

JUNE 2005

A Monthly Magazine issued by

The Remnant of Christ's Ecclesia

in opposition to the Dogmas of
Papal and Protestant Christendom

A WITNESS TO THE TRUTH

and a warning against the deception in the last days
foretold by Christ

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All Communications

D. Lancaster,
227 Moston Lane East,
New Moston,
Manchester M40 3HY,
England.

J. A. DeFries,
146 Gardner Street,
Fredonia,
New York 14063,
U.S.A.

AT THE TABLE OF THE LORD

"THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED"

This week we have been reading the words of John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. Of all the disciples, John was probably the closest to the Lord Jesus. The chronology dates the time of John's writing to his brethren as after AD 90. The book of Revelation was written in AD 96 — making these the last of the New Testament, the last divine message of the Bible. They are a special help for us in our struggles to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and His apostles. John, being the closest to Jesus, is able to help us know the mind and spirit of Jesus who gave His life in perfect obedience to His Father. The other disciples and apostles wrote their messages earlier than John, Matthew was the first, written in AD 37, followed by Peter, Paul, Luke, Mark, James and Jude. These all finished their work by approximately AD 66. All taught of Jesus as the Messiah, the Anointed of God, involving the gospel of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ at a crucial time of spreading that gospel. There is a gap in that work from AD 66 until the time of John's work after AD 90. We may wonder why there is the gap: What interrupted that work? In AD 70 Jerusalem was conquered by the Romans, Herod's temple was burned, and all Jews were banned from entering Jerusalem. Perhaps this is the reason for such a gap. Possibly John was the only one left of the apostles, the companions of Jesus. I John chapter one begins;

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life."

I John 1:1.

What a marvelous experience it must have been to see, to talk with, to touch, to be so close to the Son of God; to listen to His teaching concerning Himself as the Word of life - the means of eternal life. John wrote between AD 85 and AD 90:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God.

And the Word (Jesus) 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 I: 1-2,14.

John stood by Jesus as He hung on the cross, as His life ebbed away. As He died, Jesus said to John, the disciple whom He loved.

"... Behold thy mother (Mary, Jesus' mother)! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home" John 19:27.

After this care for Mary, Jesus died, crying out: "... It is finished" (John 19:30).

Well could John write:

"For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us."

I John 1:2.

Why did John write these words? It was to testify of God's purpose which John had so personally seen accomplished in the life and death of Jesus Christ. He expressed this mind.

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."

I John 1:3-4

John wished to share the joy of fellowship with Jesus, and through Jesus with God; that fellowship which can bring eternal life when Jesus comes again to establish God's kingdom upon earth. What is "fellowship"? The word comes from a root meaning: a sharer, a companion, a partaker, a partner; a close association because of a mutual love for each other, bringing joy and happiness. How can there be such a relationship between men and God? John knew this; he experienced a fellowship with Jesus as they worked together in unity of mind and spirit to glorify God. Jesus did so perfectly as He died upon the cross, the Victor over His fleshly nature, and so became the means of communication, of atonement with God on behalf of His brethren. This IS fellowship - based upon unity of mind, heart, and desire to give glory to God. How can this be possible? John makes it very clear:

"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness (evil) at all.

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

I John 1:5-7.

Since the beginning of God's creation, there has been a separation between light and darkness (See Genesis 1:3-4) - the light being the Word of God, the darkness being the word of the serpent as he lied to Eve: "...Ye shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). Adam and Eve sinned when they disobeyed God's word, and as a result, God said:

“... I will put enmity between thee (the serpent, evil, darkness) and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed (Jesus); it shall bruise thy head, and thou (the serpent) shalt bruise his heel.” Genesis 3:15.

John witnessed the fulfillment of that sentence when Jesus, the seed of the woman, destroyed his fleshly nature (sin in the flesh) as He died on the cross - in a figure, wounding the serpent in the head.

Going back to John's words, he wrote:

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” I John 1:8.

There is only One who did not sin, but perfectly obeyed His Father's word. Jesus died on the cross as the unblemished Lamb of God. Brethren and Sisters, we do fail, we do sin. As we succumb to sin we lose fellowship with God through His Son, and therefore His blood no longer “cleanseth us from all sin.” However, God in His mercy has provided a means of forgiveness, of atonement for sin, through the victory of Jesus Christ as He gave His life. John clarifies this for us:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make him (God) a liar, and his word is not in us.” I John 1:9-10.

It is not easy to confess our sins, for it takes humility, submission, putting down the fleshly aspects, as John reveals:

“...the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” I John 2:16-17.

John, in his desire to help his brethren, continued to encourage them:

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin (and we all do), we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” I John 2:1-2.

For those in fellowship, the Almighty in mercy and grace has provided His Son as an advocate and a means of propitiation to forgive sin, when there is confession and repentance shown. An “advocate” is an intercessor, one who comes alongside to comfort. Indeed, the word is used as comforter, of whom John wrote to his “little children”:

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another

Comforter (advocate), that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."

John 14:16-17.

Not only was the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, bestowed upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost, but God also provided Jesus as a means of propitiation for His little children. We find that "propitiation" involves atonement, expiation, and is also used as the mercy seat, over the ark and between the cherubim in the most holy place (Hebrews 9:5). It was from this mercy seat that God spoke to Moses:

"... I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony (witness), of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel."

Exodus 25:22.

The Almighty communicates with those in fellowship with Him through His Son. The Lord Jesus, as an advocate and propitiator, carries prayers to His Father, who is the:

"... Father of mercies and the God of all comfort,

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

II Corinthians 1:3-4.

Those who are "little children," are "born of water and of the Spirit." They are God's children through Jesus Christ, and know His mercy and grace.

John often speaks of these "little children" in his epistles. Paul similarly spoke to his brethren as he helped them to walk in the way of righteousness:

"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you."

Galatians 4:19.

The Almighty looks down upon those striving to be "little children" - who, in obedience and subjection to Him, "walk in the light, as He is in the light" - thereby being cleansed of their sins in the blood of Christ.

We live almost 2000 years after the time of John; yet his message, his work, his words apply in our struggles to walk in that same light - the Word of God - even as David exclaimed:

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path,

I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will, keep thy righteous judgments” Psalm 119:105-106.

Brethren and Sisters, let us give heed to John’s words as he concluded his first epistle:

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.”

I John 5:21.

Let us take to heart this message of “that disciple whom Jesus loved.”

J.A.DeF.

THE MESSAGE OF HOSEA

We have recently read God’s word as recorded through the prophet Hosea. Very little is known of him - the only information being in the first chapter of Hosea:

“The word of the LORD that came unto Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the day of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.” Hosea 1:1.

He is thought of by some as a minor prophet who brought God’s word to the rebellious house of Israel. His message however was major as reflected in the meaning of his name, “deliverer or salvation” for his prophecy reminded the house of Israel of the salvation that could be theirs if they would return to God’s word, making straight paths for their feet.

He was used in a special way to illustrate God’s displeasure because His people had turned from Him, practicing idolatry and pandering to every desire of the flesh. To bring this message home, Hosea was commanded to take a harlot as his wife:

“...And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD.”

Hosea 1:2

Israel, in God’s sight was as a harlot, because they had forsaken the God of their fathers - He who was as their Husband and only Provider by wantonly seeking after the ways of the heathen:

“Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts;

Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was

born, and make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst.

And I will not have mercy upon her Children; for they be the children of whoredoms.

For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink." Hosea 2:2-5

God's word through Hosea was a warning of His wrath to come because of their failure to be faithful to His word:

"I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts.

And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them." Hosea 2:11-12

He warned that the peace and prosperity established during the reign of Solomon would be taken away:

"For he (Solomon) had dominion over all the region on this side the river, from Tiphseh, even to Azzah, over all the kings on this side the river: and he had peace on all sides round about him.

And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon." I Kings 4:24-25

Hosea's wife bore him children, who were named appropriately to again deliver God's message to Israel, signifying the end of God's peace. The first child, a son was named "Jezreel", meaning "God will sow". A warning that their peace would soon be scattered because they had lost sight of its origin.

The prophet's wife again conceived and the daughter born was named "Loruhamah", meaning "no pity", for God said through Hosea:

"... for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away. But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the LORD their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." Hosea 1:6-7

He revealed His displeasure against His people but also extended the hope of mercy if they would repent:

"Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto

them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them,
Ye are the sons of the living God." Hosea 1:10

There was yet another son born called "Loammi", whose name meant "not my people", to tell Israel they were not God's people any longer, for they refused to live by His covenant:

"O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.

I will be thy king: where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities?" Hosea 13:9-10

The thinking of their flesh would destroy them, for only in God was there salvation. The flesh continually battles against the thinking of the spirit and has done so from the beginning, when enmity was born.

"And I will put enmity between thee (serpent) and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Genesis 3:15

Even with the enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, there was still hope. For though the serpent nature would bruise the heel of the woman's seed, its head would be destroyed through the overcoming of this flesh nature - the hope of man's salvation offered by the Almighty from the beginning. This hope and the means to attain unto it is spoken of by Paul:

"... be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;

Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,

But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel :"

II Timothy 1:8-10

The purpose of God as preached by Hosea, taught of salvation for those who used His word in their living to crush their own flesh nature, not allowing it to gain control.

"O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.

Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips." Hosea 14:1-2

A simple message in which God made known His purpose of salvation, but only a few throughout the ages have heeded that word - the same hope that Micah proclaimed to those of his day, that would

one day come to fruition;

"But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it.

In that day, saith the LORD, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted;

And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever."

Micah 4:4,6-7

What a privilege to know the purpose of God established from the beginning, and that Word made flesh - the Lord Jesus, who will take away the enmity between those of the flesh and those of the spirit for evermore.

M.C.S.

**"FROM EVERLASTING TO EVERLASTING, THOU ART GOD."
(Psalm 90:2)**

The world today greatly fails to appreciate the Creator. The children are taught that the world, and all that is therein, virtually made itself, evolving from primitive life into the developed wonder of all the natural things with which it is filled. This specious reasoning takes away from honouring the Eternal God, of whom His holy word declares:-

"By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.

He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses.

Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.

For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast."
(Psalm 33:6-9)

The theories of men sound clever in their subtle explanations, and by these mankind have been deceived. But what is taught in the schools is in direct denial of the witness of God's holy word, concerning which Christ said:-

"He that is of God heareth God's words. - - - " (John 8:47)

Modern so called science is condemned in Christ's teaching. Yet the science aspect of the present time thinks it can claim to be

Christian. The fact is that mankind is blind to the greatness of God.

From time to time scientific investigation comes out with some startling comments, but fails to look at the implication of what is suggested or concluded. Consider the recent statement from a University physics study:-

“What happened before the Big Bang? This is the most embarrassing question you can possibly ask a physicist. We physicists can glibly answer the most complex cosmic questions (such as what is the energy source of the stars and how old is the universe) but we were clueless when asked this innocent question. - - -”

However a new theory is emerging following a sending up of a space vehicle in 2003. This is referred to in the following comment:-

“ - - - a revolutionary new satellite, the WMAP (Wilkinson Micro-wave Anisotropy Probe) gave us a radically new view of Genesis. Its treasure trove of data has thrown out the old picture of cosmology, which is enshrined in astronomy textbooks.

This old picture states that the universe is like a soap bubble of some sort that is expanding but gradually slowing down. The stars and galaxies, like flies stuck to fly paper, live only on the surface of this bubble.

The data from the WMAP satellite, however, was sent to labs around the world, with a new picture consistent with the idea that our soap bubble floats alongside an infinite number of other bubble-universes. So the concept of a solitary universe is being replaced by a picture of a “multiverse” of parallel universes.”

This contemplation brings forcibly to the mind the testimony of scripture:-

“What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Psalm 8:4)

Which scripture is repeated by the Apostle Paul:-

“For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.

But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?

Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownest him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands:

Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that

is not put under him.

But now we see not yet all things put under him.

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour - - -"
(Hebrews 2:9)

Here is the truth concerning this earth and God's purpose with it:-

"The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD's: but the earth hath he given to the children of men."

(Psalm 115:16)

In God's coming purpose Christ is to rule this good earth, with those (resurrected) who are truly His. And this is because the power which belongs to the Most High, brought this earth, in its beginning, into sudden life and beauty, the ultimate purpose of which is an eternal inheritance for Christ and His people. To speak of the earth's evolving itself is a failure to realise the wondrous power of the Most High, who "spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast,"

So called investigative science is now raising doubts about a continuing future of this good earth. Consider the following scientific comments:-

"The Asian tsunami delivered a devastating reminder of our planet's violent power. - - -

Try to imagine a boiling volcanic eruption in America, exploding with the force of 1,000 Hiroshima bombs every second. Spewing forth from a super volcano the size of Tokyo, a fatal cloud of ash would cover three-quarters of the U.S. and kill millions. - - - (this would) happen if the underground volcano in America's most famous national park, Yellowstone in Wyoming, were to erupt. It has erupted three times in the past: 2.1 million years ago, 1.3 million years ago and 640,000 years ago. This cycle of roughly 600,000 to 700,000 years suggests that another blast could be brewing."

Scientists put what they referred to as their findings through a supercomputer which they say worked out the following:—

"- - - Ash cloud would cover three quarters of the U.S., there would be 25 million people in the fall-out zone and 462,000 would die in the first week alone. And despite its distance, the U.K. would not escape death and destruction;

- - - Skies would turn red as a result of the vast amounts of sulphuric acid released into the stratosphere. This would

trigger a catastrophic drop in temperatures, causing the monsoon rains to fail and triggering mass worldwide starvation. The final death toll would reach one billion.

- - - The tsunami made us realise that if nature wants to unleash hell, there is not much we can do about it. Its power is far greater than we are. Yellowstone Park is beautiful, yet eerie. Everything is boiling. There are pools of water that are ten times more acidic than battery acid - - - (pools) of boiling hot, bubbling mud. - - -"

Such scientific comments and explanations make no mention of the Eternal God. This is very sad, and very lacking, for God, in His wonderful grace, has given profound assurance:-

"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, he formed it to be inhabited:

I am the LORD; and there is none else.

I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth:

I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain:

I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right." (Isaiah 45:18-19)

Other scriptures are also confirmatory:-

"Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth." (Psalm 119:90)

"One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever." (Ecclesiastes 1:4)

Man might well fear the power of nature if everything came about by chance; evolving, as science says into what we now see around us. The truth however gives the consolation that God, omnipotently, formed man and the beauties of nature, at a precisely given time, and for a special purpose. Modern science has ignored this truth, and continues to ignore it. But to those who honour the Most High in their outlook, there is the assurance of His holy word; from He who is "from everlasting to everlasting."

A BIBLE CLASS

**"THE GOSPEL PREACHED ALSO
TO THEM THAT ARE DEAD"**

1 Peter 4:6

Peter wrote to his brethren scattered throughout the area those who were:

"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." I Peter 1:2-3.

God has called a few out of darkness to light, to be His children, made possible by the death of Jesus Christ. Jesus glorified God in obedience to His will, never sinning. He died upon the cross, crying out in triumph: "It is finished." He completed the work God gave Him to do, and became the mediator between man and His Father.

Jesus taught the gospel - the good news concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ - as a means of escape from our dying nature, brought about by Adam and Eve's sin in eating of the forbidden tree. Peter was one of His apostles who continued to preach this gospel after Jesus ascended to His Father.

We are listening to Peter as we consider our study. He spoke to his brethren:

"Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;

That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.

For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banqueting, and abominable idolatries" I Peter 4:1-3.

Having been buried in the waters of baptism, buried into His death, and having risen again from those waters a new man - a man of Spirit, with the old man of the flesh dead, one's living changes. No longer does one serve the lusts of the flesh; rather, one's service is to God, having been born of water and of the Spirit. This change causes those who still live according to the desires of the flesh to:

"... think it strange that ye run not with them to the same

excess of riot, speaking evil of you." I Peter 4:4.

The thinking and desires of the flesh are left behind when one has become a "new man" in submission to the will of God. This results in "enmity" - of which God spoke to the serpent (adversary) in the Garden of Eden:

"... I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy (serpent's) seed and her seed; it (seed of the woman) shall bruise thy (serpent's) head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" Genesis 3.15

This enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent has endured ever since. Jesus, as the seed of the woman, bruised the head of the serpent when He died on the cross, never having sinned, in obedience to God's word. Those who are joined to Jesus through baptism into His death belong to the seed of the woman and have the hope of eternal life through their obedience to God's word. Jesus spoke to His disciples:

"... If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me.

For whosoever will save his life (as the old man), shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life (as the new man) for my sake shall find it." Matthew 16.24-25.

Peter, to whom Jesus spoke these words, continued to help his brethren:

"... for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh ('think it strange'), but live according to God in the spirit." I Peter 4.6.

The gospel has been preached to those who are dying creatures, according to God's word to Adam and Eve in the garden. Some have responded to that gospel, have been baptized into the death of Christ, and thereby have the hope of eternal life at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ when He returns to accomplish God's purpose with this earth. Most of those who have heard the gospel, have not responded, choosing the way of the flesh rather than denying self. Jesus taught of this:

"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravering wolves.

Ye shall know them by their fruits...." Matthew 7:13-16.

The Almighty has provided a means of salvation through His Son, even as Israel, under Moses, had a choice, when given the law at Mt. Sinai:

"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. That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."

Deuteronomy 30:19-20

This same choice is available to men today, as the gospel is preached from His word to those who are sentenced to die, but can live, according to God's promises from the beginning of His creation.

There is a day coming when the Lord Jesus will judge those who are responsible - who have a knowledge of the gospel. Some will be accounted suitable to be saints, kings, and priests in His kingdom. Others will be cast out, rejected, because they have served "self" rather than God. Peter makes it clear that the gospel has been preached to those who are flesh, sentenced to die, yet have been granted an opportunity for eternal life - by putting off the ways of the flesh, denying self, and taking up their cross, as Jesus did, and following Him. Such will be "judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit."

J.A.DeF.

STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS

Recently we have been reading Peter's first epistle as he communed with the:

"... strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." I Peter 1:1

This word "stranger" means "alien" - a pilgrim, one different from most, as Peter goes on to describe those brethren as:

"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:

Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied." I Peter 1:2

These brethren lived in an area known as Asia Minor - a region inhabited by Gentiles, those once ignorant of the word of God and the hope of Israel. However, as they were taught by Peter and others, received the gospel and were baptized into that hope, they now would endeavor to walk after Christ's teaching and leave their old ways behind;

"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:" I Peter 1:18-19

He was reminding that their redemption could not be gained except through the blood of Christ:

"Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." I Peter 1:21

The elect, as obedient children, were to respond in faith and hope to the knowledge they had received. They were strangers once to the hope of Israel, but now grafted in and adopted as sons through the blood of Jesus:

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;"

I Peter 2:9-11

These "strangers and pilgrims" now had the hope of being part of a chosen generation - a holy nation at Christ's return, because of their newfound understanding of the Truth revealed to them in God's mercy. How clearly Peter brings out the work ahead for these "strangers and pilgrims" - that they must endeavor to abstain from fleshly lusts in order to walk as children of light.

John brought the same message to bear when he wrote:

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." I John 2:15-17

Those endeavoring to be "strangers and pilgrims" and walk after the example of the Lord Jesus, must battle constantly against the wiles of their flesh nature, as Peter reminds:

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." I Peter 5:8-9

To resist fleshly lusts, is a daily fight against the pull that the diabolic nature within each one exerts.

Some in the world believing in a personal devil, a supernatural being that tempts them to sin, abdicate responsibility for their own actions by embracing this false doctrine. It is much easier to say, "the devil made me do it", than to acknowledge the failing flesh nature within each one, which will prevail if not opposed by the spiritual help contained in God's word. To those who contend for the humanistic approach that within man is basic goodness, the Spirit through the prophet Jeremiah very plainly refutes:

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Jeremiah 17:9

Peter taught his brethren that during their walk of faith, their determination to fight against their own flesh nature would be tested by the Almighty. They were not to be disheartened when trying circumstances arose, but realize it was a necessary spiritual process of their pilgrimage - the trying of their faith:

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:

But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." I Peter 4:12-13

The life of trial and testing for God's people began after the ejection of Adam and Eve from the garden. They knew toil, trial and hardship as they struggled to make a living for themselves and their family, as well as walk anew in God's path of light. Yet they knew in faith that one day their suffering would come to an end, when God's purpose was complete in the day of restoration:

"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you."

I Peter 5:10

Here was encouragement that the suffering to come is a tool to shape and mold the servants of Christ, that they may be perfect (or complete) and established and settled, as a sure foundation, in the ways of the Spirit.

Peter could speak from experience of that perfecting process, for his personal struggle was foretold by the Lord Jesus in their first meeting, by the change of his name:

"He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.

And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas which is by interpretation, A stone." John 1:41—42

His name Simon, meaning "a hearer", was changed by the Lord Jesus to "Cephas", meaning a stone - one with strength, who would become part of the foundation of His house. Yet, he was to go through many experiences during his time with the Lord Jesus, to strengthen and build his spirit before he could be a stone or rock.

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

Matthew 16:21-23

After hearing the gospel teaching directly from the Lord Jesus, it is remarkable that Peter's perception was so lacking, yet the Lord Jesus continued to work with him, knowing his understanding would grow and become established through the things he would suffer.

We are also told from the Scriptures that Peter was the disciple who cut off the ear of the high priest's servant when they came to seize Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane before His crucifixion. This was again a lack of perception by Peter of what Jesus must first suffer if He was to become the means of redemption for all who seek God. He also failed to perceive and apply Jesus' teaching of submission and gentleness to all men.

Later that day, as the Jews brought Jesus to stand trial before Caiaphas the high priest, Peter denied even knowing Jesus, no doubt fearful he may suffer the same fate, only a few hours after telling

Him, "... Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." (Matthew 26:33). When he realized how grievously he had failed the Lord, how full of remorse and shame he was:

"And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly." Matthew 26:75

So many things he needed to change - to grow in spiritual understanding, but also to harness his impulsive and fearful fleshly nature, before he would become a "stone" or a strong part of Christ's church. His past failures and lack of perception would remind him daily of how frail is the flesh and how only through repentance and humility could he become a minister to feed the Master's sheep and thus build upon that Rock, which is Christ.

In Jesus' own words, Peter was told when he responded to Jesus' question: "But whom say ye that I am?" (Matthew 16:15) by answering, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16):

"Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock (Jesus) I will build my church;" Matthew 16:17-18

Peter's own experiences and words feed us today, that we too may perceive how we must struggle against the wiles of our flesh to be established, strengthened and settled in the name of Christ.

M.C.S.

SIGNS OF HIS COMING

" - - - the heavens are the LORD'S"
(Psalm 115:16)

How proud is the attitude of present day science. This is a sign of the times. Note the promising comments.

"Ever since H. G. Wells based his War of the Worlds on the premise that Martians harboured secret plans to invade and dominate, we have been bombarded with images of malevolent little green men and flying saucers abandoning their harsh landscapes for the fertile pastures and oceans of Earth.

But what if, instead of threatening humankind, Mars turned out to be its saviour? For scientists now believe it is possible to create conditions for human life on the Red Planet - - - ice caps could be used to give mankind a bolthole should pollution, war or human induced climate change ever make the Earth uninhabitable - - -. Global warming has been seen as a disaster for us, with the experts telling us it is destroying the planet. - - - NASA, America's space agency (has) the idea of transforming dusty Mars into a life inducing world of seas and flowing rivers. (There is) growing evidence that inside the Martian deep freeze lie the building blocks of life. - - - (Science) believes (it has) found the way to breathe new life into Mars by triggering a runaway greenhouse effect - - - most successful greenhouse gases are fluorine based and can be made from elements on the Martian surface - - - adding about 300 parts per million of the gas mixture to the thin Martian atmosphere would spark the unstoppable greenhouse effect - - -. Scientists agree the plan is credible - - -. We can do this, but should we?"

What science overlooks is the profound position as declared by God's word: -

"Ye are blessed of the LORD which made heaven and earth. The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD'S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men." Psalm 115:15-16)

To ignore this declaration of the Most High, reveals the disregard by modern thinking of the true position of mankind in God's purpose. What with suggestions of possible capabilities, where the increase of knowledge is concerned; and in the case of Apostasy, declaring men are to inherit a future abode in heaven. There is a lack of upholding and honouring 'the word of God's testimony. This is indeed a sign of these last days. Note the prophet's foretelling of the Spirit's outcome:-

"Behold, the day of the LORD cometh - - -. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light. - - -

And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease. - - -"

(Isaiah 13:9-11)

NEWS FROM THE ECCLESIAS FOR MAY 2005

HAMBURG, NEW YORK, Corner Southwestern Blvd. & Pleasant Avenue.

Sunday: Breaking of Bread 11:30am

Sunday Afternoon Class: 1:45pm

Midweek Bible Class: Forestville, Hamburg & Fredonia

Every Third Week: Revelation Study

Distribution of invitations for our literature to the general public will be suspended for the summer months, beginning again in September.

Recent illness has been a handicap for some, but healing under God's hand brings restoration and gratitude.

J.A.DeF.

MANCHESTER, Ryecroft Hall, Audenshaw.

Sundays: Breaking of Bread 11.00 a.m.

Thursdays: Bible Class 2.00 p.m.

We are grateful for letters from those who are close to us in heart, across the sea.

Also, what a comfort it is, that in the work for His House, and for the Witness, we can seek unto our Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord, for guidance, to be shown the way in which to go.