruby], topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created" (Ezekiel 28:11-13).

Here, the king of Tyre is used as a *type of Lucifer*, who became Satan the devil. The expression, "Thou

sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty," could never be spoken of any human being.

"Thou art the *anointed cherub that covereth*; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire" (Ezekiel 28:14). God's throne is depicted by the famous Ark of the Covenant, which had two cherubim with their wings overspreading the "mercy seat." The ark was a symbol of God's throne; the two cherubim represented two of the spirit beings around God's throne.

"Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee" (Ezekiel 28:14,15). Truth is truly stranger than fiction. While millions eagerly devour such motion pictures or television movies as *Star Wars*, and those featuring great empires in the universe, locked in space-age combat with death rays and spaceships; whole stars and planets exploding--very few understand the truth about pre-Adamic creation; about the time, perhaps billions of years in the past, when an archangel ruled the world.

But Lucifer was not content with his assigned place on earth. God had placed fully one third of the angelic hosts beneath his control. For countless years, Lucifer "walked up and down" on the earth, talking, reasoning, arguing, trying to sell his point of view. He felt God was not *fair*; that God had the whole universe while he, Lucifer, had only the earth to rule.

Notice the description given of these events in Isaiah:

"How art thou *fallen from heaven*, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will *ascend into heaven*, I will exalt *my throne above* the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be *like the most High*" (Isaiah 14:12-14).

Lucifer finally succeeded in completely perverting the angels who were under his rule. Lucifer attempted to mount up to heaven and *overthrow* God.

Notice: "By the multitude of thy merchandise ["trafficking," going about as a salesman, merchandising] they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire" (Ezekiel 28:16,17). The phrase "multitude of thy merchandise" is obscure in the old King James English. It means "the abundance of your trafficking," conveying the idea of merchandising, or selling. It was a revolutionary *idea* Lucifer was selling. Bullinger's *Companion Bible* says: "Merchandise=traffic, or going about, as in *v. 18*. Hence it meant calumniator (slanderer), in a moral sense" (p. 1146).

Finally, the time came when Lucifer and his angels attempted to overthrow God Himself. But God hurled them out, and in a frenzy of hatred and anger, Satan and his angels destroyed the earth. All astronomy shows a *wrecked* solar system; our lifeless, pockmarked moon shows that countless meteors and asteroids have smashed into its surface. The other planets and their moons show identical characteristics. Mars' lifeless surface is littered with rock; Venus is obscured beneath thick, poisonous gases; Jupiter's storms, larger than the earth, swirl and rage.

Notice that our Bible opens with the scene of a lifeless, ruined earth; the tectonic plates and continental land masses lying beneath raging, stygian black seas, covered by the thickest clouds.

"In the beginning God [*Elohim*: more than one person] created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was [became] without form [Hebrew: *tohu*], and void [Hebrew: *bohu*]; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Genesis 1:1-3).

Now, notice the biblical proof that the earth was not *originally created* "void and waste," which is conveyed

by the Hebrew words *tohu* and *bohu*.

"For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God Himself that formed the earth and made it; He hath established it, He created it *not* in vain [*tohu*], He formed it to *be inhabited*: I am the LORD; and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:18).

Bullinger's comment on this verse is interesting: "in vain=*tohu*. The same word as in Gen. 1.2 ('without form'). Therefore it must have *become tohu*: which is exactly what Gen. 1.2 declares:...In Gen. 1.1 we have 'the world that then was' (cp. 2 Pet. 3.6); and in v. 2 we have the ruin into which it fell. We are not told how, when, or why, or how long it lasted. When geologists have settled how many years they require, they may place them between vv. 1 and 2 of Gen. 1. In Gen. 1.2-2.4, we have 'the heavens and the earth which are now' of 2 Pet. 3.7. Both are set in contrast with the 'new heavens and the new earth' of 2 Pet. 3:13" (Bullinger's *Companion Bible*, p. 989).

All the events depicted in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 concerning Lucifer's abortive attempt to overthrow God took place between the time when the earth was created in flawless beauty and perfection, and the time when it *became tohu* and *bohu*, or empty, waste, and chaotic. There may have been a vast amount of time--perhaps billions of years the way we reckon time today--between the earlier, perfect creation, and the time of the recreation of earth's surface revealed in Genesis 1:2 and subsequent verses.

Jesus Christ frequently made reference to His prehuman existence. He enraged the Jews when He told them, "Before Abraham was, I AM!" (John 8:58). Will we *believe* Christ, as well as "believe on Him"? When His disciples returned to Him, joyous that demons had obeyed them in Christ's name, He said to them, "*I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven!*" (Luke 10:18). Of course He did, for He was *there, with the Divine Father*. The two of them, both of whom comprise *Elohim* were at the site of the throne of God when Satan attempted his violent rebellion! Do you *believe* Christ? He said He was *there* to see Satan fall like a flash of lightning or a blazing comet from heaven to this earth!

Following the creation of man, Satan instantly appeared in the Garden. It was essentially the same location he had inhabited prior to the wreckage of the earth, as we read in Ezekiel 28:13. But Satan did not appear as a snake wound around a tree. The Hebrew word is *nachash*, which means "whispering enchanter," and conveys no physical aspect.

From the very beginning, the one who became Jesus Christ had planned, with the one He revealed as the "Father," the creation of man as a *prototype of the Divine Family*. They said to each other, "Let US make man in OUR image" (Genesis 1:26). They placed in Eden a tree, called "the tree of life," and another tree, called the tree of the "knowledge of good and evil." Adam and Eve were told they could eat of any tree, of which there were hundreds, but were not to partake of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:9). Were they real trees? The Bible says they were. Many fables have been built around the creation account, and the story of "Adam and Eve in the Garden." But there is no evidence the evil fruit was an apple. And the "voice box" visible in many men's throats is not *really* their "Adam's apple."

One of the most harmful fables is that the first sin was a *sex* sin. But that is ludicrous on its face, for God said, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:28). Later, He said, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). God's Word contains much about marriage. The Third and the Seventh Commandments have to do with the family and the home, as does the Tenth Commandment.

The creature that appeared to Adam and Eve may well have been like a *cherub*. Lucifer, who became Satan, was one of three named "archangels" in the Bible. The others are Michael and Gabriel. Apparently, God assigned *one-third* of all the angels to each one. Study Ezekiel 1 and 10, together with Isaiah 6, for information about cherubim and seraphim. Each cherub appeared in four aspects: that of a man, an eagle, a lion, and an ox.

Throughout many ancient civilizations, including those in Mexico, Central and South America, the Mideast and far beyond, in China and Japan, are mythological creatures which display the characteristics of cherubim and seraphim. The Sphynx, guarding the great pyramid, features the body of a lion and the head of a man. Huge, man-headed bulls, with eagle's wings and lion's claws and tails appear as decorations on the walls of ancient cities, and in their palaces. A "winged flying serpent" was worshiped by many of the ancient Indian tribes of Mexico and Central and South America, called "Quetzalcoatl." *Quetzal* is a bird, and *coatl* meant "serpent."

Satan, appearing in whatever aspect he did, immediately began *influencing* Eve. He implied that God was *unfair*. "Now the serpent [Hebrew, *nachash*, meaning "whispering enchanter"] was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:1-5).

Eve listened to the arguments of the "whispering enchanter," and took of the forbidden fruit. Adam joined with her, and thus was committed the original sin. The sin was a combination of several things. First, they disobeyed their only Parent, who was God. They allowed the forbidden fruit to come between them and obedience to God, making it an "idol," for "covetousness is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5). They stole the fruit, which did not belong to them, but was expressly forbidden. They coveted the "knowledge of good and evil," and they listened to the Devil's subtle arguments, wanting to be "like God!"

Adam and Eve were created with "human nature." Human nature is a mixture of many motives, emotions, and passions; primarily those of vanity, jealousy, lust, and greed. Speaking of the nature of man, Paul wrote, "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is *enmity against God*: for it is *not subject* to the law of God, neither indeed *can* be" (Romans 8:5-7).

The word *carnal* means "physical," or "fleshly." Adam and Eve were not spiritually minded, for they had not yet taken of the "tree of life" which God placed in the Garden. They were both easily influenced by Satan.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2,3).

The Bible says Adam was "not deceived," because it was *Eve* who listened to the Devil's arguments; who took of the forbidden fruit, and then gave it to her husband. Adam docilely went along with his wife's decision.

Paul told Timothy, "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (1 Timothy 2:13,14). Through our first parents, *original sin* entered the world. Sin is the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4).

Writing of this essential truth, Paul said, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: For until the law [the codifying of the law at Sinai] sin was in the world: but *sin is not imputed when there is no law*. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who [Moses, not Adam] is the figure of Him that was to come" (Romans 5:12-14).

Almighty God is perfect. He is perfect character; perfectly righteous and holy. God is ALL POWERFUL. He has the power to create, and He has the power to *destroy*. Once the first family had sinned; had yielded to the Devil's temptations, God *would not allow them to partake of the tree of life*. Study the second and third chapters of Genesis. Once they had sinned, Adam and Eve became aware that they were naked. Now, nakedness carried *shame* with it, where previously they had been like two little children, blissfully unaware, and unashamed.

Notice the account: "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And He said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel. Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for *dust thou art* [the Hebrew word connotes "red clay."] and unto *dust* shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:6-19).

God revealed long ago to His righteous patriarchs, His prophets, and the apostles, that the reference to "her Seed" is a veiled reference to Christ. Modern Bible scholars agree on this. Halley wrote, concerning the Seed of the woman: "Here, immediately after the Fall of Man, is God's prophecy that His Creation of Man would yet prove to be successful, through the 'Seed of the Woman.' This is the Bible's first hint of a coming Redeemer. The use of 'He' (15) shows that One Person is meant...: Here, right at the start of the Bible story, is this foregleam of Christ; and, as the pages pass. Hints, Foregleams, Glimpses, Pictures and Plain Statements, become clearer and more abundant, so that, as we come to the end of the Old Testament, there has been drawn a fairly Complete Picture of Christ" (*Halley's Bible Handbook*, p. 67).

For centuries, philosophers have puzzled over why God did not make man so he *could* not sin. The answer is very simple. God is not in the process of creating automatons. He is recreating after His own kind! God is holy, righteous, perfect *character!* Character requires freedom of choice. It requires *free moral agency*.

God Almighty does not sin because He WILL NOT sin! There is no higher power that will not *let* God sin, for God is all powerful! But God is SELF-ruled! Because He is perfect *will* power--divine, righteous, holy character--God will always make the right choice!

You and I are creatures of choice. Each day, we choose whether to do this or that; whether to strive to live according to God's laws, and repent of our sins and weakness when we fail, or whether to live in defiance of God and His righteous laws.

God makes it clear that He has placed a *choice* before mankind. To Israel He said, "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore *choose*

life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19). God makes it clear that our human experience consists of two opposites. The way of life, and the way of death.

Innately, we tend toward the way of death, the way of sin. What does mankind experience? Look at the state of all of mankind today, and ask how far we have come toward the utopian blessings we all seek. What do we *want* out of life? We want good health, sound minds, strong bodies, love and understanding, success and material possessions. We want happy marriages; happy, healthy, obedient children; peaceful societies. But what does man experience? Mostly, he experiences sickness and disease, divorce, desertion and abandonment, infanticide in the form of abortion, illegitimacy, deformities, rampant crime even among our youth, drug abuse and addiction, murder, extortion, theft, mental illness, and war.

Why? Because of human nature, which is vanity, jealousy, lust, and greed!

God expelled our first parents from Eden, *lest* they partake of the tree of life in their sinful state!

From the very beginning, God *knew Adam and Eve would commit sin*. To ask, *why* He did not prevent it is to ignore the fundamental truths just discussed. But God also had thought out the *plan of redemption* of all mankind. John, transported forward in time through a vision from God, saw a symbolic woman, the *church*, which is both a shadowy depiction of Eve as well as Mary.

He wrote, "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars [symbolizing the twelve tribes of Israel: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads And his tail drew the third part of the *stars of heaven* [angels: Revelation 1:10], and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to His throne" (Revelation 12:1-5).

In these five verses, God reveals His timeless plan of redemption and salvation; of Satan's rebellion and Christ's triumph, as well as His ultimate reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Jesus Christ came into this world for all of the following reasons:

(1) To suffer and die for the sins of all mankind; His own creation! Because Jesus Christ is the Creator of all life, His ONE life is worth more than all the rest of human life combined.

(2) To qualify to become the future King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the future RULER of the world!

(3) To disqualify the present evil world ruler, who is Satan the devil (2 Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 12:9).

(4) To call and train His disciples, delivering to them the gospel message.

(5) To form His disciples into *His Church* (Matthew 16:18) and to *commission* them to carry the message He brought, the gospel, to all the world as a witness (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:44-49).

(6) To set all mankind an example, that we should follow in His steps, live as He lived.

(7) To fulfill the many Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ as the Messiah.

(8) To be resurrected from the dead after exactly three days and three nights in the tomb (see Matthew 12:40), thus becoming the "*Firstborn among many brethren*" (Romans 8:29).

(9) To send the Holy Spirit as He promised, thus building His true Church on the first Day of Pentecost.

One could easily amass many more reasons why Jesus Christ came to this earth as the humble carpenter from Nazareth. However, millions of nominal Christians believe Jesus Christ came to "save the world!" He did no such thing! Had He wanted to "save" it, He would have done so! But He did not come to save the world *then*. He said Himself that He spoke to the masses in puzzles, so they would not understand His message (Matthew 13:10-17).

Why? Because God Almighty has a great *plan* He is working out here below, and that plan is designed to fit a God-ordained time frame. God wants to eventually see *billions* of sons and daughters in His kingdom for an awesome, breathtaking purpose! Eventually, much, if not most of mankind will be saved.

What Was the Message He Delivered To His Disciples?

As we saw at the beginning of this book, Jesus Christ came preaching the "Gospel of the Kingdom of God." Jesus Christ did not come to "start the Christian religion"! He did not come to cause a revival in the synagogues. He did not come to "save" the world then! He came for all the reasons enumerated above, not the least of which was to deliver to His disciples the message He brought to this earth from His Father.

Christ said, "I have many things to say and to judge of you: but He that sent me is true; and I speak to the world *those things which I have heard of Him*. They understood not that He spake to them of the Father. Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am He, and that I do nothing *of myself*; but as my Father hath *taught* me, I speak *these things*. And He that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please Him. As He spake these words, many believed on Him" (John 8:26-30).

Time and time again, Jesus Christ insisted that the Father had expressly sent Him; that the Father had given Him the *message* He was to deliver to this world: "For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak" (John 12:49,50).

Constantly, Christ spoke of His coming *kingdom*. He spoke of the time when the righteous prophets and patriarchs would be in that kingdom; of the time when the disciples would sit on twelve thrones, judging the tribes of Israel!

During the famous Last Supper, an argument arose between some of the disciples about which one of them would be "the greatest" in Christ's kingdom. He chided them, reminding them that the gentile rulers "lorded it over their subjects," but commanded His disciples to be humble, as servants. Then, He said, "Ye are they which have continued with me 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 22:30).

Jesus Christ was prophesied to inherit an *earthly throne*; the throne of His father David. His disciples fully expected Him to ascend to a throne in Jerusalem, ruling over a restored kingdom like that of Solomon's time. They expected Him to throw out the occupying Roman armies, overthrow the Sanhedrin, and establish a theocracy.

When the archangel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would become the mother of the Messiah, he said, "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 for

ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:30-33).

Because of the false doctrines about the "immortality of the soul," and concepts of "going to heaven" when we die, millions are completely ignorant of the true gospel--the good news that Jesus Christ is coming back to *this earth to rule it with a rod of iron!*

Christ illustrated that fact by His "kingdom parables." He showed how the Kingdom of God would eventually fill the earth in His parable about leaven (Matthew 13:33); how it is of inestimable value (Matthew 13:44-46); how there will be some who answer His call to repentance, and some who will not, but who will be cast out (Matthew 13:47-50).

In one particularly outstanding parable, Christ described Himself as a young nobleman, who had traveled far away to obtain a *kingdom*, and then return: "And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds [British monetary standard], and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, *We will not have this man to reign over us.* And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, *have thou authority over ten cities.* And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those *mine enemies*, which would not that I should *reign over them*, bring hither, and *slay* them before me" (Luke 19:12-27).

This beautiful parable is rich in types. The young nobleman is a type of Christ. Each of the servants is a type of those He *calls* to share in His coming kingdom. The single "pound," or sum of money, is given to *each* of the servants, according to their natural talents and abilities. One, through diligent effort, which typifies living a life of *overcoming*, increases by tenfold. Another, through equal effort, but with less natural ability, increases his gift fivefold. The third *resents* the gift and the Giver. He is angry because it is *not his money!* He complains that the nobleman, Christ, is an "austere man," who "reaps where he did not sow," or who benefits from the labors of others! Rather than being thankful for the free *gift*, which typifies *salvation*, and then diligently working to increase the gift, which typifies *overcoming*, he hides his money, preparing to "give it back" exactly as he received it. Because he has not produced; because he has not grown, he loses out on both his reward *and* salvation!

The plain statements that the two who produced and overcame are to be "over cities" is a type of the fact that Jesus Christ promised positions of *rulership over the nations* to those who overcome.

Notice: "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give *power over the nations*: And he shall *rule* them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father" (Revelation 2:26,27). A potter, when he finds a pot that is defective after he has formed it, casts it down, smashing it to little pieces.

Notice how this same kind of analogy is used in Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream: His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay.

"Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:34,35).

The great image represents the four great world-ruling gentile kingdoms from the time of ancient Babylon to the present, and on into the future. The head of gold was Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, the chest and arms of silver the Persian Empire, the belly and thighs of brass the Greco-Macedonian kingdom under Alexander the Great, the legs and feet of iron mixed with clay the Roman Empire, which was to have successive resurrections down through history to our time. The ten toes represent the final union of ten nations which will be smashed into oblivion by Christ at His second coming (Revelation 17:12-14; 19:11-21).

Daniel interpreted the dream for Nebuchadnezzar. Notice the inescapable reference to the Second Coming of Christ; how He will smash the ten-nation combine called the Beast: "And in the days of these kings [the ten, depicted by the toes of the image] shall the God of heaven *set up a kingdom*, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall *break in pieces* and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall *stand for ever*. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone [a type of Christ, returning from heaven] was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it *brake in pieces* the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure" (Daniel 2:44,45).

This is not a "religious" prophecy! If you were to read news reports of a "United States of Europe" forming, armed to the teeth with nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons; a massive superpower of 250 million people with the economic, industrial, and military power to *conquer the United States*; if you read news reports of such a power *occupying Palestine*, you will not be reading of a "religious" event!

Christ's gospel was very much *prophetic*, as you can immediately see by reading His famous Olivet Prophecy found in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, together with the book of Revelation.

Millions of churchgoing, professing Christian people know *nothing* of the calamitous, tumultuous, catastrophic events Jesus Christ foretold. They remain *ignorant* of the powerful witness and warning about the FUTURE; about *our time, now*, and the immediate future before us in the *next century!*

These great events are to take place HERE, on our earth, among the nations of this world, in the near future. What was the message Jesus Christ delivered to His disciples? It is contained in the four Gospel accounts, of course. In a very brief summary in modern language, He explained to them that He was going to establish a world-ruling kingdom on this earth--the Kingdom of God. He showed it is to be a kingdom ruled by Jesus Christ Himself, and that they, and all others who will repent and receive God's Holy Spirit, can have a *part* in it. He showed that the powerful end-time Beast power will resist His return; how He will smash the Beast power and the False Prophet into oblivion, and bring PEACE to this war-torn world at last.

His disciples expected all this to happen in their lifetimes! Even after His resurrection, just before He was taken up into heaven, they asked, "Lord, wilt thou at *this time* restore again the kingdom to Israel? And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8).

The disciples had no doubt whatsoever about the globe-girdling significance of Christ's message. Read Matthew 24 in its entirety, and compare it with Luke's version of the same prophecy in Luke 21. Here are a few excerpts:

"And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and His disciples came to Him for to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as He sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him *privately*, saying, Tell us, *when* shall these things be? and what shall be the *sign of thy coming*, and of the end of the world [Greek: "age," not the end of the earth]? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of *wars* and *rumours* of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end [of the age; the time of His Second Coming] is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be *famines*, and *pestilences* [massive disease epidemics], and *earthquakes*, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows [trouble, or the Great Tribulation]" (Matthew 24:1-8).

Most of Jesus' teachings recorded in the Bible were given *in private* to His disciples. They were astonished when He told them the huge walls, columns, and buildings of the Temple would be leveled to the ground. They wanted to know what would signify His coming as King of Kings to rule the world; what signs they should expect would signal the end of the age of man's organized societies.

Notice how He characterized His Olivet Prophecy, calling it "THIS gospel," because it also contained the promise of His Second Coming: "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because *iniquity* [lawlessness; defiance of God's laws] shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall *endure unto the end*, the same shall be saved. And *this gospel of the kingdom* shall be preached in all the world for a *witness* unto all nations; and then shall the end [of the age; the end of civilization as we know it] come" (Matthew 24:9-14).

It is as much a witness *against* the nations as it is a witness *to* them, for it predicts massive wars, the loss of millions of human lives, cataclysmic "natural" disasters, and signs in the heavens, to be followed by Christ's return.

For decades I have asked, "What is 'religious' about a drought? What is 'religious' about a famine?" These are not "religious" predictions, but far-reaching, globe-girdling predictions of the most disastrous, mind-boggling destruction of human life and human civilization ever told!

It is a NOW message, a message for the immediate future, for the beginning of the next century!

Notice the stark predictions of Christ: "For then shall be *great tribulation*, such as was not since the *beginning of the world* to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be *shortened*, there should no flesh be saved [alive! This is not speaking of spiritual salvation, but the sparing of human life]: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:21,22).

Compare Christ's prophecy with a prophecy delivered by an archangel to Daniel concerning the same time: "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a *time of trouble*, such as *never was since there was a nation* even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:1,2).

What is the *time* element of this prophecy? It is exactly the *same* time as Christ described. There cannot be *two* times "such as have never been before," or they would mutually exclude each other. The phrase is hypersuperlative, a *unique* time in all world history.

Never could such language be completely understood until the advent of the atomic and hydrogen bomb.

Now, man has stockpiled enough nuclear explosives to wipe out all life on twenty worlds the size of ours! There are 25,000 nuclear warheads in the Russian arsenal alone! Many nations possess stockpiles of deadly biological agents, which can spread anthrax over vast regions; "botulin toxin," which can kill millions. Many nations possess horrifying chemical agents, such as poison gases. Such weapons were used by Saddam Hussein against his own people, the Kurds. Chemical weapons were stockpiled in forward ammunition dumps in the Gulf War. It has finally been admitted by the Pentagon that such an ammunition dump was blown up near the Kuwaiti border, and thousands of U.S. troops believe they were exposed to the chemicals, causing many different kinds of terrible disorders.

Today, a single B-52 bomber can carry the equivalent explosive force of more than two times the explosives unleashed by all sides during World War II. A single nuclear-powered submarine, called a "boomer" (because they carry many ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads), can unleash far more explosive power than all of World War II.

Jesus Christ did not deliver a sanctimonious message of sentimental "religious" posturing to His disciples, but a message about the coming *end of civilization as we know it*, and the earth-shaking INTERVENTION OF GOD in the form of the return of the conquering Christ!

Notice how Jesus Christ described this great event: "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; *believe it not*. For there shall arise *false* Christs, and *false* prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, *if* it were possible [but it is not!], they shall deceive the *very elect*...Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, He is in the desert; go not forth: behold, He is in the secret chambers; *believe it not*. For as the *lightning* cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:23-27).

Even today, there are those who will spread exactly such a false rumor. The word *lightning* merely means "a brightening," or "a glare." Because we say "thunder and lightning," we associate the brilliant discharge of electricity during a thunderstorm with the sound it makes and the rumbling echos produced by the clouds. Yet, the discharge of electricity during a storm can be from the ground up, or from cloud to cloud, or from the clouds to the ground. The only "lightening," or "brightening," or "glare" of which we know that "comes out of the east" and then "shines even unto the west" is the *sun!*

Christ is returning in such power and splendor that He will shine like the SUN in all its glory; so bright, so brilliant, that no human eye can look upon Him!

Notice how John described the glorified Christ He saw in vision: "His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a *flame of fire*; And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters. And He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and His countenance was as the *sun shineth in his strength*. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last" (Revelation 1:14-17).

The sun "transits the sky" once each day, as we express it (actually, it does no such thing; the earth rolls "away" from the sun which appears to "rise" in the east and "set" in the west).

At the Second Coming of Christ, there will be such awesome, gargantuan displays in the heavens that no human being on earth will remain unaware of them! The *Day* of the Lord may, on the "day for a year" theory (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6), actually consume *one year* being fulfilled!

The Great Tribulation, Heavenly Signs, and the Day of the Lord together consume three and one-half years. This is the *same* three and one-half-year period during which the following great events take place: (1) God's people Israel enter the Great Tribulation, and are taken into captivity; (2) Jerusalem is "trodden down of the

Gentiles"; (3) the False Prophet sits in the "temple of God, showing that he 'is God'"; (4) the Two Witnesses fulfill their prophecy; (5) the saints of God are horribly persecuted.

The horrors of the Great Tribulation are *cut short* by the mind-boggling display of God's Heavenly Signs. Notice the description: "And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth [a massive meteorite shower, greater than any in history], even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places [earthquakes on a scale never before imagined]. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, *hid* themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of *His wrath* is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Revelation 6:12-17).

These tumultuous events are very much a MAJOR PART OF THE GOSPEL!

Notice the time order of these events: (1) the Great Tribulation; (2) the Heavenly Signs; (3) the Day of the Lord. Absolute, incontrovertible proof of this is seen by looking at only two scriptures. They are Joel 2:31, which says, "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, *before* the great and the terrible day of the LORD come," and Matthew 24:29, which says, "Immediately *after* the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."

Jesus Christ is being quoted *in person* in the scripture just given above. Notice the following verse: "And then [*after* the Heavenly Signs] shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall *see* the Son of man [not looking on His face, but seeing a brilliant light, as if the SUN were approaching the earth!] coming in the clouds of heaven with *power* and *great glory*" (Matthew 24:30).

Now you know a major *part* of the message Jesus Christ delivered to His disciples. It was a powerful message about His coming *world-ruling government* (Isaiah 2; Micah 4; Isaiah 11; Revelation 20). It was also a message about repentance; about how human beings can receive God's Holy Spirit, and eventually become a child of God. It was about being "*born again*" so that, at the last trump when Christ descends to this earth, each converted Christian can be born into the ruling Family of God; become a part of the Kingdom of God!

Why Did Christ Speak In Puzzles or Parables to the General Public?

Millions assume Jesus Christ tried to save everyone He could. They assume He continually shouted out; preached to people in public, urging them to understand. Millions assume He would never turn a single person away; never refuse anyone who came to Him. These assumptions are simply not true.

His own disciples wondered why He spoke to the people in parables, or puzzles. "He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them *it is not given*. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing *see not*; and hearing they *hear not*, neither do they understand" (Matthew 13:10-13).

Christ showed His disciples that the Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees had hardened their hearts against Him. He showed how they were spoken of by Isaiah. He said, "And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; *lest* at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and

should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them" (Matthew 13:14-17).

Because the people were "dull of hearing," blinded by their own self-righteous, religious superiority, Christ said He *deliberately* confused the meaning of His teachings "lest *they should be converted!*"

Why? Because God is working out His plan here below on a definite time schedule! It was not *time* for the masses to understand then. When Isaiah was commissioned with His vast and important prophecies, He revealed that he had seen in vision seraphim, which, like cherubs and archangels, are created spirit beings around God's throne. He said one of them flew to him, having a coal from the altar, which he touched (in vision) to Isaiah's lips. Isaiah then said he was ready to convey God's messages to the world (Isaiah 6:1-8).

Notice: "And He said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but *understand not*; and see ye indeed, but *perceive not*. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; *lest* they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and *convert*, and *be healed*. Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate" (Isaiah 6:9-11).

In other words, until the time of the *end of the age*, when the "veil" that has been placed over the eyes of the masses will finally be lifted.

Speaking of the establishment of God's kingdom on earth, and of the time of the wondrous millennial reign of Christ, Isaiah prophesied, "And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And He will destroy in this mountain the *face of the covering* cast over all people, and the *veil* that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it" (Isaiah 25:6-8).

Christ explained that it was only those whom God is *calling* who can understand. He said, "No man *can* come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44).

Many are extremely puzzled over this. Not understanding that God is working out a great plan here below on a *specific time schedule* for a great purpose, they wonder if God is "unfair" somehow. Are those who are blinded; those who cannot understand; those who have not been called *lost*?

One of the major false doctrines accepted by millions is the "saved or lost" concept. Major denominations teach that *today* (meaning in the lifetime of the people to whom they preach) is the "*only* day of salvation!" Not understanding Christ's teaching about the Great White Throne Judgment; about the great, general resurrection of the dead (Revelation 20), they believe one is either "saved" during this lifetime, or one is "lost." This belief obviously consigns countless millions of Chinese, Indonesians, Japanese, Mongolians, Nepalese, Indians, Kurds, Afghans, and dozens of other nations, as well as hundreds of millions of believers in Islam, to an "everburning hell." Is the "God" they worship *that cruel*? Would God, who says He is *love*, cause innocent little children who have never heard one word about the Christian religion--never heard the name of Jesus Christ--to burn like a steak on a skillet, writhing in agony, day after day, week after week, year after interminable year, because they never had a *chance* to hear or understand the gospel? How much can a little child understand in any event?

As a classical, hypothetical case, such a belief means that, if a little five-year-old Chinese girl is deathly sick, and a missionary is on his way to her village, but has a flat tire on the primitive roadway, and therefore cannot reach the little girl before she dies to teach her about "the little Lord Jesus," she goes instantly into an

everburning hellfire for all eternity. Catholic doctrine, while equally untrue, since it is based on the false concept of the "immortality of the soul," is a bit more practical with regard to some of the fundamental questions concerning such situations. They say there is a special "limbo," into which the "souls" of such children go; a special "limbo," like a compartment of "purgatory" where, in an intermediate state, "unsaved" souls wait for indeterminate periods of time before they can attain to the "beatific vision." Thus, *limbus patrum* (for the patriarchs and those who lived prior to the time of Christ) and *limbus infantum* are invented.

Christ Himself showed that even many of those who hear the truth of God do not comprehend it. Following His "parable of the sower," He explained *why* He spoke to the people in puzzles they couldn't understand. Then, He explained the meaning of His parable to His disciples in private:

"Hear ye therefore the parable [puzzle] of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matthew 13:18-23).

Obviously, then, Jesus Christ shows that when many are *called* of God by hearing His truth, some are so deeply enmeshed in Satan's world that they quickly reject it. Others receive it, begin with enthusiasm, but soon abandon their faith and commitment because of family and friends; because of persecution from others in society who believe they are embracing a "strange" religion. Still others allow the lust for material things-- houses, cars, money, investments, physical security, and the "deceitfulness of riches"--to "choke the word." They become *completely absorbed* in this brief physical life, and lose sight of the wondrous Kingdom of God.

Now, is God "unfair," somehow, because He allows some to be blinded, and specially calls others? Paul explained this important question to the Gentiles in Rome. Study carefully Romans 9, 10, and 11. Space does not permit reprinting all this material here. A few excerpts must suffice. Paul shows that God sometimes not only *allows* people to be blinded, and not to receive salvation during this first, physical life span, but that He sometimes deliberately hardens their hearts in order to work out His purpose:

"As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even *for this same purpose* have I raised thee up, that I might show *my power* in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth" (Romans 9:13-17).

Paul was showing how God had allowed the Jews to become blinded. He used the analogy of an olive tree, referring to Israel as the tree, and the Gentiles as a "grafted" tree, replacing the original tree.

Anticipating their question about whether God is "fair" to do this, Paul told the Romans, "Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that *replieth against God*? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, *Why hast thou made me thus*? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?"

(Romans 9:18-24).

Paul explained that "blindness in part" had occurred to the Jews so that the "fullness of the Gentiles" might come in.

Notice: "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all ["shut them up," or blinded them] in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:29-33).

Millions who believe they have heard the "gospel" know *nothing* of these profound truths. God chose His people, Israel, calling them out of Egypt and proposing a *covenant* with them. If they would obey His laws, He would bless them with unimaginable blessings. Paul likens them to the "natural olive tree," which was cut off, so the "wild olive tree," the Gentiles, could be "grafted in," thus receiving the promise of salvation.

Whether or not we like or agree with it, Jesus Christ plainly said that "salvation is *of the Jews*" (John 4:22). Whether the anti-Semitic world likes it or not, Jesus Christ was a Jew. As you read earlier, "He came *unto His own* and His own received Him not." The Samaritan woman asked Him, "How is it that thou, being a Jew...?" He expressly said to be of the "House of Judah" (Hebrews 7:14).

Notice what Paul explained to the Romans: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh [i.e., Jews. Paul said he was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews"]: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption [*sonship*] and the glory, and the *covenants*, and the *giving of the law*, and the *service of God* [the service in the Temple, the only site approved of God at the time of the earthly priesthood for the true worship of God], and the *promises*; Whose are the fathers, and of whom *as concerning the flesh Christ came*, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Romans 9:1-5).

When the Jews rejected Christ, which they continually have done from the time He began His ministry in Nazareth nearly 2000 years ago, the prophecy of Hosea came to pass. He said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children" (Hosea 4:6).

Can we believe Jesus Christ? He plainly said the prophecies of Isaiah about spiritual *blindness* had come to pass; that He therefore spoke in puzzling parables, LEST they should "convert," and He should heal them!

Millions do not know WHY Christ spoke in parables, even though He plainly explained it! Now you know. Jesus Christ did not attempt to save the world *then*. He knew His own people were spiritually blinded and that their hearts were hardened against Him. He told His disciples they had been specially called. He also said that "many righteous men" had desired to know the things He was teaching them, but that it was "not given" to the masses at that time.

Jesus Christ Promised, "I Will Build My Church"

More misunderstanding and confusion exists over the word *church* than over the word *gospel*. Millions think of the word *church* as a *building*, or as a denomination, or a religious organization. Common expressions are: "I am going to church," or, "We are members of such-and-such a church." A church is a building with a steeple (which you should investigate--the origins of the custom are interesting), stained-glass windows, and often shaped like a cross. People think of basilicas, cathedrals, and large, imposing stone and brick structures as being "churches."

But the Greek word for "church" does not remotely connote a cathedral, or a building. The word is *ekklesia*, and means, simply, "assembly." It can be rendered "group," or "called-out ones."

Christ said to Peter and His disciples, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter [Greek: *Petros*, a stone, or pebble], and upon this rock [Greek: *Petra*, a large stone, such as a monolith, or a mountain of rock] I will build my church; and the gates of hell [*hades*, the grave] shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:18,19).

The Greek language has masculine and feminine endings, just like the Latin languages. The word *petros* is the masculine for "rock," and means "a stone," such as one might pick up in one's hand. The word *petra*, with the feminine ending, means a large rock, such as a monolith. This is vitally important, for millions have been taught that Christ built His church upon *Peter*, that Peter "had the primacy." This is not true. Christ Himself was and is the Head of His true church, and never gave the headship to any man.

Only two chapters later, Christ is quoted as saying to *all* the disciples, "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if *two* of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where *two or three* are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:18-20).

He did not say "Where Peter is...", but said that where any "two or three" of them were gathered together, He, Christ, would lead and guide them.

Notice that Christ, not Peter, is the HEAD of His church: "For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him [as we have already seen, in John 1 and Hebrews 1]: And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. 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 1:16-18).

To the Ephesians, Paul said that Christ was "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 [the Father] hath put all things under His [Christ's] feet, and gave Him to be the *Head over all things to the church*, Which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:21-23).

Notice the analogy that the church is the body of Christ, not the body of Peter!

Paul insisted that he was in every sense Peter's equal, even though he was as one "begotten out of due season," called later, after Pentecost. He wrote, "For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles" (2 Corinthians 11:5). Later, he reaffirmed, "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).

As a final and incontrovertible proof, notice that the apostles, plural, *sent* Peter and John on a mission. It was not the other way around: "Now when the apostles [plural! All of them!] 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). The Jerusalem conference shows that it was James, not Peter, who rendered the final decision (Acts 15:19).

What IS "the church"? It is that collective group of called-out individuals who are commissioned to preach the good news of Christ's coming kingdom to the world. Jesus Christ said, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your

Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). He showed that His was to be a *persecuted* group; that they would be scattered. "Then saith Jesus unto them, 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" (Matthew 26:31).

As John recorded, Jesus said, "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:32,33).

Christ said the persecutions which scattered His people were a fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones" (Zechariah 13:7).

Never did Christ prophesy that His church would become a great, visible, "universal" church! Read the interesting article in *Halley's Bible Handbook* (pp. 757-804). You will see incredible information about the rise of an apostate church, and about terrible martyrdoms of hundreds of thousands of people over the centuries. Jesus Christ did not intend that His true church become a huge, monolithic hierarchy, fabulously wealthy, wielding political power over nations, and having concourse with earthly governments. The great *false* church, on the other hand, is described as exactly that. John saw a vision of the great apostate church when he was spiritually transported forward into time, into the Day of the Lord.

He wrote, "And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication [she is a *state* as well as a church, having political dealings with governments], and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication [symbolic of her false doctrines]. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration [shock, alarm, awe, not approval]" (Revelation 17:1-6).

Jesus Christ called His disciples, taught them the message He had received from His Father, then commissioned them to preach that message to the world. The term *evangelistic association* actually conveys to one's mind a more accurate picture of the true *function* of the church insofar as its responsibilities toward the nations of the world are concerned. However, Jesus Christ gave His apostles a *two-part* commission. The first part was to preach the gospel of the Kingdom to the world. The second part was to "feed my sheep," or to care for the church. Thus, as the early church grew, Jesus Christ inspired the early apostles to create many different functions in the church, such as pastors and teachers, deacons and deaconesses, "helps, governments," and the like. Study 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Timothy 3 in this regard.

God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), and so Jesus Christ placed government and organization within His church. Never did He intend it to become an autocratic dictatorship, with swaggering, haughty, superior people of "high rank" lording it over the flock! Instead, His ministers (servants) were to become "helpers of their joy."

Now, let us understand one of the most vital truths of all:

Why Did He Die?

Millions of professing, churchgoing "Christians" believe Jesus Christ's *death* has "saved" them! Many believe "once saved, always saved," and believe that there are no works whatsoever required for salvation.

Almighty God has given mankind His law, which is so righteous, so holy and perfect, that Moses' face shone when he came down from the Mount with the two tables of stone. God showed that obedience to His law meant long life, good health, wonderful crops, healthy children, and peace in the land. It also meant an absence of every evil, such as sickness and disease, insanity, destruction of crops and property, military conscription and heavy taxation, and war. Study the "blessings and cursings" of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

God told Adam, as we have seen, that in the day he disobeyed God, he was under the sentence of *death!* The "wages of sin is *death*" (Romans 3:26). But God Almighty LOVES mankind! He made man in His own image, after His own likeness. He is *recreating* after His own kind. Now we come to the favorite scripture of millions of professing Christians: "For God so *loved* the world, that He *gave* His *only begotten Son*, that whosoever believeth in Him should not *perish*, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Countless thousands of sermons have been preached from this verse. It is displayed on banners at major sports events, where those eager to "witness" about their religion paint huge characters, "JOHN 3:16" on a sheet and hang it where they believe the television cameras will show it.

Millions know it by heart. Yet, many of them *do not believe* what it plainly says! Jesus Christ Himself stated these words in the context of a lesson about the *two opposites* of life on the one hand, and death on the other. He used the word *perish!* In the entire context, Christ was showing that the result of sin is death, *destruction--perishing!* Read Malachi 4:1-3. On the other hand, repenting of sin, which is the breaking of any one of God's laws, results in forgiveness of sin, and belief in Jesus Christ as the one who paid the penalty for sin in our stead is the first step toward salvation.

Notice the verses preceding and following: "And *no man hath ascended up to heaven*, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven" (verse 13). The nominal Christian world utterly rejects this statement of Christ. Millions believe the "saints" of the Bible ascended up to heaven; that people's "souls" ascend up to heaven when they die.

Notice further: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up [referring to His being affixed to "a tree," or the stake, and being "lifted up" to die upon it]. That whosoever believeth in Him should not *perish*, but [on the other hand, as an opposite of perishing] have eternal life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their *deeds were evil*" (John 3:13-19). Deeds, not just "beliefs."

Jesus Christ offered His life, the life of the very Creator, whose one life is worth more than all the rest of human life put together, for the sins of the world! The penalty for sin is *death, not eternal life* in an "everburning hellfire." Christ Himself spoke many times of destruction in Gehenna fire (see Matthew 10:28; 23:33).

Notice what John wrote: "And He is the propitiation [or "atoning sacrifice"] for *our sins*: and not for ours only, but also for the *sins of the whole world*. And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we *keep his commandments* [in other words, if we quit sinning!]. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth *not* his commandments, is a *liar*, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:2-4). Millions love to say how nice it is to "know the Lord." Yet those same people refuse to obey God's commandments--especially the fourth one, which they insist is "done away."

One of the most commonly heard expressions in nominal Christendom is "Christ died to save sinners." One may see these words painted on barns along roadways, on old buses, on billboards, and on rocks. Insofar as the expression goes, it is true.

Paul wrote to Timothy, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to *save sinners*; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting" (1 Timothy 2:15,16). But the death of Jesus Christ is efficacious for the forgiveness of sins, NOT blanket permission to continue sinning!

If you were to see a drowning man who had deliberately thrown himself into a lake, but who then began calling for help, and you rescued the man, how would you feel if he then threw himself into the same lake again?

When Christ rescues us, when His shed blood atones because we have *sinned*, He does not give us blanket permission to go right back into the life from which He saved us! Notice that salvation includes not only Christ's death for our sins, but His LIFE, as our daily High Priest in heaven: "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, *while we were yet sinners*, Christ *died* for us. Much more then, being now *justified* by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we *shall be saved* by His life" (Romans 5:8-10). If Christ's *death* saved the world in itself, then there was no need for His resurrection! It is because He LIVES today, that He overcame sin in the flesh, that He *qualified* to become the world ruler, and that He was raised from the dead that the plan of salvation is complete!

When we are forgiven, God expects us to live a new and different way of life, the way of God's laws. When we are baptized after we repent, the law considers us "dead." The penalty has been paid. Christ paid the penalty in our *stead*. It would be a terrible slap in the face to Jesus Christ Himself if we then, like the man who threw himself back into the lake, continued to live in the same old way as before.

Paul put it this way: "Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him. For in that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin [the breaking of any point of God's law] therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Romans 6:8-12).

Why did Christ die? He died because His love, and that of His Father in heaven, is SO GREAT toward God-defying, God-rejecting, sinning, lawless mankind that He willingly *gave His life*, which followed horrible humiliation, beating, and suffering for His own creation! As you now know, there is *so much more* to understand than that which is conveyed to most people by the oft-repeated statement, "Christ died to save sinners."

Did Jesus Christ Really Rise From the Dead?

There is no greater question. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the pivotal truth upon which the entire Christian religion depends. Continually, Jesus Christ predicted His own resurrection. On one occasion, Christ allowed Peter, James, and John to see a vision of His coming kingdom in what is called the "Transfiguration." Read it, in Matthew 17. After the vision had passed, and as they came down from the mountain, Jesus "charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be *risen again from the dead*" (Matthew 17:9).

Only a little later, He specifically predicted His death and resurrection: "And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: And they shall kill Him, and the

third day He shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry" (Matthew 17:22,23). When the arrest, brutal scourging, and death of Jesus Christ occurred, true to His predictions, all the disciples forsook Him and fled. Study John 18-21 for many details. As is evident from the writings of the eyewitnesses to Jesus' death, His own disciples *did not believe* He had been resurrected!

Yet, on five separate occasions Jesus Christ had told them personally that He would die and be resurrected from the dead. The first was following Peter's confession that Jesus was the Christ, no matter the false stories circulated that Jesus was "Elijah," or "John the Baptist," or "one of the prophets" (Matthew 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22). The second was the example we just saw, following the Transfiguration. The third was following the healing of an epileptic (Luke 9:44). The fourth was as they were passing through Galilee (Matthew 17:22-23; Mark 9:31). The fifth was near Jerusalem, and was quite specific:

"Then He took unto Him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death: and the third day He shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken" (Luke 18:31-34).

No matter how repetitively or explicitly Jesus Christ told them of His impending death, burial, and resurrection, they did not truly understand! This is why they were *unbelieving* immediately following His resurrection.

This is an important point, for the story was deliberately spread then, and has been repeated ever since, that "His disciples stole the body away." Books alleging that He was merely "in a swoon," or that His disciples plotted with Him to fake His resurrection, have been written over the centuries.

Yet, notice that the disciples did not believe He had been resurrected: "Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how He spake unto you when He was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered His words, And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. And their words seemed to them as *idle tales*, and they *believed them not*" (Luke 24:1-11).

It was not until after Jesus Christ had appeared to them in person several different times, in different places, even miraculously "materializing" through solid walls, that they finally believed! Read verses 13 through 31 of this same chapter; how they walked toward a village called Emmaus, and Christ appeared to them.

After hearing their unbelief, He chided 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 and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:25-27).

A short time later, while they were eating, He "took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight" (Luke 24:30,31).

Who has not heard of "doubting Thomas"? Christ had suddenly appeared inside a large, closed room, where the disciples "were assembled for fear of the Jews, [then] came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto

them, Peace be unto you. And when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord" (John 20:19,20).

When they joyously told Thomas of it, notice what happened: "But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, 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*, 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*. And *many other signs* truly did Jesus *in the presence of His disciples*, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (John 20:24-31).

Not only are there many recorded instances when Christ appeared to His disciples and others following His resurrection, but John says there are many others which were not recorded.

Paul wrote, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that He was seen of Cephas [Peter], then of the twelve: After that, He was seen of above *five hundred brethren at once*; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, He was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all He was *seen* of me also, as of one born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

James, the brother of John, was beheaded (Acts 12:1,2). Paul himself was martyred--probably thrown into the arena at Rome! Stephen was stoned (Acts 7). Many of Christ's servants were murdered! Now, think! Do men willingly go to their deaths, including such horrible deaths as being torn by wild animals, or being burned alive, for the sake of a conspiratorial "plot" they KNOW is an hoax? Not by the faintest stretch of the imagination!

Did the Jews "steal His body away"? Nonsense! If they had, they would have displayed it publicly! They were the ones who approached the Romans, insisting that His tomb be *guarded day and night!*

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was not a fanciful theory which was "added" by writers of the Christian faith in later years. No, it was the very *cause* of their faith! A major part of the gospel is the fact of Jesus' resurrection, and the breathtaking truth about WHY He was raised from the dead! He is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven only UNTIL His enemies are vanquished, *until* "His enemies be made His footstool," *until* the "time of the restitution of all things."

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter said, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear [flaming coronas of fire around their heads; a roaring, rushing sound of a mighty wind], For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool" (Acts 2:32-35).

The most important fact the apostles repeated over and over again was that they had been *eyewitnesses* of His death, then had been eyewitnesses that He was ALIVE! This message was the cause of their persecution!

"And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day..." (Acts 4:1-3).

Study the famous "resurrection" chapter of 1 Corinthians 15. Paul made it very plain that if Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead, then the entirety of the Christian religion is vain! He wrote, "Now if Christ be preached that He rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ: whom He raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, *your faith is vain*; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life *only* we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ *risen from the dead*, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:12-20).

The "firstfruits" from the dead is reference to the meaning of the Feast of Firstfruits, which became known as Pentecost. This was because the feast was determined by counting from the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread until the "morrow after the seventh Sabbath," which would be the *fiftieth* day. Hence, Pentecost, which merely means "fiftieth." Christ is the "firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). Those who are eventually born of God will become members of the same spiritual family as Jesus Christ, who is the FIRSTborn. Study 1 Corinthians 15:50-52 and Romans 8:15-29 in this regard.

How Long Was Jesus Christ In the Tomb?

The only perpetual sign Jesus Christ said He would leave to the world as proof that He was the true Messiah was the *exact length of time* He would be in the tomb! He said, "For as Jonas was *three days and three nights* in the whale's belly; *so* shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). Yet, for many centuries following the great apostasy that overcame the large, visible church, millions have been taught that Christ was only "part" of three days and three nights in the tomb. Thus, without realizing it, many generations of nominal Christians have *unconsciously rejected* the only sign Christ left!

Because of the pagan traditions surrounding "Easter," which was nothing other than a celebration of the vernal equinox and new life in the spring, the "Good Friday--Easter Sunday morning" fable was adopted. This is a vast subject, and there is vast literature to prove how Easter was eventually enforced upon the visible church.

Jesus Christ was not entombed on a Friday, and He did not rise on "Easter Sunday." He was buried on a *Wednesday late afternoon*, and arose exactly three days and three nights later, on a late Sabbath afternoon. A very good source for information about the exact time of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection is contained in the notes and appendices of *The Companion Bible* by Bullinger.

Christ Himself specifically stated how long He would be in the tomb. He quoted the prophet Jonah, and Jonah was written in the *Hebrew* language, not Greek! Millions have been told that the expression "three days and three nights" is a Greek idiom, and doesn't mean what it says. Some, intent on clinging to the traditions handed down from the time of the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, have even alleged that the book of Jonah uses an idiom!

The apostle John wrote in detail of the death of Christ. Notice: "When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost [Greek: "breathed His last," or "expired"]. The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross [Greek: *stauros*, or stake] on the Sabbath day, (for *that Sabbath day was an high day*,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away" (John 19:30,31).

This was the "High Day Sabbath," or the first Day of Unleavened Bread (see Leviticus 23:6), not the regular weekly Sabbath. It fell on that *Thursday*, so the bodies were buried on a late Wednesday afternoon. The feast

always fell on the fifteenth of Nisan, the first month of the sacred year. Christ died on the fourteenth, just as the first paschal lambs were being slain. It was because thousands of true Christians tenaciously clung to Christ's custom and the practice of the apostles of the first century that they became called "Quartodecimans." The word means "fourteenths." These Christians observed the same customs Christ gave to His apostles (1 Corinthians 11:23). The Quartodecimans were mercilessly persecuted; many thousands of them were put to death because they refused to observe the pagan Easter, and clung to the fourteenth of Nisan instead.

In Appendix 144 in Bullinger's *Companion Bible*, you will find a thorough explanation of the exact meaning of the "three days and three nights" of Matthew 12:40. In part, he says, "When the number of 'nights' is stated as well as the number of 'days', then the expression ceases to be an idiom, and becomes a literal statement of fact.

"Moreover, as the Hebrew day began at sunset the day was reckoned from one sunset to another, the 'twelve hours in the day' (John 11.9) being reckoned from sunrise, and the twelve hours of the night from sunset. An evening-morning was thus used for a whole day of twenty-four hours, as in the first chapter of Genesis. Hence the expression 'a night and a day' in 2 Cor. 11.25 denotes a complete day (Gr. *nuchthemeron*).

"When Esther says (Esther 4.16) 'Fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days', she defines her meaning as being three complete days, because she adds (being a Jewess) 'night or day'. And when it is written that the fast ended on 'the third day' (5.1), 'the third day' must have succeeded and included the third night.

"In like manner the sacred record states that the young man (in 1 Sam. 30.12) 'had eaten no bread, nor drunk any water, three days and three nights'. Hence, when the young man explains the reason, he says, 'because three days ago I fell sick'. He means therefore three complete days and nights, because, being an *Egyptian* (vv. 11,13) he naturally reckoned his day as beginning at sunrise, according to the Egyptian manner (see *Encycl. Brit.*, 11th [Cambridge] ed., vol. xi, p. 77). His 'three days ago' refers to the beginning of his sickness, and includes the whole period, giving the reason for his having gone without food during the whole period stated.

"Hence, when it says that 'Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights' (Jonah 1.17) it means exactly what it says, and that this can be the only meaning of the expression in Matt. 12.40; 16.4, Luke 11.30, is shown in Ap. 156" (p. 170).

For centuries, so-called "scholars" have claimed that Christ died in A.D. 29, 30, 32, or even 33! *Never* would they choose A.D. 31, even by "*accident*," for it is the only year in that period of five years in which the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or the fifteenth of Nisan, *begins on a Thursday!*

Jesus Christ died on a late Wednesday afternoon. He was buried quickly, in a new tomb which was close at hand to Golgotha. Notice: "Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore *because of the Jews' preparation* day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand" (John 19:40-42). The preparation day was *Wednesday*, the preparation for the "High Day Sabbath" of the Feast!

Is Jesus Christ Alive Today?

When Christ was resurrected, He was *changed* from His human, fleshly form to become literally *composed of Spirit*. The huge stone covering the sepulchre was not rolled back to let Christ out of the tomb, but to allow the world to look in! By the time the women came to the sepulchre, He had already risen some hours earlier.

Matthew wrote, "In the end of the Sabbath [the weekly Sabbath, the third day since Christ had been buried], *as it began* to dawn *toward* the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was [Greek: "had been"] a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it" (Matthew 28:1,2). Even the

marginal note in many King James Bibles says "had been" instead of "was." Bullinger's *Companion Bible* has a note concerning the words "rolled back," saying, "*had* rolled back." The earthquake, which dislodged the stone, was a past occurrence; it had taken place prior to the women's arrival. As you have seen, there are many proofs of Christ's resurrection.

Christ promised He would never leave His disciples and would continually be with His people, watching over His church: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, 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" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Mark wrote, "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, *the Lord working with them*, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen" (Mark 16:19,20).

When Stephen was martyred by stoning, he cried out as he died, "But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul" (Acts 7:55-58).

Saul was struck down on the road to Damascus, became deeply converted, and became the apostle Paul. He may have seen Jesus Christ over a period of more than three years in the desert. He wrote, "Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not *seen* Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?" (1 Corinthians 9:1). The only time Paul could have seen Jesus Christ personally was when he was in Arabia.

He wrote to the Galatians, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into *Arabia*, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother" (Galatians 1:15-19).

Not only were there many hundreds of eyewitnesses to the fact that Jesus Christ was *alive*, but Paul may have seen Jesus Christ again and again while he was in the Arabian desert.

The entire book of Hebrews is about the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ. It is a profoundly important book of the Bible which shows Christ's *daily* intercession on behalf of His people, interceding in their behalf before His Father at His left hand.

Notice: "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in *all points tempted like as we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16).

The whole point of the book of Hebrews is the efficacy of Christ's living High Priesthood over that of the Levitical Priesthood--that He is *alive*, and able to guide, direct, and correct His church, to intervene in the course of human events, to intercede on behalf of His people, and is waiting for the moment of His return to this earth.

Following the beautiful eleventh chapter of Hebrews, which lists many of the most famous and revered of

the martyrs of God through the ages, we are urged to remember these great witnesses, and to look to Jesus Christ as the living Savior: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Hebrews 12:1-3).

Millions of nominal Christians, without realizing it, tend to think of a *dead* Christ, hanging on a cross! Their minds are not focused upon a living Savior, seated at the right hand of the Father, His face blazing like the sun in its strength, able to hear and to feel our heartache, our distress, suffering, and pain, and turn to His Father as our Advocate, intervening in our behalf. Yes, and we should *praise God daily* for the fact that Jesus Christ is *alive* today!

Is Jesus Christ Going To Return To This Earth?

One of the most powerful points of the gospel, which is the *good news* of the Kingdom of God, is that Christ is coming again! He said so continually! Christ told the haughty, self-righteous Pharisees that they would see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of God, and they themselves rejected, cast out!

Millions believe it is "easy" to be saved! All you must do is "believe in your heart" and "confess with your mouth" that Jesus Christ "died to save sinners," and you can be saved, they say. But Jesus Christ plainly said it is not quite so easy!

"Then said one unto Him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait [narrow; difficult] gate: for many, I say unto you, will *seek* to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye *workers of iniquity* [lawlessness]. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, *in the Kingdom of God*, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:23-29).

As you have seen, the famous Olivet Prophecy, which is the most important prophecy in all the Bible, has as its main theme the return of Christ to this earth in the power and glory of God: "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:27). Jesus Christ spoke continually of the time of His return to this earth to establish His kingdom!

Notice the promises He gave for those who *overcome* during this brief, human life: "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give *power over the nations*: And he shall *rule* them with a *rod of iron*; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father" (Revelation 2:26,27).

He described His Second Coming to His disciples in the Olivet Prophecy several times. He said, "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall *see* the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together *His elect* from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:30,31).

And where will Jesus Christ BE when He "comes again to this earth"? Why, *on the earth*, of course! Many, many prophecies proclaim this fundamental truth! Christ Himself said it over and over again!

The very first message that ever came back to earth from a heavenly messenger as Jesus Christ was taken up reconfirmed it! Notice: "And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, *shall so come* in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11).

Where will Christ be when He returns? Notice Zechariah's prophecy: "Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle. 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" (Zechariah 14:3,4).

There are many, many prophecies in God's Word about the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom on this earth.

Isaiah wrote, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; 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 LORD, 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 LORD 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 any more" (Isaiah 2:2-4).

While millions have been deceived into believing that "souls" go immediately to heaven when they die, the Bible clearly says Christ will resurrect the "dead in Christ" first, and that those who are alive and remain at the time of His Second Coming will be "caught up together with them in the clouds" (which are part of this earth's atmosphere), and will then dwell in the Kingdom of God with Christ. While they ascend up to meet Christ *in the clouds*, only a few thousand feet above the land, they will be conveyed by God's angels (Matthew 24:31) to descend "in that day" upon the Mount of Olives!

Paul wrote, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's *at His coming*. Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet" (1 Corinthians 15:22-25).

To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote, "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord *in the air* [part of this earth's atmosphere]: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). And where will the Lord BE? He will be on this earth, establishing His spiritual capital in Jerusalem!

Notice the description of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ seen by John 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 and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the

fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. 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: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh" (Revelation 19:11-21).

Anyone who doubts for a moment the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is a person who simply rejects what Christ Himself said over and over again, and rejects the focal point of all prophecy! Nothing is emphasized any more powerfully or continually than the return of Christ to this earth to rule it as King of Kings and Lord of Lords! The GOOD NEWS Jesus Christ brought to this earth so long ago is for OUR DAY, NOW, and for the years just ahead of us! It is an up-to-the-minute message about world conditions that are inexorably leading us into the time of the prophesied Great Tribulation, a time of world trouble such as has never been from the beginning of the world until that time.

Daniel prophesied of this time, just as did Jesus Christ Himself. An archangel said to Daniel, "And at that time [the "time of the end," see Daniel 11:40-45] shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a *time of trouble*, such as *never was since there was a nation even to that same time*: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:1,2).

The greatest news you and I could ever hear is that Jesus Christ will *intervene* in human affairs and HALT the insane, satanic wars impending in the future, when, except for God's intervention, not a man, woman or child would be left alive on this earth!

Luke wrote of Christ's encouraging reminder that when these terrible things BEGIN TO HAPPEN, His people should "lift up their heads," and know that their redemption is very near! He said, "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth *distress of nations*, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts *failing them for fear* [*many will drop dead of heart attacks!*], and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things *begin* to come to pass, then *look up*, and *lift up your heads*; for your redemption draweth nigh. And He spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the *kingdom of God* is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. *Watch* ye therefore, and *pray always*, that ye may be accounted *worthy to escape* all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:25-36).

As you now know, the so-called "gospel" millions have heard is only a small *part* of the message Jesus Christ brought to this earth and commissioned His disciples to preach to all the world as a witness! His great good news was that He will *intervene* in the course of human events; He will return to this earth to RULE it with a rod of iron!

The work of God's church today is the work of proclaiming this globe-girdling, tumultuous, awesome message to all the world as a witness! God says many will reject it; they will refuse to believe Christ's message;

they will refuse to repent and receive baptism as a sign of their repentance before God. But some will hear, and understand. Some will receive the seed into the "good ground," where it will take root, and grow.

Could *you* be one God is calling? Could *you* be one who will be used of God Almighty to have a part in His work? The time is growing near when God will no longer plead with people by the means of preaching and writing. The time is growing near when there will be no doubt whatsoever in people's minds about the existence of the Almighty God! Soon now, when the prophesied Tribulation is upon us, when the awesome Heavenly Signs are displayed, there will be no remaining doubts in any human mind! Soon now. . . .

-End-

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