



**W**ith the death of Jesus on the cross Satan and his anti-Christ minions in both the spirit and physical realms must have believed they had won the day. Surely God's plan of redemption had been thwarted. At the least they must have thought that they had delayed God's plan of redemption. The Savior's blood had been spilled and mingled with the mud of the earth, defiled and trodden underfoot by the crowd that followed Him to the cross and that stood mocking Him. What a victory for His enemies to savor.

As He was dying in agony they taunted Him:

And those who passed by vilified Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "You who destroys the temple, and builds it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross!"

Likewise also the chief priests with the scribes and elders, mocking Him, said, "He saved others, but He cannot save Himself! If He is the King of Israel, let Him come down from the cross now, and we will believe Him! He trusted in God! Let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him, for He said, 'I am the Son of God!'" (Matthew 27:39-43)

Picture, if you will, these blasphemers laughing at the pitiful figure impaled before them. The more He writhed in agony the more they mocked Him.

Truly, the spirit of anti-Christ is cruel and profane. For even if Jesus were not the Son of God—even if He were a deceiver as they claimed—had those religious leaders possessed hearts toward God they would not have rejoiced at seeing Him die, especially in such a terrible manner. Their own law indicts them:

Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles lest YHWH see it, and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him. (Proverbs 24:17-18)

If your enemy is hungry give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap coals of fire upon his head, and YHWH shall reward you. (Proverbs 25:21-22)

This latter verse is often quoted with the suggestion that treating one's enemies with kindness should be motivated by seeing him ultimately suffer. But that is not the intent. It is merely stating what will happen to him should he not reconcile with us. We are not to rejoice at his fall, or hope for coals of fire to be heaped upon him. Rather, we should pray in hope that he will be converted and become a brother in Christ.

Jesus' commandment that we love our enemies does not allow for us to hold animosity toward them while offering only outward solace.

Even God does not rejoice at the destruction of His enemies:

"Say to them, 'As I live,' says the Lord YHWH, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn you, turn you from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel!'" (Ezekiel 33:11)

If God takes no pleasure in the death of the evil, what justifies any man doing so?

But such is the spirit of anti-Christ which is alive today, even in the hearts of many of God's people. An example is found in Luke 9:51-56 where James and John wanted to call down fire from Heaven upon the Samaritans that rejected Jesus. The Lord told them they did not know of what spirit they were.

How often do Christians harbor in their hearts the desire to see the enemies of God destroyed? Is it not because those enemies of God impose upon their comfort and convenience? It takes far more effort and submission of one's own self to reach out to those who hate us than it does to hate in return.

The anti-Christ spirit that surrounds us knows how to take advantage of our proclivity to hate those who merely rub us the wrong way, let alone those who seek our destruction. We must follow the example of Jesus who said, "Father, forgive them because they do not know what they are doing."

But suppose Jesus had acted upon their words that if He came down from the cross they would believe Him? What do you suppose would have happened (although knowing the purpose of the cross we know it never would have happened)?

I believe they would have fled in terror, regrouped in the nearest synagogue, and said, "Okay, now what do we do?"

So corrupt were their hearts that they would defy their own Scriptures and act lawlessly in condemning and crucifying their own Messiah—and that in a mocking manner.

So on that Passover afternoon the sinless Lamb of God was slain for the sins of the world. He was put in a tomb that was sealed at the order of Pontius Pilate acquiescing to the request of the Jewish religious leaders, and guarded by a company of Roman soldiers. And the day following Passover day—the high Sabbath beginning the Feast of Unleavened Bread—drew on.

The followers of Jesus went into mourning. The hope they had for the Kingdom and its King had been shattered. The finality of death impressed upon them the loss of great promises.

But the Sabbath of all Sabbaths was coming!

The day after that high Sabbath, the women bought spices and prepared them for the Lord's burial, then rested for the weekly Sabbath that followed. As the weekly Sabbath came to a close the soldiers that guarded the tomb were stricken with tremendous fear as they saw the angel of God come down from Heaven and roll away the stone.

Now late on Sabbath, as it was getting dusk toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.

(And, look! There had been a great earthquake. For the angel of the Lord, having descended from Heaven and having come and rolled back the stone from the door, was sitting on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him, those keeping guard trembled and became like dead men.)

And the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not fear, for I know that you seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for He has risen as He said. Come look at the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead. And, look, He goes ahead of you into Galilee. There you shall see Him. Look, I have told you."

And they left quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. (Matthew 28:1-8)

When the women came to the tomb, the weekly Sabbath had not yet ended. The angel had already rolled away the stone; the Lord had already risen; the guards were either still lying on the ground, or had fled to the Jewish leaders to seek an alibi:

Now when they were going, look, some of the watch came into the city, and revealed to the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were gathered with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave much money to the soldiers, saying, "You say, 'His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and keep you safe."

So they took the money and did as they were told. And this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day. (Matthew 28:11-15).

Even the Lord's resurrection did not soften the hearts of the anti-Christ religious leaders. They purposely instructed the soldiers to lie in order to cover up a miracle beyond human explanation.

Just as Jesus prophesied, His body had lain in the tomb for exactly three days and three nights (Matthew 12:38-40).

The truth that the Lord rose on the weekly Sabbath was corrupted by anti-Christ who, by the third century, had convinced the paganized Christians in Rome to assign what they called "the Venerable Day of the Sun" as the alleged day of the Lord's resurrection. Thus, "Sun-day" replaced the Sabbath as the day of gathering to worship weekly. It was also a ruse to distance Roman Christianity (which would encompass virtually the entire world known to the Romans and Greeks) from its roots in the faith of Israel and Judah, with whom Jesus established His New Covenant. That Covenant was hijacked by an apostate Christianity that saw itself as the replacement for Israel in God's economy rather than as a people who would be grafted into Israel through faith in Israel's Messiah.

We've seen how the faith had become perverted by rabbinical Judaism by the time Jesus appeared on earth; in future installments we will see how the faith as interpreted by the very giver of the faith would be perverted by pastoral Christianity in like manner.

After His resurrection Jesus appeared to His disciples on numerous occasions over a period of forty days, instructing them on how they should proceed as His witnesses throughout the whole world. In the process He further confirmed His authority and power through miracles. But for some, there would be no belief without experience. The most notable doubter in Scripture was the apostle Thomas who, not being present when Jesus had previously appeared to the other disciples, said, "Unless I see the nail marks in His hands, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

As innocuous as this may seem, it is also evidence of the anti-Christ spirit. Thomas had been with Jesus almost from the beginning. He had seen the miracles—the healings, the raising from the dead, the Lord's authority over nature—but he hardened his heart against the idea that God could or would raise Jesus from the dead. That is, until Jesus appeared to him also, and told him that those who believe without having seen would be the more blessed.

In that encounter, there is something that escapes the anti-Christ spirit in many people: when Thomas saw the Lord he did not touch His hands or put his own hand into the Lord's side. Rather, Thomas merely confessed, "My Lord and my God!"

Anti-Christ's have seized upon the Lord's silence about being God when He walked the earth as a man. They say, "Jesus never claimed to be God." Even word-faith guru Kenneth Copeland famously (or infamously) said, "Jesus never claimed to be God. He only claimed to be the Son of God." Yet when Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus did not reprimand him for it, or deny that He is Thomas's God.

He could easily have said, "No, Thomas, I am not God; I am only the Son of God." But as the Word of God who created

all things, He became as a man to die for mankind's sins. Now, with His resurrection, He would resume His status as a member of the Godhead.

He had set aside His glory to become totally reliant upon His heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit who guided Him. This is why He said in His prayer at the close of the Last Supper, "And now, O Father, glorify Me with Yourself with the glory that I had with You before the world existed."

Jesus was anticipating that He would attain the same glory as the Father, which He had with the Father before the creation. As the Word of God who came forth from the Father, uncreated, His nature is the same as the Father's—divine. He is the second person of the Godhead. Within Him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9).

This truth has been one of the most assiduously attacked by the anti-Christ spirit from the time of Jesus' birth until today. And it will be attacked until He appears again to rule the nations with a rod of iron.

Why is anti-Christ so determined to destroy faith in the truth of Jesus' divinity? Because unless Jesus is God in the flesh, then His death cannot be an atonement for the sins of mankind. He would be merely a sinful man. And a sinful man cannot be a perfect sacrifice for sin. Or, as claimed by the Jehovah's Witnesses of the Watchtower Society, He would have to be an angel (the archangel Michael, as this cult says). This, too, is a lie of anti-Christ. Scripture says God never called any angel His Son:

God, who at different times and in diverse ways spoke in past times to the fathers through the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us through His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds, who, being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when he had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, being made so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

For to which of the angels has He ever said, "You are My Son: I have fathered you this day?"

And again, "I will be a Father to Him, and He shall be a Son to Me?"

And again, when He brings the first-begotten into the world, He says, "And let all the angels of God worship Him."

And of the angels he says, "Who makes His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire."

But to the Son He says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; the scepter of Your Kingdom is a scepter of righteousness. You have loved righteousness, and hated iniquity. Therefore God—Your God—has anointed You with the oil of gladness above your fellows. And, You, Lord, in the beginning have laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands. They shall perish, but You remain, and they all shall grow old as a garment does, and You shall fold them up as a garment, and they shall be changed, but You are the same, and Your years shall not fail."

But to which of the angels has He ever said, "Sit on My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool?"

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation? (Heb. 1)

The Son is subservient to the Father, but the Father exalts the Son with His own glory. This is why the Father says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever." He acknowledges that the Son is of the same essence and nature as the Father—God.

This truth is the most destructive to the purposes of the anti-Christ. For all who believe this truth and worship the Son will escape the anti-Christ's snare that leads to eternal damnation.

Just before He ascended into Heaven Jesus gave two commands to His disciples:

And being assembled together with them, [He] commanded them that they should not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, He said, "you have heard through Me. For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Therefore, when they came together they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You restore again the kingdom to Israel now?"

And He said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons that the Father has put in His own power. But you shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth."

And when He had said these things, while they looked He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. (Acts 1:4-9)

Thus ended the anti-Christ's direct assaults against the Son of God. Now he would have to turn his focus toward the small group of called-out believers who, prior to the day of Pentecost, would be utterly powerless against him.

Pentecost was a day of spiritual significance to the Jews. Its commemoration is commanded in Leviticus 23:15-21:

And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath [the high Sabbath after Passover day—the first day of the feast of unleavened bread], from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, seven Sabbaths shall be complete, even until the day after the seventh Sabbath you shall count fifty days. And you shall offer a new offering to YHWH.

You shall bring out of your homes two wave loaves of two-tenth deals; they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the first fruits to YHWH.

And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs without blemish of the first year, and one young bullock, and two rams. They shall be for a burnt offering to YHWH, with their food offering, and their drink offerings, an offering made by fire, of sweet savor to YHWH.

Then you shall sacrifice one kid of the goats for a sin offering, and two lambs of the first year for a sacrifice of

peace offerings. And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the first fruits for a wave offering before YHWH, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to YHWH for the priest.

And you shall proclaim on the same day, that it may be a holy assembling for you. You shall do no work; it shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.

Pentecost fell fifty days after the first day of the feast of unleavened bread. It appears as if Pentecost occurred about one week after the Lord ascended into Heaven, counting three days from His crucifixion, then forty days when He remained with His disciples. So it wasn't a very long time before He sent the Holy Spirit upon them.

The significance of Pentecost was that it was a day for a new offering to God. These offerings were to be presented with the bread (the body) of the first fruits (Christ) as a wave offering to God.

The disciples upon whom the Holy Spirit fell were the first fruits of the Body of Christ. In a very real sense they were a new offering that would be sacrificed for the witness of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

With the Lord's resurrection and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon all believers beginning at Pentecost, the anti-Christ's focus became channeled against the Body of Christ. As faith in Jesus grew through the witness of the disciples, anti-Christ stirred up the Jewish religious leaders once more. The first instance recorded in Scripture came in much the same manner as when Jesus ministered healing to the people.

Peter and John went up to the temple for prayer one day when they encountered a man crippled from birth being carried to the temple. When the man asked them for money Peter famously replied, "I have no silver or gold, but such as I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise and walk."

The people who witnessed the miracle were astonished and came running to Peter and John. Peter then indicted Israel for having killed its Messiah, and called upon the people to repent of their sins. This greatly disturbed the priests, so they had Peter and John arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. The next day they were questioned by what authority or name they performed the miracle.

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "You rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we are examined today about the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name

of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him does this man stand here whole before you.

"This is the stone that was set aside by you builders, who has become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:8-12)

Unable to counter Peter's words, and seeing the evidence of God's power standing before them in the person of the healed man, the religious leaders conferred how they could prevent further spread of the Gospel. They commanded Peter and John never to speak or teach about Jesus. But again, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge, for we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard."

For fear of the people the Sanhedrin allowed them to leave, but this was merely the first of many attempts by the anti-Christ to thwart this new move of God among men.

The next recorded move by anti-Christ came in the persons of Ananias and Sapphira as an attempt to defraud the believers who had come to unity in deciding to share all their possessions in common with one another. Having sold a property, both Ananias and Sapphira separately lied to the apostles about how much they had received. They were immediately judged by God and paid the ultimate price.

Some think their deaths were too severe a penalty to pay, but the Lord had His purpose in taking their lives: 1) they were an example to those who would lie to God; 2) they had tested the Lord; 3) they threatened the unity of the Body of Christ at a time when that unity was most important—the beginning of the Gospel being proclaimed by men without the Lord present among them in the flesh.

As the Gospel began to spread throughout Jerusalem and Judea the apostles performed many miracles to prove their authority came from God. Many Jews came into the Kingdom as a result. But the more success they had, the more they came under scrutiny of the religious leaders. And the more they began to experience the wrath of the anti-Christ.

They were arrested and put in prison. But an angel of the Lord released them and told them to go to the temple and proclaim the Gospel. Because the religious leaders feared the people, they did not arrest them again at that time, but they brought them before the Sanhedrin and gave them a stern warning, upon which the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than men!" They again indicted the religious leaders of murdering their Messiah, causing the leaders to call for their death.

Upon the wise counsel of Gammaliel, the Sanhedrin spared the apostles' lives, but had them flogged.

The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing that they were counted worthy by God to suffer for the name of Jesus.

The next recorded incident of persecution from anti-Christ resulted in the first martyrdom—that of Stephen, one of the seven chosen by the disciples to minister to the needs of the widows among them. Stephen is said to have been a man full of faith

<sup>1</sup> There are reasons why God does what He does when He does it. The Jewish feasts have significance to us because of their prophetic nature relative to the Messiah's appearance, ministry, sacrifice, and rule over the Kingdom of Heaven. But much of that significance has been lost due to the anti-Christ's work in turning Christians away from their Hebrew roots during the first few centuries, again particularly through the imperial power of the Roman papacy. Thus the vast majority of Christians today do not have a solid grasp on their faith, not understanding the significance of the Lord's work as prophesied in the Jewish feasts. Of great prophetic significance is Passover, which typifies the sacrifice of Israel's Messiah. The papacy substituted for Passover the celebration of Easter—a pagan feast to the goddess Ishtar (see our special report, *Facts and Fallacies of the Resurrection*).

and power by the Holy Spirit. Jews from a particular synagogue disputed with Stephen who had been working miracles and wonders among the people. When they could not resist the wisdom by which he spoke they hired false witnesses who claimed that Stephen had blasphemed against God and the Law of Moses (Acts 6:11).

In the face of these accusations Stephen testified the truth from Abraham to Jesus, accusing his captors and their fathers of murdering the prophets, including Jesus. Hearing his words they were “cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth” (Acts 7:54). When he said he saw Heaven opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God the entire council ran at him, cast him out of the city, and stoned him to death as he called upon the Lord to receive his spirit.

Acts 7:58-8:1 records that standing by with the murderers’ clothes at his feet was a young man named Saul who was consenting to his death. This Saul would be for a time anti-Christ’s greatest emissary of persecution and death against the saints, though Scripture does not reveal that he ever personally murdered any of them. The Lord may have stayed his hand in order that he not carry even greater guilt.

Whereas Satan thought to destroy the fledgling group of disciples, the result of his persecution was to scatter them abroad where they would spread the Gospel far and wide.

Scripture testifies of many signs and wonders granted by God through the disciples as they fled persecution.

This prompted the anti-Christ spirit in Saul to go to the high priest for letters that he could use to take prisoner those in the Damascus synagogues who preached faith in Jesus Christ. But on the way to Damascus he was struck to the ground and blinded by the Lord who accused him of persecuting Him. It was at this point that anti-Christ lost one of his greatest warriors, named Saul, and the Kingdom of Heaven gained one of its greatest warriors, the apostle Paul. Because of his conversion Saul would become arguably anti-Christ’s greatest enemy, marked for death.

Even while he was still in Damascus the Jews took counsel to kill him, but the disciples learned of their plot and rescued him by night. When he went to Jerusalem and found favor with the apostles there, he disputed with the Greek Jews, so they, too, sought to kill him. Again he was rescued by the brethren who took him to Caesarea and sent him from there to Tarsus.

To fully realize the extent to which Saul was so used by anti-Christ, we need only learn from Scripture that upon his conversion the Body of Christ “had rest throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria, and their numbers multiplied” (Acts 9:31).

For a time, anti-Christ was held in abeyance by God. He was powerless against God’s protection of His growing called-out company of believers in Jesus. But that respite was not to continue for long.

King Herod arrested a number of believers, and had James, the brother of John, put to death by the sword. Seeing how this pleased the Jews he seized Peter also and had him held until he could be tried after Passover. But an angel of the Lord rescued Peter and led him on his way. When the angel left Peter he

realized that what had happened was no dream or vision, and he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, also called Mark, where a number of brethren were praying.

When Peter was nowhere to be found, Herod had the guards arrested, and ordered that they be executed.

At Antioch the Holy Spirit told the disciples to set aside Saul and Barnabas to embark upon the greatest recorded journey for the spreading of the Gospel, beginning in Cyprus. At Paphos in Cyprus they were called for by the proconsul, Sergius Paulus because he wanted to hear about the Word of God from them. But anti-Christ, acting through the sorcerer Elymas, opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. But Saul (called Paul for the first time here), challenged Elymas, accusing him of perverting the ways of the Lord and pronouncing blindness upon him for a time. Seeing this, Sergius Paulus believed, not merely because of this wonder, but because he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord. Sergius Paulus is the first recorded convert among the Gentiles that came at the proclamation of the Gospel by the disciples.

When Paul went to Pisidian Antioch to proclaim the Gospel in the synagogue on the Sabbath his words were well received by the Jews and by the Gentile proselytes. The next Sabbath day almost the entire city came to hear what Paul and Barnabas had to say. When the Jews saw the crowds they were filled with envy and were incited by the anti-Christ spirit within them to speak against Paul’s teaching, contradicting him and blaspheming.

Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you, but seeing you put it away from you and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, look, we turn to the Gentiles. For so has the Lord commanded us, saying, ‘I have set you to be a light of the Gentiles so that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

And when the Gentiles heard this they were glad, and glorified the Word of the Lord, and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the Word of the Lord was announced throughout all the region. (Acts 13:46-49)

As Paul and Barnabas began their outreach to the Gentiles, new avenues of persecution by anti-Christ developed. His target was enlarged. It was no longer just the Jews, the Messiah, and His immediate disciples that came under anti-Christ’s close scrutiny. Now he had to contend with an entire world of believers from all backgrounds. The Body of Christ became identified as one Body without distinction among Jew and Gentile, all being one in Christ. Thus began what Scripture calls “the time of the Gentiles.”

But upon most of Israel fell spiritual blindness that has remained until the time of the Gentiles will be completed upon the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly!