

Is this the face of Jesus Christ?

Forensic scientists have put imaginary flesh on the skull of a first-century Jew and have proposed that this is what Jesus must have looked like. It seems that the so-called religious are not the only ones to be fascinated by his appearance (echoes of the Shroud of Turin).

Once more humanism tries to bring the Lord of Life down to man's level, to demolish what they believe is a myth by giving him feet (and features here) of clay. By doing so they presume to make a graven image of the Son of God, and we should steer clear. Those who have produced this sensational effigy do not respect the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are merely pandering to the need of the crowd to tell or hear some new thing (Acts 17:21).

What a pity these blasphemers do not turn their attention to our Lord's moral attributes instead of his physiognomy, to his role as our redeemer, high priest and heir to the whole world. The Scriptures tell us that Christ was the "express image" of his Father, "the brightness of His glory", and that his face was illuminated by "the knowledge of the glory of God" (Heb. 1:3; 2 Cor. 4:6). Surely our Lord was "altogether lovely" (Song 5:16) as he grew in grace; he had supreme spiritual beauty, whatever his facial characteristics, and we know that little children flocked to him.

However, that face was set like a flint (Isa. 50:7) to go to Jerusalem, and the burden that his Father was pleased to lay upon him took a terrible toll. He was oppressed and afflicted, and bore the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53 shows that Christ was abhorred and shunned as a leper. He must have looked appalling, since his visage was disfigured more than any man (52:14). The reason we are given this description of our Master's face is surely to drive home the enormity of what he suffered for our sakes. Everything else is just vanity, a following after the world.

Yet we are taught that we shall see him as he is (1 Jno. 3:2), and I believe that on the resurrection morn Jesus had all his former beauty restored to him, since those who had known him well in his ministry simply failed to recognise him. Once more he had "the dew of [his] youth", "in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning" (Ps. 110:3).

The Bridegroom who is to come is described as the epitome of loveliness, "the chiefest among ten thousand", in the Song of Solomon (5:10),

which presents each one of his magnificent features as the object of adoration by the Bride. This is our hope and expectation, that in the Kingdom we will be united with him in all his resurrection glory, that by grace we shall be like him.

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The future of Israel

I would like to offer some comments on Brother Paul Bouwer's letter published under the above heading (Feb. 2001, p. 60).

I question whether Brother Bouwer's application of Jeremiah 17:1-4 to modern Israel giving land to the Arabs is justified. Admittedly the RSV renders the first part of verse 4, "You shall loosen your hand from your heritage which I gave to you", but these words seem to relate to the time of Jeremiah, when Zedekiah, because he refused to listen to the words of Jeremiah, was taken into captivity. In this his hold on the land was loosened or discontinued (see AV). Zedekiah and those that were with him were the evil figs of 24:8-10, who were "consumed from off the land that [God] gave unto them". I do not think we are justified in applying these words to Israel handing over land to the Arabs.

Regarding Zechariah 14:1,2, we expect to see Israel suffer at the hand of all nations at the time of the end. These words are not, however, speaking of annihilation, for it is only half of the city that goes forth into captivity. Soon after this, the Lord Jesus Christ (who, as Brother Bouwer rightly says, is "termed 'the LORD' because he is the Name-bearer") "shall be king over all the earth", and then "Judah also shall fight at Jerusalem; and the wealth of all the heathen round about shall be gathered together . . . in great abundance" (vv. 9,14).

I also do not think it is justified to say that, when Isaiah says, "the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people" (11:11), the first time was the present-day return of Israel to their land. There was no parting of the sea to mark this return, but verse 15 shows that this passage is speaking of an event like the crossing of the Red Sea under the hand of Moses. That this was the first time is confirmed by verse 16: "like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt".

With regard to Israel dwelling safely, this applies to her before she recognises Christ, as we