

2009 Summer Newsletter
Detroit Bible Students
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“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” Matthew 24:14

HAS CHRISTIANITY FAILED?

A correct answer to the question as to whether Christianity has been a success or a failure depends upon a proper understanding of what constitutes Christianity, and just what God intended it should accomplish in the earth. Recently articles in Newsweek Magazine, The Christian Science Monitor, The Detroit News and others have painted a gloomy picture of the success of Christianity in the world.

The reports are grim. The 2009 American Religious Identification Survey reported that the number of Americans who claim no religious affiliation has nearly doubled since 1990, rising from 8 to 15 percent. Michael Spencer, in the Christian Science Monitor

states, “We are on the verge—within 10 years—of a major collapse of evangelical Christianity. This breakdown will follow the deterioration of the mainline Protestant world and it will fundamentally alter the religious and cultural environment in the West.”

Along with the decline of Christianity there is a rise of secularism and non-Christian religions such as Islam. In many countries of Europe, the Muslim minority is coming close to being a majority. Even in those countries where Christianity still predominates, massive majorities of young Christians know next to nothing about their own faith except how they feel about it and cannot articulate the Gospel with any coherence.

In the Bible, Christ is presented to us as the Savior of the world; and the logical conclusion is that God had planned for the world to be converted to him, and thus to be saved from death. But nearly two thousand years have passed since Jesus came to the earth to die for mankind, and yet the world is still far from being converted, and, in fact, grows less so with each passing year. Are we to judge from this that God's plan has failed?

Jesus taught his disciples to pray for God's kingdom, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is done in Heaven." Matt. 6:10 They were taught to look for this kingdom to bring righteousness and peace to the earth. What they failed to understand was that the time had not then come for the establishment of that kingdom, as their question at the time of Jesus' ascension indicates. (Acts 1:6) Just so with most professing Christians since then, their belief that God's plan is the conversion of the world through Christ has been expected before it was God's due time. They have failed to see from the Scriptures that this is not the age in which God purposed that this work should be accomplished.

The Apostle James gave us a very clearly stated timeline of God's plan as recorded in Acts 15:14-17: "Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written; 'After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David [Israel], which has fallen down]; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; **so the rest of mankind may seek the LORD**, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things.'"

The Apostle Paul, in Galatians 3:8, defines the Gospel by saying, "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, *In you all the nations shall be blessed.*"

In verse 16 of the same chapter he elaborates further: "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, and to seeds, as of many, but as of one, And to your Seed, who is Christ...And if you are Christ's you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (vs. 29) Thus we see that the blessings to *all the nations* come after the seed which is to do the blessing, the Church of Christ, is called out of the world.

The mission of the true Christian in the world was stated by the Lord in his final words to his disciples in Matthew 28:19,20. "Go therefore, and make **disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."

That this mission would be perilous to the disciples of Jesus was clearly stated to them by the Lord. "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you **out** of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also." John 15:18-20

The Apostle Paul states this matter clearly saying, "If children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Romans 8:17,18

The glory referred to here is evidently the glory of joint-heirship with Christ in his messianic kingdom. If those who attain to this glory must first of all suffer with him, then it means that the present mission of the

church is not that of conquering the world for Jesus, but of following faithfully in his footsteps, witnessing to the truth to all who have a hearing ear, and upholding His word faithfully in the face of the world's scorn, even unto death. Thus the gospel would go out as **a witness** (Matthew 24:14) to all nations.

If the wholesale conversion of the world was the Lord's intention, he would not have taught in parables. He explained to his disciples "it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [the multitudes] it has not been given. Therefore I speak to them in parables because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand....Lest they should understand with their heart and turn, so that I should heal them." Matthew 13:11-17 The Apostle tells us, "Every soul who will not hear that Prophet [Christ at his second advent] shall be utterly destroyed from among the people." Acts 3:23

Thus the conversion of the world will be accomplished fully at its appointed time, during the glorious kingdom reign of Christ and his Church. "For He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death." 1 Corinthians 15:25,26 Paul says, "to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God," He describes the "calling" of God as coming to the humble and lowly ones of the earth, by-passing the wise and the noble. 1 Corinthians 2:24-31

Thus, the work of true Christianity has thus far been only that of finding and preparing the future joint-heirs with the Messiah for the great work of his long-promised kingdom. It is, therefore, little wonder that the attempted work of converting the world has made so little progress throughout the Christian era. The Lord knew that, from the human standpoint, Christianity would appear to be a failure with its mere 22 percent of the world's

population. Jesus himself said, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8) Thus the fact that very few in the world today believe in the Bible is no surprise to God.

How grateful we can be that despite man's misbegotten efforts to bring conversion, the Lord has a glorious, beneficent plan for all. That the time is drawing near for the fulfillment of His great and precious promises; when the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will fill the whole earth as the waters cover the sea (Habakuk 2:14); when the times of restitution spoken of by the mouths of all the holy prophets since the world began will come (Acts 3:19-21); when the ransomed of the Lord will return and sorrow and sighing will flee away (Isaiah 36:10).

This is not to say that anyone will obtain life without full cooperation with God's program. Obedience to God is the requirement for life on any plane of existence. However, today most of the world cannot see the glorious power of the Creator; either because they have been born, lived and died in an area where ignorance and superstition predominates, or because they have been deluded by false teachings or popular myths. The Apostle Paul says of such, "whose minds the god of this world [Satan] has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ....should shine on them." 2 Corinthians 4:4

In the kingdom, however, when they are brought back from the grave, they will be equipped with a full knowledge of good as well as of evil. Then, any who choose evil will be destroyed. As the Apostle Peter warned: "And it shall come to pass that every soul who will not hear that Prophet [Jesus at his second advent] shall be utterly destroyed from among the people." (Acts 3:23) "For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death." (1 Corinthians 15:25,26)

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