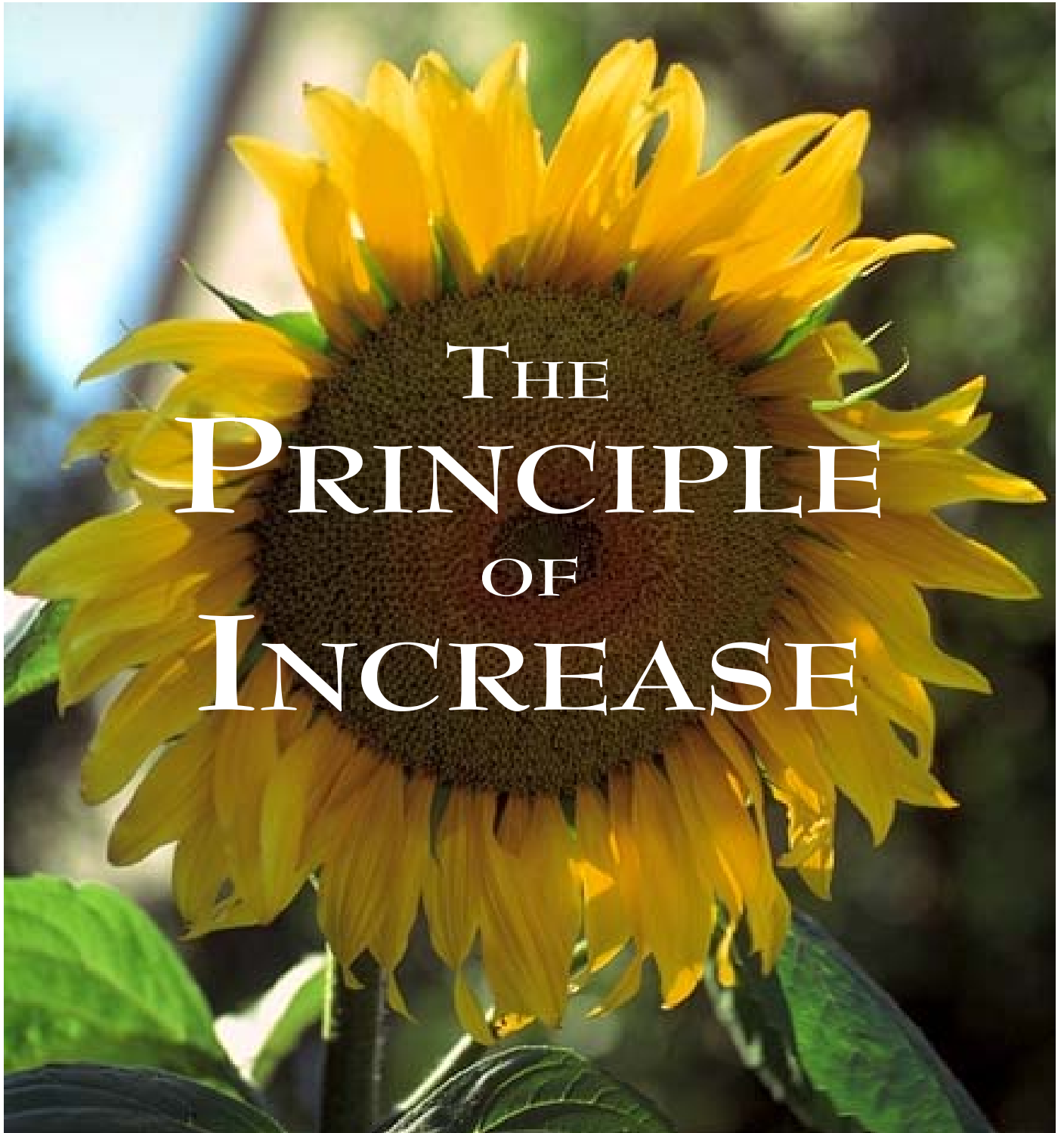


Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God



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June 1996

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- 3 **PERSONAL FROM JOHN W. RITENBAUGH:**
Little Things Count!
- 7 Recognizing the Second Witness
—Charles F. Whitaker
- 9 **PROPHECY WATCH / WORLD WATCH:**
The Woman Atop the Beast (Part 2)
—Richard T. Ritenbaugh
- 12 **A READY ANSWER:**
Have the Ten Commandments Passed Away?
—Earl L. Henn
- 20 **BIBLE STUDY:**
Trumpets

About Our Cover:

One small sunflower seed produces a plant that can grow taller than a man. But that singular sunflower will produce hundreds of sunflower seeds, each capable of reproducing itself many times over! This principle of increase is active spiritually as well, for the fruits of our actions are prone to increase, whether for good or evil. (Corel)

CHURCH OF THE GREAT GOD

In the **UNITED STATES:**
PO Box 471846
Charlotte, NC 28247-1846
(800) 878-8220 / (704) 544-2100
(704) 544-2233 fax

In **INTERNATIONAL AREAS:**
Box 4
Indian River, ON K0L 2B0
CANADA
(705) 295-6671
(705) 295-6989 fax

Editor-in-Chief

John W. Ritenbaugh

Managing Editor

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Associate Editors

Earl L. Henn, Darryl Henson

Layout Editor

Sharon B. Ritenbaugh

News Editor

Andy Benedetto

Contributing Writers

*Ted E. Bowling, John F. Bulharowski,
Phillip E. Cole, Martin G. Collins,
Michael R. Ford, Helmut J. Fraund,
Ronny H. Graham, William Gray, Al
Legg, John Reid, Mark Schindler, Ervin
W. Sollars, Kenneth W. Spencer,
Sherly J. Trogans, Harold A. Way,
Charles F. Whitaker*

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Little Things Count!

Much about life in this world seems designed to make us think that what we are or what we think or do is of no account. We feel that it really makes no difference whether we live or die. We feel that we are lost in the shuffle; we are nameless, faceless blobs in the teeming masses of humanity!

I once read of the accomplishments of a famous athlete who had entertained millions of people. The writer described him as a “shooting star” that attracted attention, but was over and gone in a flash. Once his brilliance passed, the world went back to what it had been doing, as though he and his performances had never existed.

So many people with so many similar names do so many things that it has become difficult to keep track of them all. To simplify matters, our culture has turned to numbers to identify us. I have a social security number and a draft number. Companies I have worked for have identified me by at least five different employee numbers. I also have credit card numbers, a driver’s license number, car registration number, home and business phone numbers, home and business address numbers and a post office box number. Each one of these numbers identifies John Ritenbaugh!

But are we not more than numbers? Do we not each have a face and personality that identifies us and nobody else? Do we have *any* impact? Does what I do mean anything? Do I count?

Numbers, Numbers, Numbers!

Newscasters casually toss immense figures at us so often that we feel bludgeoned into insensibility about their possible significance to us. The federal government’s debt is over \$4 trillion, and total indebtedness (public and private) is well over twice that! Interest payments alone on the federal debt this year will be much larger than the entire 1960 federal budget, the last year America had a surplus!

How long is a trillion seconds? A billion seconds equals thirty-two years, but 1 trillion is one thousand times longer—32,000 years or 26,000 years before God created Adam and Eve! Even 1 billion minutes ago was AD 76. Peter and Paul had been martyred about a decade earlier, the

Christians had fled Jerusalem for Pella, and six years had passed since Titus had destroyed the Temple.

If one had \$1 trillion to spend, and he spent it at an average of \$1 million a day, it would take him 2,750 years! Or, if he spent \$80 million a day, it would still take him 35 years! However, the U.S. government spends the total lifetime taxes of the average person in less than one second! If that does not make one feel puny, insignificant and of no account, nothing will.

In God’s creation, the figures are equally staggering. Earth’s nearest heavenly neighbor, the moon, is roughly 240,000 miles away—about the same distance as ten times around the equator. If it were possible, walking at three miles per hour twenty-four hours a day, it would take a man 80,000 hours, 3,333 1/3 days, or nine years and one month to get there. If he were to walk only a normal work day of eight hours, it would take twenty-seven years and three months. Leaving in June 1996, he would arrive on the moon in about September 2023! That’s quite a hike!

We can break this down into steps. If he had a twenty-four-inch stride, he would have to take 633,600,000 steps. But, if at any point in the journey he decided **not** to take the next small, twenty-four-inch step, *he would never arrive!*

Details Matter

We think that “little things,” even our individual lives, do not count for much. Do not be deceived—they do! Even seemingly insignificant human beings matter because we participate in processes. We can begin them, move them along or even conclude them. People play a large role in determining the direction and quality of an event or thing. A choir director knows that the quality of individual singers and their desire to blend with the whole determines the overall quality of his chorale. An infinite amount of care and quality control must be given to thousands of details to cause a Rolls Royce to be such a fine and costly automobile.

This principle is especially familiar to us in its application to mechanical things. Remove a single, almost microscopic part from a watch, and it stops operating. Leave one ingredient from a recipe, and it will likely fall flat. From one couple, all of mankind spread over the face of the earth,

and if one member of that pair had been missing, we would not exist!

Yet, in relation to living organisms, we either do not always understand or we ignore this principle. God has built safeguards or a certain amount of adaptability into living things, but it can be stretched only so far. How we interact with living things can be exceedingly important regardless of our being only one person. Man is learning dramatically that he is an integral part of the web of life. What he does with earth's resources makes a huge difference in the quality of life for ourselves and our posterity. Two principles that are at work on this earth among living things are important to understand:

- First, in the reproductive process there is a powerful tendency toward increase. Simple observation of our lawns establishes this truth—weeds!
- The second is stated in Galatians 6:7-8, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." What a man sows follows the universal law of "kind reproduces kind." We cannot get cabbage from brussels sprout seeds, nor carrots from radish seeds—no matter how much the seeds may look alike. They are simply not of the same kind.

Good Fruit, Bad Fruit

If we planted corn and got pumpkins, we would be greatly surprised. Similarly, if we gossip about our friends, we should not be surprised to find that we do not have as many friends as before or that people are more guarded in their relationships with us. The seeds of gossip can produce only one kind of fruit—bad! Every action produces results, and every result tends to be of the kind that was sowed.

Jesus confirms this principle in human conduct:

You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. (Matthew 7:16-18)

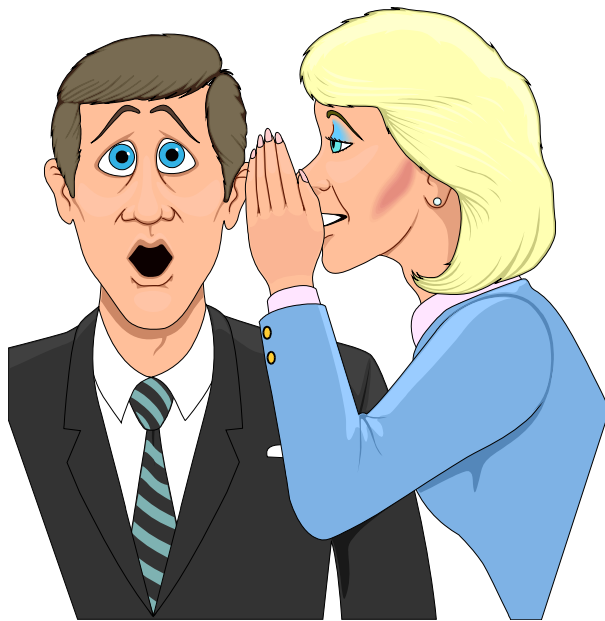
When we put these two principles together, we find that no matter what a man sows, unless something intervenes to interrupt the cycle, more will be produced than was

sown. One can fake living according to Christian standards and morals FOR A WHILE, but no matter how careful a person is, the fruit produced by his life will betray him. As Numbers 32:23 says, "But if you do not do [as God commands], then take note, you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out."

No one knows how long it will take and how much fruit will be produced, but sin will produce spiritual weaknesses, even though they are concealed with great energy and hypocrisy. Bitterness, divisiveness, weak understanding, confusion and spiritual lethargy will surface. Many variables affect how much and how soon the fruit will appear, but because of the principle of increase, it is certain that more will be reaped than was originally sown.

Jesus' Parable of the Sower and the Seed teaches us about the effects of these variables:

And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Matthew 13:4-9)



Just as plants tend to produce more than one seed, so does gossip increase when it is planted! Slanderous words carried along "the grapevine" can involve hundreds or thousands of people in a sin. And when it has come to complete fruition, who knows what destruction it will cause!

Jesus describes quite a number of variables here, and we could add such things as weather, insects, viruses, molds, parasites, soil quality and seed quality.

What happens when we plant an apple seed? In due time, the seed grows into a mature tree, which produces *far more* than just one apple. In all likelihood, it will produce many bushels of apples for many years. The apples fall to the ground or are carried away from their point of origin—sometimes very far away in the stomach of a bird or a horse. New seeds are then deposited on the ground, and the "spreading" cycle begins anew to be repeated almost endlessly. Of course, there are some impediments to this process, but where the factors are right, both apple trees and their fruit can increase greatly.

Suppose someone plants a choice morsel of gossip into another's ear. If that sin falls on fertile "ground" (a person with all the "right" proclivities for carrying it to others without regard to consequences), who knows how much destruction can be caused! If that person tells ten others, and these in turn tell ten more, in three cycles *one*

thousand people are involved in this sin! It is entirely possible that not even one person in that thousand would see himself as a cog in the process of spreading potential destruction!

Paul confirms this in II Timothy 2:16-17. “But shun profane and vain babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer.” The *New English Bible* translates that last sentence as, “The infection of their teaching will spread like a gangrene.” Conduct like this will bear bad fruit because human nature provides very few impediments to sin. Human nature can produce nothing else, as Paul writes in Romans 8:6, “For to be carnally minded is death.” To add to the tragedy, human nature almost always drags others into its curse along the way to death.

The Increase of Evil

Paul mentions this principle of increase again in II Timothy 3:13. “But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” Men are not improving; they are growing increasingly worse! Here God is acknowledging that human nature is prone to progressive degeneration. There are two related reasons for this:

1. Sin has a drug-like addictive quality in that the sense of relief, satisfaction or pleasure derived from it does not last. Thus, to receive the same amount of pleasure as before *one has to sink deeper and deeper into the perversion.*
2. Closely related is that *a person must commit the sin more frequently* because the duration of satisfaction decreases the longer one continues in a sin.

Because of this inclination toward increase, social and religious barriers to immorality within the individual and community gradually come down. Therefore, each new generation provides a more fertile breeding ground for sin because human nature provides no real impediment to it. As sin becomes more acceptable in a society, the people have more difficulty recognizing it.

To the Christian, this sets up a disturbing possibility. Suppose twenty years ago we were fifty percent more righteous than society, and today we are still fifty percent more righteous. But because standards in society have declined steeply, we have slipped far ourselves! People who do not understand sin call evil good and good evil until society reaches the point illustrated in Genesis 6:5: “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil

continually.” In cultures all over this globe, mankind is rapidly approaching conditions that are just like the days of Noah (Matthew 24:37).

Each Life Is Significant!

Do we still think our individual lives are insignificant?

After all, how will our puny lives with our tiny sins have much effect on the rest of humanity or the course of history? Who sees us? Are we not just nonentities, merely nameless, faceless numbers? Who gets hurt by our “little” sins? Are there not victimless crimes?

Maybe we should turn it around a little. How comfortable would we be if God held an “open house” on our lives? How significant would our influence be if we saw on the silver screen how our lives affected all our acquaintances, friends, relatives? Would we say we do not matter?

God gave Ezekiel such a view of the leaders of Israel in his time:



There is no such thing as a victimless crime. Crime and sin always affect someone, whether the perpetrator himself or an innocent person caught up in its evil. Jesus Christ is the ultimate victim of every sin, for He died for all of them.

Then He said to me, “Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the room of his idols? For they say, ‘The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.’ . . . Then He said to me, “Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it a trivial thing to the house of Judah to commit the abomination which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence; then they have returned to provoke Me to anger. Indeed they put the branch to their nose. Therefore I also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them.” (Ezekiel 8:12, 17-18)

Their sins did not slip by God, did they? God says their sins done “in the dark . . . filled the land with violence.” Their lives affected the whole nation! The result was God’s unsparing judgment descending upon Judah, and thousands of lives ended in death or captivity.

As for victimless crimes, what about Christ as sin’s victim? Their sins certainly killed Him! A victimless crime does not exist.

“CBS Radio Mystery Theater” once presented the story of a prosperous and respected college professor. He was married and the father of two children about to enter college, and he lived in an upscale, wooded suburban neighborhood. To others, he seemed to “have it all.” Inside, however, he felt cheated, conspired against and held back by superiors who did not realize his value to the university. He especially believed he was underpaid for his many contributions to the university’s reputation.

In emotional turmoil one day, he decided to leave the

office early, go home and think things through. Upon arriving home and discovering that his wife had gone shopping, he left his car in the garage and started to stroll through the neighborhood to a nearby wood. Before he left the house, though, he took the garbage to the curb because his wife had failed to take it out and the refuse truck was in the neighborhood.

Unknown to him, in another part of town at the same time, a bank had been robbed. The thieves made their escape with the loot, but the police were in hot pursuit. They were so close that the thieves decided they should get rid of the stolen goods. Pulling into the professor's neighborhood, the thieves deposited the money bag in his neighbor's garbage container. From his hidden position in the woods, the professor watched the thieves speed away. But before long, his curiosity drove him to inspect the contents of the mysterious bag. He casually retrieved the bag and took it inside.

When he opened it, he discovered \$80,000 in cash! *The perfect crime!* he thought. *Now I have the money I deserve! And nobody is hurt—the bank's money is insured, isn't it? The thieves dumped the money into the neighbor's garbage, so if they get caught and confess, the focus will be on the neighbors, not me. If the police question me, I can just conveniently remember it was garbage collection day.*

Jesus had an interesting thing to say about situations of this sort in Luke 12:2-3:

For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.

The author of the radio drama also understood these principles. Before the story concluded, the professor's wife had been murdered, and his best friend wounded. His own mind snapped from the stress of the ordeal. His children, burdened with a name stained by the crime, had to go on with their lives without their parents and without a college education.

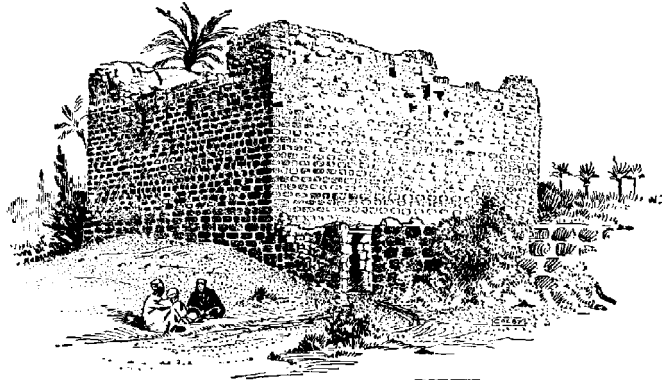
Sin's Effects Multiplied

What Jesus said and the radio program dramatized is that the effects of our sins will eventually show. This process contains the power to reach out and multiply its potential for damage by involving others who may be innocent of the sin that began it.

We do not sin in a vacuum; no man is an island for good or bad. God wants to cover sin, but if no other way will produce repentance, He will bring it out into the full light

for all to see. We are living organisms, interacting with and having an impact upon other living organisms. Why are we so indifferent to the effects of our behavior? Should not God's Spirit lead us to strive to produce positive fruits? Could we be grieving His Spirit by resisting its prodding?

Joshua 6 and 7 contain the tragic story of Achan's sin, which is similar to the radio program's theme. Achan, one man, sinned by stealing a garment, 200 shekels of silver and a wedge of gold during the heat of battle after having been instructed that all the booty from Jericho was devoted to God (Joshua 6:17-19; 7:1, 20-21). He had no accomplices, and no one saw him do it. Nonetheless, Israel's army became paralyzed with fear when they attacked the little city of Ai (verses 4-5). Joshua faltered and became confused (verses 6-9). Thirty-six men died—wives were widowed and children lost fathers. In the end, Achan's entire family was destroyed, even though they were innocent of his sin.



Jericho, site of Achan's infamous sin. Little did Achan know how far-reaching his actions that day would be! By the time it was all over, 36 men had died, leaving widows and orphans, and Achan and his family were stoned to death.

The whole nation was affected! When God analyzed Achan's sin, He saw it as a national sin (verses 10-12). The sin of one part was the sin of the whole. When one failed, they all failed. We need to pay more attention to this approach because it is part of the "one body" analogy. We should also notice that God was personally involved. It was after all, His nation, His church, and its conduct is of intense concern to Him. This story also contains a clear illustration of sin's leavening effect. Until a correction was made, it did not just lie there and die. Its effect increased.

Deuteronomy 20:1-2, 8 addresses the effect the conduct of one has on many:

When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle, that . . . the officers shall speak . . . to the people, and say, "What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart."

God understands the effect of "mob psychology." Even in war with lives on the line, men tend to behave in a way that will increase to affect the whole army negatively unless it is impeded or prevented entirely.

In the New Testament, Paul writes of this principle in the context of sexual sins:

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality

Please see page 16

RECOGNIZING THE SECOND WITNESS

We stand today at the threshold of the second half of Christ's seven-year ministry. During its first half nearly two millennia ago, many did not recognize the Messiah as He stood before them. A few did. When He returns, will we recognize Him for what He is?

One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; *by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.*" So reads the law regarding witnesses, as recorded in Deuteronomy 19:15.

In II Corinthians 13, the apostle Paul puts an intriguing twist on this law. Here, two or three witnesses are not different *people*, but different *trips*. The "two or three witnesses" are successive trips he made to Corinth. Each separate trip—or more correctly, his teaching during each separate trip—stands as a witness against those who fail to receive correction. Paul's various visits to Corinth provide several witnesses against those who continue to sin.

Notice II Corinthians 13:1-2 from the Berkeley Version:

This is my third visit to you. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses every statement shall be confirmed." I said, while previously there on my second visit, and I say it before my arrival while still absent, to those who kept on in their old sins and to all the rest, that when I come once more I shall not spare.

The message is the witness. Paul understood that, over time, one person can provide a number of witnesses. One person, several witnesses! This understanding has an important application for those of us who labor in the twilight of "this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). In part, that application is this: *The Messiah is to preach the Good News—the gospel—*

of His Father's Kingdom in two visits; His message will take the form of two witnesses. We commonly call them His two ministries or His first and second comings.

His first visit—or witness—took place nearly 2,000 years ago. Christ introduced it one Sabbath day by reading Isaiah 61:1-2a in Nazareth's synagogue. His Galilean audience

were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. (Luke 4:28-29)

History repeats itself. When Christ soon stands to read Isaiah 61:2b-3, many, unable to recognize Him as their Messiah, will respond as did the Galileans. At Christ's second "visit," His second witness, many will again be "filled with wrath" and seek to destroy Him (Revelation 19:19). How can we avoid a "strong delusion" (II Thessalonians 2:11) and ensure that we will recognize Him?

God's Word answers that question. Some of the events and people during Christ's *first* witness teach us about His *second*. John 7 tells the story of two groups that *did not* do the right things; as a result, they failed to recognize their Messiah. Luke 2 narrates the story of a different group whose

people *did* the right things, and consequently, recognized Jesus as their Messiah.

"Presto Chango"

The setting of John 7, Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles, shows that the people of Judea accepted Christ no more readily than those of Galilee. When Christ went to the Feast and taught (verses 10, 14), "there was a division among the people because of Him" (verse 43). Christ caused a maelstrom in the ocean of people attending the Feast. John records that two groups stood before Christ on this occasion. We will call them the Magicians and the Jingoists.

The Magicians

Verse 27 records their hang-up: "We know where this Man is from; but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from." These people must have had a penchant for magic; they thought the Messiah would simply *appear* out of nowhere!

Their silly idea probably sprung from misinterpreting Malachi 3:1: "And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple. . . ."

To them, "suddenly" implied that no one would know from where Christ came. Matthew 13:54-57 shows that many Galileans knew that He was the carpenter's son. They were familiar with His mother and family. Word got down from Galilee to the people of Jerusalem, and they, too, knew all about Him. How, these



Magicians asked, could He be the Messiah?

We understand that Malachi 3:1 means that Christ will suddenly come to His temple, the church. But these citizens of Jerusalem, not “rightly dividing” the Scripture, did not realize that Christ would have two witnesses, two ministries. He would first come in “the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7). The second time He would come “on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30) suddenly, quickly, when we do not expect Him, as many scriptures mention (Mark 13:32-37; I Thessalonians 5:2-3). Even then, those of God’s people who are awake will know from where He comes.

Because Jesus did not just pop out of nowhere, the Magicians refused to recognize Him as their Messiah.

The Jingoists

John 7:41-52 tells the story of a second group that could not recognize Jesus as their Messiah.

... Some said, “Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?” ... Nicodemus ... said to [the Pharisees], “Does our law judge a man before it hears Him and knows what He is doing?” They answered and said to him, “Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.”

Had these doubters really searched, they would have found that several prophets came from Galilee:

- **Micah** was from Moresheth-gath, in Galilee (Micah 1:1).
- **Elijah**, of Gilead, was a native of Galilee (I Kings 17:1).
- **Jonah** was from Gath Hopher, in Galilee (II Kings 14:25; see Joshua 19:13).

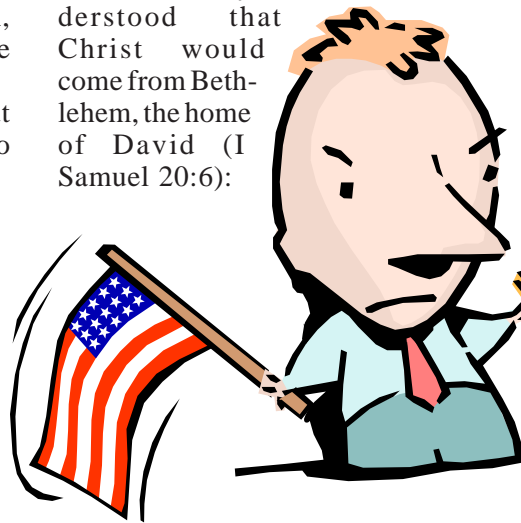
Nahum and **Hosea** may have hailed from Galilee as well. The Jingoists’ argument—that no prophet arose from Galilee—was completely without merit! Most important, their

argument totally neglected Isaiah’s prophecy about Christ’s own Galilean ministry. He was to shine as a light in the darkness, in the inheritances of Naphtali and Zebulon, in “Galilee of the Gentiles” (Isaiah 9:1-2).

As so often happens, the Jingoists mixed truth with fallacy. They correctly understood two things about Christ’s birth and descent:

First, they understood Isaiah 11, Jeremiah 23 and Jeremiah 33, which indicate that Christ would descend from David. He would be of Judah—the Scepter tribe (Genesis 49:10).

Second, they understood that Christ would come from Bethlehem, the home of David (I Samuel 20:6):



But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. (Micah 5:2)

Yet notice the detail of Micah’s prophecy they missed. He does not say that the Messiah would *reside* in Bethlehem, but that He would “come forth” from it, which is exactly what He did! Joseph had come to Bethlehem at Jesus’ birth because he had to pay taxes in his home town. We can deduce from Christ’s genealogies that both Joseph and Mary hailed from Bethlehem. Their ancestors include David, Jesse, Obed and Boaz (Luke 3:32)—all men of Bethlehem (see Ruth 1, 2 and 4; I Samuel 16 and 17).

Sometime after Christ’s birth, Joseph returned to Nazareth, in Galilee, where he and Mary reared Jesus. He began His ministry from Galilee, *not Judah*, as Isaiah 9 foretold. Mark

1:14-15 records a partial fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy:

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

Compare this passage with its counterpart, Matthew 4:12-17, which quotes Isaiah 9:1-2 and points out that Christ fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy regarding His Galilean ministry.

Believe it or not, this group of people failed to recognize their Messiah because of His place of residence—because He lived in Galilee! Thus, we have dubbed them the Jingoists, people driven by inordinate nationalism.

Behind their reason for rejecting Christ—that no prophet ever did or ever would come from Galilee—lurks an irrational, arrogant prejudice against anything not of Judea. *These people were part of the power-elite of the day, part of the religious establishment centered in Jerusalem.* Classic xenophobes, they wanted nothing to do with Galilee.

Situated to the north of Judea, Galilee was home to an enclave of Judeans who had migrated northward since the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Geography and doctrine separated Galilee from Jerusalem.

- **Geography:** Between Judea and Galilee was Samaria, home to the Gentile “interlopers” the Jews hated. These were the people the Assyrians brought into the area when they deported the House of Israel, the northern ten tribes, around 721-718 BC.
- **Doctrine:** Though far from perfect, the Galileans were doctrinally purer than the Jews to the south. For example, the Galileans observed a 14th Passover, while many of those in Jerusalem, as we know, kept Passover on the 15th of Nisan (John 18:28).

Loving God’s Truth

The Magicians loved superstition

Please see page 14

The Woman Atop the Beast

Part 2

The aged John had never seen anything like this before! God had shown him a number of incredible visions: the very throne of God, the 144,000 and innumerable multitude, the Two Witnesses, various beasts and plagues of every description. But this one seemed to top them all—not because it was so strange or unbelievable, but because it portrayed something so horribly EVIL!

What the apostle saw, described in the first six verses of Revelation 17, graphically depicts the great false church that sat upon the revivals of the Roman Empire. This “great harlot” has made the whole world “drunk with the wine of her fornication” (verse 2) and controls millions of people with her idolatry. Over the centuries, she has manipulated kings and emperors and prime ministers to do her ungodly bidding worldwide.

In the previous issue, we looked into why God illustrates this false church as a prostitute, and saw that she has brewed a foul mixture of paganism and Christianity. This syncretistic doctrine has presently intoxicated over one billion people and many millions more in the past two thousand years. We also saw that her meddling in the affairs of nations—as she has done incessantly since the days of Constantine—is another proof of her whoredoms.

We looked into the matter of Mary worship and how she has been elevated to the point that she virtually replaces the Holy Spirit in the supposed Trinity. Mary is simply the modern manifestation of the ancient



The Pope greets Americans during one of his visits to the United States. With over one billion Catholics worldwide, John Paul II draws huge crowds wherever he travels. Such huge numbers of adherents give the Roman Catholic Church great power among the nations of the world.

goddess Ishtar, also known as Semiramis, Astarte, Rhea, Ceres, Diana, Venus, etc. Finally, we noted how the harlot’s colors, purple and scarlet, have come down to today in the garments her clergy wear for official activities.

Already, the proof unmistakably points to the largest and most powerful of “Christian” churches, the Roman Catholic Church. However, much more evidence exists to put this fact beyond question. We KNOW who controls the Beast!

Wealth and Luxury

Another clue to the great harlot’s identity is her adornments: “gold and precious stones and pearls” (Revelation 17:4). This woman is one rich prostitute! From her fornication with

“the kings of the earth” and making “the inhabitants of the earth . . . drunk with the wine of her fornication” (verse 2), she has made a killing!

The Roman Catholic Church is by far the wealthiest institution on the face of the earth. Not even considering her wealth in priceless art, ancient documents and properties, the Catholic Church has invested in projects, corporations and nations all over the world, giving her vast returns yearly. She owns or controls hundreds of schools, colleges and universities in many countries. And, of course, she receives donations from the faithful in every type of currency in the world.

The golden cup that the harlot holds in her hand is further evidence of her identity. The chalice, states *The*

Catholic Encyclopedia, “[is] the most important of the sacred vessels. . . . [It] may be of gold or silver, and if the latter, then the inside must be surfaced with gold” (Broderick edition, 1976, pp. 103-104). Multiple thousands of these “sacred” cups adorn the altars of Catholic churches around the globe.

Dave Hunt, in his 1994 book, *A Woman Rides the Beast*, writes:

Most of Rome’s wealth has been acquired through the sale of salvation. Untold billions of dollars have been paid to her by those who thought they were purchasing heaven on the installment plan for themselves or loved ones. The practice continues to this day —blatantly where Catholicism is in control, less obviously here in the United States. (p. 75)

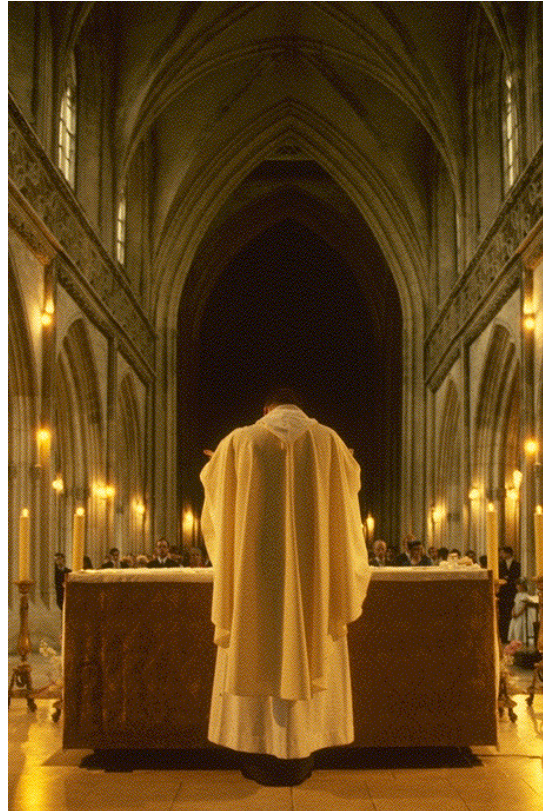
This “sale of salvation,” historically called “indulgences,” precipitated the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. For certain sums of money, a Catholic could buy his release from purgatory or decrease his stay there. Dominican Friar Tetzl, commissioned by Pope Leo X (1513-1521) to sell indulgences, used this sales pitch to rake in vast sums for “Mother Church”: “As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs!”

Today, the Catholic Church sells masses. Many devout people stipulate in their wills that an amount of money should be given to the Church so that masses may be performed in their behalf every week, month, quarter or year. By this posthumous devotion, they hope to be accepted more quickly into heaven from purgatory.

D. Antonio Gavin, a Spanish writer of the late seventeenth century who fled the Inquisition to England, describes the wealth of one Catholic church in the Spanish town of Zaragoza:

[The crown on the image of the Virgin Mary is] twenty-five pounds weight, set all over with large diamonds, so that nobody

can see any gold in it, and everybody thinks it is all made of diamonds. Beside this rich one, she has six crowns more of pure gold, set with rich diamonds and emeralds. . . . The roses of diamonds and other precious stones she has to adorn her mantle are innumerable; for though she [the statue of Mary] is drest [sic] every day in the colour of the church’s festival, and never useth twice [in a year]



The Catholic Church is renowned for its ornate cathedrals and opulent liturgy. In the world of religion, it is without peer in its wealth and power. Here, a priest prepares to perform a wedding ceremony in northern France.

the same mantle, which is of the best stuff imbroidered [sic] with gold, she has new roses of precious stones every day for three years together, she has three hundred and sixty-five necklaces of pearls and diamonds, and six chains of gold set with diamonds, which are put on her mantle on the great festivals of Christ. (*A Master Key to Popery: In Five Parts*, 1773, pp. 157-158.)

Tourists can see these and many other treasures today in the church of Our Lady of the Pillar in Zaragoza. This is only one church in one small town!

Blood of the Saints

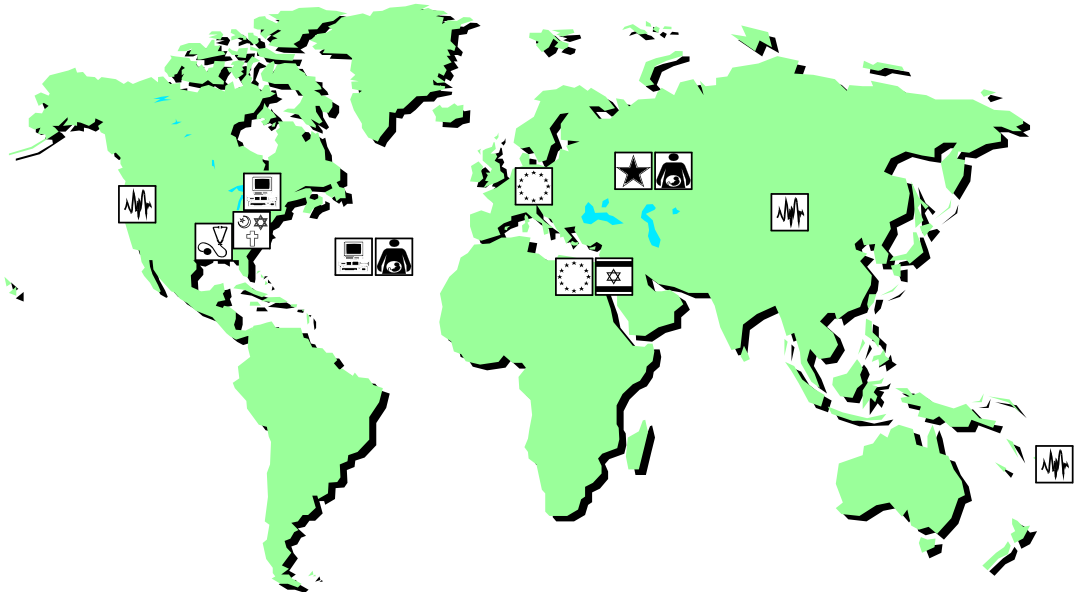
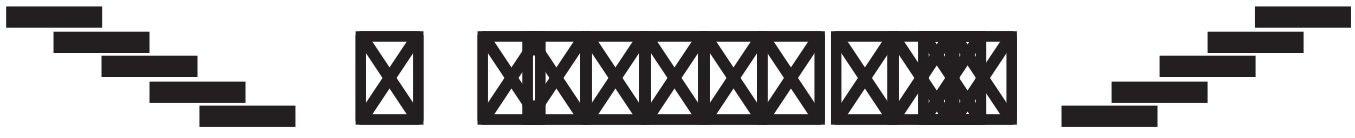
The final description of this wicked harlot centers on her bloodthirsty persecution of God’s people: “And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Revelation 17:6). After he saw this, the apostle John was simply dumbfounded! What he saw probably far surpassed anything the early church had experienced under the Roman emperors. Just imagine how horrifying it would be to watch someone drink and become intoxicated on the blood of family members! That is how John felt!

This clue also squares with what we know of the Roman Catholic Church. She is famous, not just for persecuting those she deems “heretics,” but also for *three* Inquisitions: Medieval (1227-1492), Spanish (1478-1834) and Roman (1542-present)! The Inquisition, now called the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, still occupies the Palace of the Inquisition next to the Vatican.

Beyond that, the Church decreed crusades against non-Catholics all over Europe. She hunted down thousands of Bogomils, Huguenots, Albigenses, Waldenses, Anabaptists and others, and imprisoned, tortured, massacred and/or burned them. Many thousands of Jews and Moors died in Church-sponsored pogroms and wars. This does not even consider her several crusades to free Jerusalem from “infidels.”

How many people does this involve? It is literally **MILLIONS!** Over three million died in the Spanish Inquisition alone (R. W. Thompson, *The Papacy and the Civil Power*, 1876, p. 82)! The inquisitors believed that it was “better for a hundred innocent people to die than for one heretic to go free.” The Roman Catholic Church justifies these deaths as a necessity of the times to keep the Church doctrinally pure. Historian

Please see page 18



Earthquakes



A 7.1 quake hit near Tonga on April 16, causing little destruction. On May 2 a 6.4 temblor struck near Beijing, China, killing 5 and leaving thousands homeless. For the first time in years, a strong earthquake (5.4) rocked Seattle, Washington, also on May 2.

Large earthquake totals for 1996 as of May 2:

+6.0s: 51 +7.0s: 6

European Union



• Recently, a European consortium won a billion dollar tender to build a refinery in Alexandria, Egypt. The refinery is being set up as a joint venture between Europe, Israel and Egypt. Some analysts think this kind of economic partnership could eventually lead to Israel and other Mediterranean countries joining the European Union (EU).

• EU foreign ministers met on April 22 to consider the recent escalation of violence between Israel and Hezbollah forces in Lebanon. German foreign minister Klaus Kinkel indicated that Europe may soon play a role in the mediation.

Jerusalem



To speed the “permanent status” peace talks, the Palestine National Council on April 24 accepted Yassir Arafat’s request to revise their National Covenant denying Israel’s right to exist. Jerusalem is the key point of conflict. The Palestinians are adamant in claiming East Jerusalem as their capital, while the Israelis declare that it will not be divided again. Real negotiations will not begin until after the May 29 Israeli elections.

Russia



On March 15 Russia’s lower house, the State Duma, called for the reuniting of the Soviet Union. Georgia’s President Eduard Shevardnadze im-

mediately called for an emergency summit of former Soviet republics, warning of a “return to a totalitarian regime.”

Technology



• All U.S. military personnel globally will be issued a new identification device named “MARC” (Multi-technology Automated Reader Card). This “smart card” utilizes a bar code, magnetic strip, embossed data, printed data, a digitized photograph and a microchip.

• Ontario, Canada, announced in February that it will issue “smart” ID cards to all its residents within a year. Each card contains a microchip capable of storing and processing large amounts of personal, medical and driving data.

Ecumenism



In March a Catholic priest from Pittsburgh helped formulate a covenant with Catholic, Lutheran and Episcopal bishops to work and pray together, to eradicate bigotry and intolerance of other religions and to minister to the needy. Over the past 30 years, similar covenants have been made in five other states.

Health



• U.S. teens testing positive for HIV is doubling every 14 months.

• With nearly 11 million alcoholics, America’s most common drug abuse problem is alcoholism.

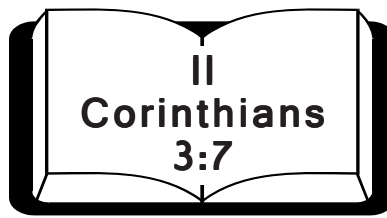
Abortion



• The United Nations reports that 45 million abortions are performed annually around the world, meaning that for every 3 children born, one life is aborted.

• Russia’s Labor Ministry reports that it led the world in abortions in 1994 with between 2.8 and 3.5 million, double the number of births.

—Andy Benedetto



HAVE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS PASSED AWAY?

Many years ago, I watched a Sunday morning television program presented by a popular Protestant denomination. This particular denomination teaches that the Ten Commandments and the entire Old Testament are now obsolete, and its adherents use only the New Testament. On one program, they used some verses in II Corinthians 3 to try to prove that the Ten Commandments are a thing of the past.

The argument went something like this: In II Corinthians 3:7, Paul speaks about “the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones.” He states that this ministry of death “was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance.” But, Paul continues, this “glory was passing away.”

The shining of Moses’ face refers to Exodus 34:29-35, which describes Moses coming down from the mountain the second time with the Ten Commandments, and because of his close contact with God there, his face shone. From this, they concluded that the ministry of death is the Ten Commandments, which are “passing away.” To emphasize this further, Paul repeats that this ministry of death is passing away in verses 11 and 13. This reasoning then led them to claim that the Ten Commandments and the whole Old Testament are now obsolete!

What is Paul talking about in these verses? What is this ministry of death? What is it that is passing away? Could the law of God—which Paul declares to be “spiritual” (Romans 7:14) and “holy, just and good” (verse 12)—

“But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away.”

have passed away and become obsolete? If he is not saying this, why does he mention Moses receiving the Ten Commandments and his face shining? What do these scriptures REALLY mean?

A Contrast in Covenants

As in all cases where scriptures are difficult to understand, we must read them in context. At the beginning of chapter 3, Paul praises the Corinthians for the joy, satisfaction and affection he felt in seeing the growth and accomplishments of this congregation of the church of God.

Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of

commendation from you? You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men. (II Corinthians 3:1-2)

Paul boasts that the church at Corinth displayed such a fine example that their behavior worked like a letter of commendation for him, the apostle who started the congregation and served it.

In verse 3, Paul uses this metaphor of a letter of commendation to lead into a discussion comparing the Old and New Covenants. “You are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with

ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.” When God made the Old Covenant with ancient Israel, Moses wrote the commandments, statutes and judgments that God had given to him in a book with “ink” (Exodus 24:4). God wrote the Ten Commandments with His own finger on two tablets of stone (Exodus 31:18; 32:15-16). However, Paul points out, under the New Covenant, God has given us His Spirit, enabling us to keep His laws in their spiritual intent. He is now writing His Ten Commandments on our hearts (Hebrews 8:10)!

In verses 4-5, Paul gives all the credit to God and Christ for the knowledge that he and other ministers transmitted to the Corinthians. In verse 6,

A Ready Answer

“Be Ready Always To Give An Answer” – I Peter 3:15 (KJV)

he returns to the two covenants, declaring that he and his colleagues were ministers of the New Covenant: “[God] also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit.” Under the Old Covenant, God never gave the people the Holy Spirit. He required them to keep the law only in the “letter” and not in its spiritual intent and purpose as Jesus Christ later magnified it.

For example, the sixth commandment forbids murder. As long as one does not actually take someone’s life, he has kept the commandment in the letter. However, Jesus taught that anyone who is angry with his brother without a cause or even insults someone else is in danger of breaking this law (Matthew 5:21-22). Because we have God’s Spirit under the New Covenant, we can keep His laws not only in the letter but also in their spiritual intent.

The apostle then writes, “for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (II Corinthians 3:6). This statement is a key to understanding the rest of the chapter. “The letter kills” means that, in agreeing to the terms of the Old Covenant and accepting God’s law, the carnal nation of Israel fell under the condemnation of the law because the people could not keep it. When law is broken, a penalty results, and the penalty for breaking God’s law is death. Thus, without the ability to keep it properly, the Israelites incurred the death penalty.

Paul explains this as it occurred to him personally in Romans 7:9-11:

I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.

A Better Covenant

The Old Covenant had a fault: The people under it were unable or unwilling to obey God’s law. The author of Hebrews mentions this in his discussion of the New Covenant’s superiority over the Old:

For if that first [Old] covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second [New Covenant]. Because finding fault with them [the Israelites], He says: “Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” (Hebrews 8:7-8)

Since the Spirit of God was not generally available under the Old Covenant, the carnal Israelites could not obey the law even in the letter. They broke the covenant that they had made with God, so a New Covenant was necessary.

Under the New Covenant, God gives us His Holy Spirit upon repentance and baptism. This enables us to keep God’s law even in its spiritual intent. Furthermore, under the New Covenant, God provides a means for repentant sinners to receive pardon for their sins and have Christ’s righteousness imputed to them. These people are no longer under the condemnation of the law (Romans 6:14), and the way is open for them to inherit eternal life. This is what Paul means when He says, “the Spirit gives life” (II Corinthians 3:6).

We now have the background to understand that when Paul speaks of “the ministry of death” (verse 7), he refers to the ADMINISTRATION of the Old Covenant. The Levitical priesthood, a carnal priesthood based on physical descent from Levi, administered the Old Covenant. This covenant provided no promise of eternal life and no means for sinners to receive forgiveness because “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). Therefore, the people lived and died under the condemnation of the law, and “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

Another reason why Paul refers to the Old Covenant as “the ministry of

death” is that God required the Levitical priesthood to execute those who transgressed certain laws. God’s law mandates the death penalty for certain sins like murder and dishonoring parents (Exodus 21:12-17), Sabbath-breaking (Exodus 31:14-15) and certain sexual sins (Leviticus 20:10-13). The priests were responsible to enforce the death penalty by actually



Because Moses broke the original tablets of stone after Israel’s idolatry with the Golden Calf, he had to return to Mount Sinai for another pair. It was after this second trip that his face shone, reflecting God’s glory.

putting such transgressors to death in the proscribed manner. In this sense, the Old Covenant ministry was indeed a “ministry of death.”

“Engraved on Stones”

However, why did Paul say that the “ministry of death,” the administration of the Old Covenant, was “written and engraved on stones”? Was it not the Ten Commandments that God wrote on two stone tablets? Even though the Ten Commandments were NOT the covenant itself (a covenant is simply an agreement between two parties), they were the *terms* of the covenant. Because the Ten Commandments constituted the part of the agreement between God and Israel that the Israelites agreed to keep, the Old Covenant became synonymous with the Ten Commandments. In Deuteronomy 4:13 Moses writes, “So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tables of

stone.” To put it another way, “keeping the Old Covenant” was the same as “keeping the Ten Commandments.”

A paraphrase of the first eleven words of II Corinthians 3:7 helps to clarify what Paul means: “But if the administration of the Old Covenant, [the terms of which were] written and engraved on stones. . . .” The Ten Commandments undergirded all the laws that God gave to Israel—laws that the Israelites could not keep. The responsibility to teach these laws to Israel and enforce penalties for disobedience, including the death penalty, fell to the priests.

Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? (Hebrews 7:11)

When Moses went up Mount Sinai the second time to receive the Ten Commandments, he wrote God’s statutes and judgments in a book, and God wrote the Ten Commandments on two tables of stone. This, in essence, finalized the “contract” that God made with Israel.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the

covenant, the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 34:27-28)

Verses 29-35 then describe how Moses’ face shone when he delivered the Ten Commandments and the book of the law to Israel.

So what is passing away? Hebrews 8:13 provides the answer: “In that He says, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” The Old Covenant and the Old Covenant ministry, the Levitical priesthood, are passing away, not the Ten Commandments!

The Glory of the Covenants

The apostle goes on to say in II Corinthians 3:7 that this “ministry of death” was glorious as indicated by Moses’ face shining when He delivered the covenant to the Israelites. If this ministry of death was glorious, he reasons, how much *more* glorious must the New Covenant ministry, “the ministry of the Spirit,” be?

For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.” (II Corinthians 3:9-11)

In this same chapter, Paul explains that the veil Moses wore to hide his shining face (Exodus 34:33-35) symbolizes Israel’s failure to understand the truths of the New Covenant.

But their minds were hardened. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. (II Corinthians 3:14-15)

As most of us have experienced, the knowledge of God’s truth has to be miraculously revealed to an individual through the calling of God. Understanding opens to us like the lifting of a veil that had been covering our eyes. “Nevertheless, when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (verse 16).

Paul ends his discussion by showing what marvelous blessings God has bestowed upon us in allowing us to enter the New Covenant: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (verse 18).

We who have been called and ordained of God to understand His marvelous truths are now having God’s Ten Commandments written on our hearts by His Spirit dwelling within us (Hebrews 8:10). We now have no hindrance to learning and applying the Word of God in our lives, which sanctifies and cleanses us (Ephesians 5:26). Through this process, we are being transformed into the glorious image of our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, the One who kept God’s Ten Commandments perfectly.

What a blessing and privilege to be participants in the New Covenant!

—Earl L. Henn

RECOGNIZING THE SECOND WITNESS

continued from page 8

more than God’s truth. The Jingoists loved power more than God’s truth. Neither group had received “the love of the truth”; consequently, both had come to “believe the lie” (II Thessalonians 2:10-11).

But, while in Jerusalem shortly after Christ’s birth, Joseph and Mary encountered a group of people who

had no difficulty recognizing the Messiah—though He had not yet uttered a word. We will call this group

The Devout.

These people had a deep love for God’s truth, and that love paid off. Luke 2 records their story.

Notice the setting. Joseph and Mary left Bethlehem for Jerusalem shortly after Christ’s birth. In accordance with God’s laws, they needed to bring a sacrifice before God for Mary’s purification (Leviticus 12:1-8). Also,

they needed to dedicate Christ, as a firstborn, to God (Exodus 13:2; 22:29; Numbers 3:13; 8:16; 18:15-16). At this time they had the pleasure of meeting a few of the Devout, two of whom Scripture lists by name.

Simeon was a man “just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him” (Luke 2:25). He praised God as he held the infant Jesus in his arms:

My eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared

before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel. (Luke 2:30-32)

He responded to Jesus in a way totally different from that of the Magicians and Jingoists.

Anna

was . . . a prophetess . . . who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant, she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. (Luke 2:36-38)

Anna took only seconds to recognize her Savior and to begin declaring His coming among the faithful!

Doing the Right Things

How were Simeon and Anna able to recognize the Messiah three decades before His first witness actually began? Luke provides the answer. He shows us that, in aggregate, the people of this group displayed the following characteristics:

1. *They had God's Spirit.* As a result, they were able to understand "the deep things of God. . . . No one knows the things of God except [by] the Spirit of God" (I Corinthians 2:10-11). When He promised the Spirit to His disciples, Christ called it

the Spirit of truth [which] . . . will guide you into all truth; for [it] will not speak on [its] own authority, but whatever [it] hears [it] will speak; and [it] will tell you things to come. (John 16:13)

The Spirit *taught* Simeon and Anna, just as it taught the apostles—just as it teaches us today.

2. *They heard God's Word.* Anna "did not depart from the Temple . . . night and day." She often heard the reading of God's Word, which Christ defined as truth (John 17:17). That Word "is profitable for . . . instruction in righteousness" (II Timothy 3:16). The Devout received frequent instruction from God's Word.

3. *They talked with others of like*

mind. Simeon was not alone; neither was Anna. Luke 2:38 says Anna "spoke of [Christ] to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem." An unspecified number of *other* people also waited for the Messiah! They fellowshipped with those who were "just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel" (verse 25).

4. *They fasted often.* Notice the plural: Anna "served God with fastings" (Luke 2:37). These were not the fastings of vanity (see Matthew 6:16-18), but she fasted in *service* to God. A result of proper fasting is knowledge (see Daniel 9:1-22; 10:1-21). Surely, Anna's frequent fastings contributed to her ability to recognize the Messiah.

5. *They prayed regularly.* Again, notice the plural, "prayers" (Luke 2:37). Many hours of prayer lay behind Anna's recognition of her Messiah.

Solomon writes in Proverbs 2:3-5, "If you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, . . . then you will . . . find the knowledge of God." Solomon should know. God greatly increased his knowledge and wisdom as a result of his prayer (II Chronicles 1:10).

6. *The Devout made the right connections.* As a result of hearing God's Word, they were aware of the Seventy-Weeks Prophecy (Daniel 9:20-27). They realized that it was *about* 69 prophetic weeks since the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and the Messiah's coming was imminent. That is what Luke 2:26 tells us: God's Spirit revealed to Simeon that he would not die before seeing the Messiah.

7. *The Devout saw the Day approaching and did not forsake the assembling of themselves together* (Hebrews 10:25). They understood the value of Christian fellowship. The prophet wrote of them and their sort through the ages: "Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them" (Malachi 3:16).

Discussing God's Word in frequent fellowship, with humble fastings and prayers, the Devout received understanding from God. Thus, they recognized their Messiah while the superstitious Magicians and the proud Jingoists did not.

The Example of the Devout

These people walked the earth at the time of Christ's first witness to mankind. Similarly, we stand today at the threshold of His second witness. Will we stand in the shoes of the Magicians and Jingoists—the many who will not recognize Christ as their Messiah—or in the shoes of the Devout—the few who will? The choice we make will determine our future.

The Magicians and the Jingoists of old, in rejecting Christ as their Messiah, had only a short time to wait for the consequences. Less than forty years after His death, they suffered one of the most grisly tribulations of history. The Romans burned and pillaged in Galilee and Judea. They destroyed the Temple and Jerusalem with it. Josephus records that the Roman armies led 97,000 captives away from Jerusalem alone. During the three months before the Romans took the city, hunger, disease or the sword claimed 115,800 lives.

This conflagration was a type of the Great Tribulation. Had the Magicians and the Jingoists standing before the Messiah recognized Him, they and their children could have escaped, just as the Devout did. The Devout, understanding that Christ's first witness was imminent and refusing to procrastinate, did the right things. As a result, God "counted [them] worthy to escape all these things ["great distress"; verse 23] that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36).

Will we be among the relative few who recognize our Messiah? Will we escape the *real* Tribulation? We will *if* we do the right things!

We will if we love the truth. We will if we use God's Holy Spirit, studying God's Word with "fastings and prayers night and day." We will if we fellowship every Sabbath—and more often as practicable—with the people of God's true church, those who are "just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel."

If we in these last days follow the example of the Devout, God will judge us worthy "to stand before the Son of Man." And, make no mistake about it, we will recognize Him for what He is!

—Charles F. Whitaker

Little Things Count!

continued from page 6

among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. . . . Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? (I Corinthians 5:1-2, 6)

Did the fornicator think that his singular actions were affecting the whole congregation? Not only did he not think so, but neither did the whole congregation! None of them, it seems, understood how his sin was having a damaging effect upon them!

We, however, must begin to think in this way. **We are one body**, and what each part does and how he does it affects the efficiency, effectiveness and purity of the whole. In Corinth it played a major role in puffing up, confusing and dividing the congregation—jeopardizing the spiritual health of all!

This is so important that God includes it in the Ten Commandments! “You shall not bow down to [idols] nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me” (Exodus 20:5). God warns that evil will reach out, spread and afflict unborn generations. The effects of drugs, smoking, alcohol, medicines, x-rays and poor diets upon the unborn are well known. However, we often fail to think of the effect of example. Do we care what we pass on to our children? Remember, it will very likely increase.

An Encouraging Flip Side

But notice the other side of this principle as revealed in the same commandment: “. . . but showing mercy to thousands [of generations], to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (verse 6). In His mercy God has provided that the good we do goes a long, long way—almost immeasurably farther than our evil deeds. God is sovereign over His creation, actively participating in stopping evil before it destroys us. At the same time, He is active in producing good in us toward His Kingdom.

An excellent example of this occurs in Romans 11:26-29:

And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn

away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.

God has a commitment to Israel—and thus us—because of the obedience of one man, Abraham. We are reaping the benefits of the good Abraham sowed almost four thousand years ago because God is faithful to His promises!

Why does God tell us so much about the kings of Israel and Judah? One reason is that each king reflected the attitudes and conduct of the entire nation, so He can describe the whole nation in microcosm. An equally important reason is to show that the nation reflected its leadership. If the nation was led by a David, Hezekiah or Josiah, things went well. If the leadership fell to an Ahab or Manasseh, the country degenerated quickly.

God is showing that there is a ripple effect within the nation; the moral and spiritual quality of its leadership

radiates out toward the people (Proverbs 29:2). Ralph Waldo Emerson writes, “An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man.” Parents need to take note of this. What kind of ripple effect is influencing your children?

In Romans 5:12-19, Paul expounds these principles to a limited degree and gives some examples. Verse 12 has an especially chilling phrase: “. . . and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.” Sin was introduced and death spread. Adam and Eve never thought that the episode in the garden would have such impact! But it was the crack in the dike that has led to the flood of sins in every facet of man’s life.

Our acts may not be as important as Christ’s, Abraham’s or Adam and Eve’s, but the principle is there and working. We do not live in a vacuum. As part of a body, our actions affect many others.

A Team Effort

God does everything perfectly and with wisdom and love. He did not carelessly call us. We are not nonentities swallowed up in the vastness of humanity. Matthew 10:29-30 assures us that God’s sovereignty is not limited to just big issues; He superintends even the tiniest details. Each of us is so valuable He gave His Son for us. Thus, we need not fear that He will overlook us as we struggle with life. However, we do need to consider much more deeply how valuable our conduct and attitude are to the whole body.

Paul writes in I Corinthians 3:6-7, “I planted, Apollos



Our actions radiate out from us and affect others more than we may realize. Christians must be aware of this. The example of parents influences their children, that of employers their employees, and leaders of nations their citizens.

watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase." When we are doing God's will and yielding to Him in obedience, God adds a miraculous element to produce spiritual growth. Verse 8 adds that, even though we have different functions, we are united in submission to God, but we will be rewarded individually. This proves that God is watching each person's conduct. To Him, we are not a faceless blob in a sea of church members. How could we be rewarded accordingly if our labors were not being individually noted?

God's work involves many individuals with a variety of gifts. To God there are no superstars, only team members called and placed to perform their own special role for which He has prepared them. When we fail to do our part, a slow separation begins, and because a part is not functioning as it should, the body suffers. Paul begins this epistle asking, "Is Christ divided?" (I Corinthians 1:13), and proceeds to discuss a variety of sins that produce division. Later, he teaches the application of the body analogy to the church, and in chapter 13 he stresses the main function of every member: to love.

In I Corinthians 12:4-11, Paul shows that each person God places in the body receives gifts for the benefit of the entire body. In verses 14-20 he explains that diversity in the body is necessary because, if the entire body was just one part, it could not function. The diversity in this context is in terms of gifts, not doctrine, nationality, sex or race. Diversity enables the body to be much more effective, efficient and versatile in performing its intended purpose. Each person has a specific function necessary to the whole.

In verses 21-25 Paul makes a veiled warning that we need to guard against both pride in our abilities and its opposite—equally vain—that we have nothing to give. We become useful members when we choose to set aside these vanities and begin doing what we should.

Verse 18, combined with verses 22-26, teaches us that God Himself has organized the body. We need to understand that the greatest authority in all of creation has *specifically* placed us within it and given us gifts. If the body is to function as He has purposed, each part

must recognize his individual dependence upon and concern for the whole. In addition, each must understand what the body is designed to accomplish. It is the responsibility of each part to subordinate himself to God in order to produce the unity that will enable the whole body to do its work.

God expresses these concerns for the body because He wants it to function efficiently and effectively in unity. Therefore, what happens to one part, or what one part does, affects the whole. **WHAT WE DO DOES INDEED MAKE**

A DIFFERENCE because we are individual parts of a living, spiritual organism. Our actions will produce an increase of good or evil, efficiency or inefficiency in the use of spiritual resources, effectiveness or ineffectiveness of our witness, and growth or backsliding in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

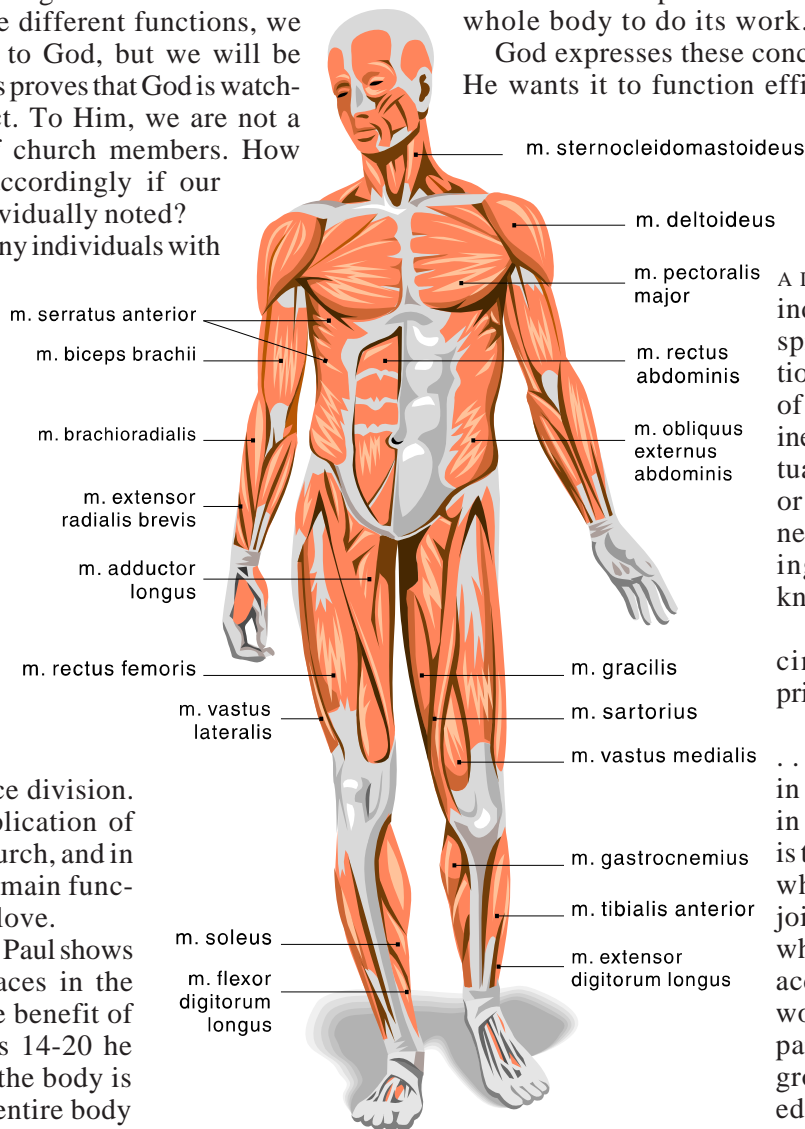
Ephesians 4:15-16 succinctly summarizes these principles.

... but speaking the truth in love, [we] may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Brethren, never think that what you do is meaningless! You occupy a position in the most important organization on earth, and what you are doing is preparing you to affect the lives of **BILLIONS** in time to come. Little things, like you and me, count because God has graciously inserted Himself into our lives. Our lives do make a difference!

In Christian love,

John W. Stenhouse



The major anterior muscle groups of the human body. For a person to function effectively and efficiently, these muscles, along with the joints, ligaments, tendons and many other parts, must work together in unity. God's church functions in a similar way.

THE WOMAN ATOP THE BEAST

continued from page 10

Will Durant, author of *The Story of Civilization*, writes:

Compared with the persecution of heresy in Europe from 1227 to 1492, the persecution of Christians by the Romans in the first three centuries after Christ was a mild and humane procedure. . . . Making every allowance required by an historian and permitted to a Christian, we must rank the Inquisition, along with the wars and persecutions of our time, as among the darkest blots on the record of mankind, revealing a ferocity unknown in any beast. (Vol. IV, p. 784.)

Peter de Rosa, a Catholic historian and a former Jesuit, describes Roman Catholicism as

the most persecuting faith the world has ever seen . . . [forcing] the throne to impose the Christian religion on all its subjects. [Pope] Innocent III murdered far more Christians in one afternoon . . . than any Roman emperor did in his entire reign. (*Vicars of Christ: The Dark Side of the Papacy*, 1988, p. 180.)

It is easy to understand why John “marveled with great amazement.”

The Harlot Exposed!

“But the angel said to me, ‘Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery [*hidden truth*, margin] of the woman. . . .’” (Revelation 17:7). It is as if the angel says to John, “What did you expect? You know how much persecution the church has already received. It could only get worse!”

The angel then primarily concentrates on the beast upon which the woman rides, but he scatters a few tidbits about the harlot along the way. The first appears in verse 9: “Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads [of the beast] are seven

mountains on which the woman sits.” Mountains are biblical symbols for GOVERNMENTS or nations, as in Isaiah 2:2-3:

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the *mountain* of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the *mountains*, and shall be exalted above the *hills*; and all *nations* shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, “Come, let us go up to the *mountain* of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Thus, God reveals that the harlot sits upon—or controls like a rider guides a horse—seven governments or nations. These seven heads or mountains, as Herbert Armstrong often explained, are seven revivals of the Holy Roman Empire from Justinian (AD 554) to the final world dictator who will rise in Europe soon. It was the Roman Catholic Church that pulled the strings in the past six revivals, and she will do so again in the seventh.

The next item comes in verse 15: “And he said to me, ‘The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.’” This verse is a biblical definition of what “waters” often means symbolically in Scripture. Thus, when the serpent spews “water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood” (Revelation 12:15), we can surmise that Satan will send an army of many people after the true church of God when she flees to a place of safety.

The angel is showing the worldwide influence and dominance of the great harlot. The Roman Catholic Church has adherents in every nation, speaking every language. Wherever the Pope travels, throngs gather to hear him speak and celebrate mass. No other church or religious system can claim such a global impact.

The angel discloses the clinching evidence in Revelation 17:18: “And

the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.” We must remember when John wrote this book: about AD 95. At the time, only one city reigned over the kings of the earth—Rome! From Britain to the Caspian Sea and from Gibraltar to the Red Sea, Rome reigned supreme!

More amazing is that the Catholic Church took the name “Roman” and chose Vatican City—sitting in the heart of Rome—as its headquarters! For centuries, the Church controlled Rome itself and came to be associated with it. Today, even more than during the height of the Roman Empire, the Roman Catholic Church truly reigns over many nations of the world. Most countries exchange ambassadors with the Vatican, and many Catholic nations consider the Church’s wishes before making secular decisions. The Pope still retains the authority to excommunicate kings and prime ministers, as well as to put cities and nations under interdict. (An interdict is a censure withdrawing most sacraments and Christian burial, consigning everyone to hell; this fundamentally excommunicates everyone in the area under it.)

What is the end of this horrible woman on the beast? The biblical principle, “all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52), is apropos to the fate of the false church. The angel says in Revelation 17:16, “And the ten horns [*kings*, verse 12] which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire.” As she persecuted, tortured and killed thousands, so God will destroy her!

Watch and Come Out!

There is little room for doubt. All the evidence fits the Roman Catholic Church! Many books and articles have been written detailing the power, wealth, idolatry and atrocities of this great false church that claims to represent God on earth, and the authors have reached the same conclusion as we have.

As Will Durant writes in *The Story of Civilization*, the activities of the great harlot are a dark blot upon the history of man. Worse than that,

though God is not involved with her, the harlot's activities reflect upon Him because she claims to be Christian. An anonymous Catholic, quoted by Peter de Rosa, said, "It would be better to be an atheist than believe in the God of the Inquisition." God says through Isaiah, "My name is blasphemed continually every day" (Isaiah 52:5).

For those of us in God's true church, this knowledge helps us to watch world events as they begin to develop into fulfilling the prophecies of the Bible. Jesus warns us:

Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch! (Mark 13:35-37)

The identity of the great harlot of Revelation 17 is a key piece of understanding that will help us to identify the coming Beast power in Europe. We will be able to recognize when the political power begins to use religion to unite the nations of the new Roman Empire—just as Constantine did in AD 325—and how the harlot in turn will use the Beast to further her aims. Thus, we will have advance warning on the rest of the world—if we are watching!

Of greater importance is the warning God gives in Revelation 18:4-5:

And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities."

Though Revelation 18 speaks generally about the whole Babylonian system that this world follows, the great false church plays a major role in it. We need to be examining ourselves and our mode of life to see if we have absorbed any of the harlot's ways. If we have, we still have time to "come out" of them, purifying ourselves as the Bridegroom is pure (I John 3:3).

The bride of Christ, unlike the great harlot in her opulent and vain-glorious scarlet and purple, wears "fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Revelation 19:8). Our Savior is hard at work sanctifying His bride,

that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such

thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:27)

Soon, we will be able to say, "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:7)!

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh



The Temple of Saturn in the Roman Forum (top) and St. Peter's Square in Vatican City (bottom). It is no coincidence that the Roman Catholic Church chose Rome as her headquarters. Since the time of Constantine, this great false church has ruled over nations all over the earth just as the Roman Empire did in its day. Truly, it is the image of the Beast (Revelation 13:11-18)!

BIBLE STUDY: TRUMPETS

Normally, church members approach Passover and Unleavened Bread very somberly. The enormity of what our Father and His Son risked for us is sobering, especially as we examine ourselves in comparison to the perfection of Jesus Christ! At Pentecost, the mood lightens as we contemplate the coming of God's Holy Spirit as a comforter and guide during our journey toward the Kingdom of God. It is a thrill to realize that God has chosen us to be part of the first harvest of His creation!

This exuberant mood stays with us as we approach the Feast of Trumpets. We tend to focus on the return of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords and on our resurrection to glory as this festival depicts. What a joyous day that will be! Though Trumpets does ultimately focus on these events, we should consider other sobering—even terrifying—meanings as we near the Feast of Trumpets, for it also depicts a terrible time of judgment upon the people of this world!



1. Why do we call this holy day “the Feast of Trumpets”? Leviticus 23:23-25.

COMMENT: God commands us to keep this holy day each year so we will remember something about the “blowing of trumpets.”

2. What do trumpets symbolize in Scripture? Isaiah 58:1; Jeremiah 4:5; 6:1; Ezekiel 33:3; Joel 2:1, 15; Amos 3:6.

COMMENT: Trumpets symbolize a loud, warning cry of impending danger! These verses from the prophets impart a dire warning to those living in the end time: The day of the Lord is at hand, a day of darkness, gloominess and clouds over man's society! The prophets strongly admonish the ministry to raise their voices as trumpets to warn of sudden, terrifying destruction!

3. Are these warnings just for the world, or are they for God's people too? Same verses.

COMMENT: Though originally intended for Israel, these warnings apply specifically to the called-out children of God since *we* are the ones living in the end time with the understanding of God's plan! In fact, we have the most to lose by ignoring these stern prophecies of death and destruction. They are admonishments to prepare ourselves **SPIRITUALLY** for the tumult ahead. Notice that these verses stress repentance, fasting and prayer, and who but God's elect truly understand them?

4. How do these warnings apply to the Feast of Trumpets? Revelation 8-9; 11:15-19.

COMMENT: The seventh seal, which includes the seven trumpets, announces the Day of the Lord and the return of Jesus Christ! I Corinthians 15:52 says that the resurrection will occur “at the last trumpet,” and in I Thessalonians 4:16 Paul writes that Christ “will descend from heaven with a shout, . . . with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” These proofs lead unmistakably to the conclusion that the Feast of Trumpets represents this step in the plan of God.

5. Why must God pour out His wrath on humanity? I Corinthians 13:9-13.

COMMENT: We do not know all the reasons why such destruction and death must occur, but we do know that God will do it in love. It may be that He sends these plagues in just retribution for their sin, or He may be saving their character from permanent rebellion against Him. He desires all to repent and attain His Kingdom (II Peter 3:9), so He will do whatever is necessary to bring that to pass!

6. Does God's church have a responsibility in preparing for Christ's return? II Peter 3:10-18; Revelation 19:7-9.

COMMENT: It is one thing to celebrate a joyous meeting with Christ—it is quite another to ensure that we are a fitting bride for Him! The church must do its part in cooperating with God to prepare us as holy, righteous, godly saints who are worthy to marry His Son.

7. Revelation 10:7 says that when the seventh angel “is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished.” What is this mystery? I Corinthians 15:50-58.

COMMENT: The great mystery is that we can and will become immortal and incorruptible spirit beings at Christ's return! This is the part of the Feast of Trumpets that we rejoice in—for good reason—for vision of what **WE WILL BE** is a great motivator! I John 3:2 says we will be just like the returning Christ, who is very God, “the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29; see Philipians 3:20-21; Colossians 1:18)!

8. Is God's plan finished when Christ returns? I Corinthians 15:23-28; Revelation 20.

COMMENT: The resurrection at Christ's second coming is only the beginning of God's reign on the earth! In the proper time and order, all who have lived will be given an opportunity to repent and enter God's glorious Kingdom as sons of God. These events are more fully contemplated in the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day.

9. Will Jesus return on the Feast of Trumpets?

COMMENT: The church of God has supposed this to be true for many years—and the biblical material seems to support His second coming **ON** that day some time soon. However, no verse specifically, unequivocally states this. The Feast of Trumpets *pictures* His return, but we cannot blindly assume that He will in fact come on that day. The odds are no worse than 1 in 365, however!

Because we **know** that He *will* return soon, we can be prepared for it! If we learn to love each other fervently—which is the basis of His judgment of us (Matthew 25:31-46)—we will qualify to help perfect others. We will be prepared to help others as they recover from the terrible times of the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord. We will be trained to teach and guide others as they strive to enter God's Kingdom.

For us, **BEING READY** is much more important than **WHEN** Christ returns. As the prophets advised, we need to be busy repenting, overcoming, praying and fasting as Christ's return approaches!