

NEW

Horizons

Vol 11 No 4

July/August 2007

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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With around two thousand Christian denominations vying for your attention, it's easy to miss the important issues of life and religion. It's our hope that through *New Horizons* our readers will come to understand the true meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and by his apostles in the clearest of terms - and recorded for us in the Scriptures. Over the centuries that truth has been buried, dug up, buried again. Our desire is to restore the simple apostolic message. We hope you will be excited by what the Scriptures reveal about life, and the horizons beyond

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It is distributed free on request, being a cooperative voluntary effort financed by the members and friends of the Churches of God. We also welcome the financial support of all who benefit from our publications and who wish to labour with us.

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Tulsa, OK 2007

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new **Horizons**

Issue No 64

July/August 2007

Was the Bush-Blair axis war-mongering by its invasion of Iraq? Was it a genuine belief that Saddam Hussein and his cohorts were a threat to Western democracies?

Was “black gold” the true motivation?

It’s unlikely you will extort a straight answer to such questions from any politician. And “the man in the pub” has his own –sometimes confused—inside knowledge. Bible thumpers, too, spout their pennyworth. Could there be another explanation?

While the following is merely a suggestion it may—at least for Bible-believing Christians—be worth consideration. (Unbelievers may scoff!)

Given the invisibility of the “weapons of mass destruction,” the apparent use of obfuscation to justify the war and the current near civil war in Iraq, could *God* have had a hand in it? Could He have exercised His eternal right - so often used - to govern the world?

Not, if such is the case, that such a scenario implies the Creator is pleased with the United States of America or with the United Kingdom. As in the past, He may well simply be using these nations as a “big stick” to quell the excesses of a brutal tyrant. The cry of the people of Iraq may have come to His ears.

Consider:

- God is Creator—and sovereign
- He intervenes to prevent our

world tipping into anarchy because of our awesome *sin*

- He raises up and overthrows nations and empires
- In the past He has used both Israel, Assyria, Persia (Iran now) to fulfil His will in such matters
- the LORD has, too, inspired kings to carry out His sovereign will - eg Cyrus, Nebuchadnezzar

Some Examples

Israel is described by God as “*the apple of my eye*” (Zechariah 2:8 *etc*). On the strength of Abraham’s relationship with God, his descendants through Isaac were chosen to be God’s standard-bearer before the world - a model nation. Through them the true faith - present since creation - was to be preserved.

As a nation they failed, sinking into idolatry. First the northern clans, then Judah. The prophet Jeremiah passed on God’s message to Judah. They would be removed from the Land, but...: “*Someday I will bring you back to this land that I gave your ancestors. But for now, I am sending enemies who will catch you like fish and hunt you down like wild animals in the hills and the caves. I can see everything you are doing, even if you try to hide your sins from me. I will punish you double for your sins, because you have made my own land disgusting. You have filled it with lifeless idols*” (ch 16:15-18 CEV).

In this instance the “enemy” was King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. He invaded, and carried away most of the inhabitants of Judah. There are other instances.

Note what happened to some Israelite of the “House of Israel”: “*The people of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh were unfaithful to the God their ancestors had worshiped, and they started worshipping the gods of the nations that God had forced out of Canaan. So God sent King Tiglath Pileser of Assyria to attack these Israelite tribes. The king led them away as prisoners to Assyria*” (I Chronicles 5:25-26 CEV). Also: “*the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians*” (II Chronicles 21:16).

Writing in the eighth century BC, Isaiah warns Israel: “*...The Lord says: I am furious! And I will use the king of Assyria as a club to beat down you godless people. I am angry with you, and I will send him to attack you*” (ch 10:5-6 CEV).

Repeatedly the LORD corrected His errant nation by stirring Gentile nations against them. But Israel itself has also been used to further the divine plan.

Israel, Too

Divine justice dictates that there’s a line across which He will not tolerate further moral corruption. Until then - sometimes centuries - God is tolerant, giving time for change. An example is the ancient Amorites.

The land of Canaan has ever been ear-marked by the LORD as the central focus of His plans for mankind. In the nineteenth century BC it was occupied by the Amorite peoples descendants of Canaan.

Blessings Past

God could have used Iran to quell

the excesses of Sadaam and his little helpers. They have long been at each other's throat. Instead He (may have) stirred up the United States and Britain. Close attention to the Scriptures gives us a clue.

These two nations have, above all, inherited earth's bounty. In Bible terms they are "blessed." But blessed by God for historical reasons:

- these two nations, especially, have inherited promises made by God to Abraham and his descendants
- more than any other they have applied the divine Law in governing the nation
- that Law is the optimum form of governance for any nation, and its application bears good fruit

So, if Britain and America are God's "big stick" - does that mean He approves of how they have abused His munificence? For no longer do our rulers apply the divine Law. Instead they have substituted laws dreamed up from the depths of human depravity.

Whatever the motives, we are embroiled in the occupation (call it what you will) of a foreign sovereign nation. If President Bush is indeed - perhaps unknowingly - forwarding God's will, then why the many deaths of both civilians and military? Why do Islamic terrorists kill and maim the innocent? Why has not the war already ended cleanly and successfully?

Consider some of the reasons that God's blessing is slipping from us:

- the elderly are ignored, abused, neglected
- violence is not prevented or is inadequately punished
- adultery is considered normal, rape is rarely punished, stable marriage is deemed of no importance, millions are slaughtered in the womb
- we steal, cheat on tax, invade

homes for gain, amass money by illegal means

- our justice system is corrupt, perjury and witness intimidation common
- the inordinate desire for "stuff" drags millions into unpayable debt and homelessness

The God Factor

How did we come to step on this slippery path? Because we have abandoned the God of the Christian Scriptures. Because the Word of the Sovereign God is no longer respected. Not even in the "Bible Belt." Because we bow down to our own gods of gold and silver. Because we have substituted the worship of other gods - which, says Paul, are "no gods" - for the true worship: God's festivals and His Sabbaths.

We must consider that our failures in

Request: *The Two Houses of Israel*

Iraq, the expenditure there of billions of our taxes, the deaths of our soldiers, the rising unrest at home - these may be part of "the plan." Despite our military might, our moral weakness has made the "stick" weak. It may well be that it will snap, that our great national heritage will disappear, that God has given us our last chance. That He has, there in the Middle East, engineered our defeat to bring about our national repentance.

Christians can pray that God, that Jesus Christ, will turn aside their anger at how we have trodden underfoot God's bounty. But Scripture provides no surety that our leaders, our people, will turn from our path of rebellion to the Creator - though individually we can, and must.

Prophecy indicates the downfall of modern Israel, precipitated by economic failure and foreign domination. That time may be too close for comfort. Ω

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Most of us would reply to that question in our title with a resounding YES!

Ian Hufton

Some earnestly desire and yearn for a *place* of safety which by itself may place them in great danger. Jesus Christ said: *“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.”* (Mark 8:35)

Obviously there are different kinds of safety and we normally desire large helpings of each and every kind. For this commentary, let’s just focus on the one most important kind of safety that is nearest and dearest to our hearts, i.e., *spiritual* safety.

Our Lord Jesus Christ lovingly warns us that before His return we would live in the most perilous times imaginable: *“For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many”* (Matthew 24:5).

He adds:

then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be (v.21). For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; inasmuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect

The apostles Paul and John press home the warning: *“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.”* (II Timothy 3:1)

“And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” (Revelation 12:17)

Spiritual safety would seem to be at the top of the priority list for circumstances such as these. Do you have it? Are you spiritually safe?

Spiritual Safety

Is total spiritual safety possible? What do you think? Is the answer *yes* or is it *no*? If it is *yes*, is it “easy as pie” or is it something we must treasure and struggle for, above all other desires in life? I believe the answer is *yes*. Total spiritual safety is possible but only under certain circumstances.... let me explain.

Christ said that those who endure to the end *“shall be saved”* (Matt 24:13). So total spiritual safety must involve you *“enduring to the end.”*

Paul was inspired to write:

‘Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness’
(II Thessalonians 2:9-12)

Notice verse eleven: *“strong delusion”, “believe a lie”*; does this not indicate that wrong belief, deception, is the greatest danger to spiritual safety? Notice also the element of *“pleasure”* in verse twelve. Do people reject truth and fail to endure to the end, because of un-

Do You Want Safety?

righteous pleasure? From the verses above, it would seem so.

Deception Rampant

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14).

Can you sense the winds of false doctrine blowing all over this planet? Many have already accepted false doctrine in recent years. It is high time that all true believers go on full alert against Satan’s deceiving ways. Satan’s greatest tool is deception, but his ministers appear as *“ministers of righteousness”*: *“And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.”* (II Corinthians 11:14-15)

Are we, you and I, experienced enough with God’s word to be impregnable against the assaults of Satan’s ministers? Obviously, *“loving the truth”* is a critical element of being impregnable. But what if we love something we think is truth, but in reality is a falsehood? What then?

Would our loving Father in heaven and Christ, our Saviour, be highly concerned that Their Sons and daughters and future bride be protected from deceit and false doctrine. **Yes!!!** Obviously they care, and have kept on warning us throughout the Bible. What is their advice for spiritual safety???

Prescription for Safety

Four elements are of critical importance for guiding you into truth and spiritual safety. **cont’d. p.8**

Two Witnesses

Who are the two witnesses of Revelation 11? When will they come? Will you know them? Or, will you be deceived?

John Morton

The identity of the “two witnesses” has long fascinated Bible students. Here is one author’s controversial view.

Much speculation has arisen since the Apostle John mentioned the two witnesses almost two thousand years ago. They will appear at the end of this age to give testimony (witness) of Christ prior to his return. They will have the power to call down fire from heaven and to smite the earth with plague. Over the centuries many have claimed to be one of the two witnesses only to disappoint their followers when the second witness didn’t appear, they couldn’t call down fire upon their critics and Christ didn’t turn up on cue.

So far all these “witnesses” have come to naught and we still wait in expectation for the identity of the true witnesses to be revealed.

Two Witnesses

What does the Bible say about the two witnesses? John wrote,

And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will. (Revelation 11: 3-6)

For three and a half years they will prophesy, having the power to call fire down from heaven, cause drought, turning water to blood and striking the earth

with plagues.

Two Olive Trees

Notice that John called them “*the two olive trees*,” a term also used in the Book of Zechariah written some five centuries earlier. Zechariah was shown a golden lampstand that symbolized the spiritual power with which the Messiah will accomplish God’s promise to bring salvation to all the families of the earth, “*a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.*” (Zechariah 4:2-3).

When Zechariah asked, “*What be these two olive branches*” he was told, “*These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.*” (Zechariah 4:12, 14). Some translations call them “*The two sons of the oil*” (Darby, and Young’s Literal Translation). “*Sons of oil*” as opposed to sons of God, or sons of man. Oil represented God’s Holy Spirit which seems to indicate that the these two sons of oil may be symbolic of spirit beings rather than human. They are depicted as “*standing by*,” or standing in the presence of the Lord (Christ) who is to be the King over this earth as the Book of Revelation reveals (Revelation 19:10-16, 20:4).

Two Cherubim

A similar configuration existed much earlier in ancient Israel when representations of two spirit beings were placed over the mercy seat from which God spoke to his people. Moses had been instructed to...

...make a mercy seat of pure gold: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof. And thou shalt make two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end: even of the mercy seat shall ye make the cherubims on the two ends thereof. And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one

another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be.” (Exodus 25:17-20).

The tabernacle was patterned on what Moses had been shown (Exodus 25:9) which according to Paul was the pattern of heavenly things (Hebrews 8:5). It was understood that the mercy seat represented God’s throne in heaven beside which stood two cherubim. It was from the mercy seat, between these two symbolic cherubim, that the God of Israel spoke to His people, “*And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.*” (verse 22).

Other passages also indicate that God dwelt between the cherubim (Numbers 7:89, I Samuel 4:4, Isaiah 37:16, Psalm 80:1 and 99:1). Significantly the tabernacle with its mercy seat and cherubim was described as the “*tabernacle of witness*” (Numbers 17:7-8, II Chronicles 24:6) - the cherubim were witnesses to God’s presence.

The God of Israel, who had brought them out of Egypt was none other than Jesus Christ himself as explained in I Corinthians 10:1-4. He was the one Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu (along with seventy elders) saw on Mt Sinai (Exodus 24:9-10). It could not have been the Father whom no man has seen (John 1:18).

The same configuration of two cherubim was continued in the temple built by Solomon. The Bible says that these cherubim were made from olive trees covered in gold, “*And within the oracle he made two cherubims of olive tree, each ten cubits high.*” (I Kings 6:23). This could account for both the prophet Zechariah and the Apostle John describing the two witnesses who stood by the symbolic lampstand as two “*olive branches*,” or “*olive trees.*” They were the witness who Zechariah said were “*standing by the Lord of the whole earth*” and described similarly by John as “*standing before the God of the earth.*”

When Jesus Christ returns at the end of this age as King of Kings he will rule over this earth (Revelation 19:10-16,

20:4). He is symbolized by the lampstand as being the spiritual light to the world (John 8:12, 9:5 and 12:46). The two olive trees that stand either side of the lamp are witnesses, as were the two cherubim who stood by the mercy seat in the tabernacle of witness. These two who have witnessed his presence here on earth in the past are most likely to be the ones who witness at his return.

Two “Men”

These two witness, if cherubim, will be manifested in the form of men - which is how the prophet Ezekiel described the cherubim he saw, “*Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man.*” (Ezekiel 1:5).

It is also interesting that when Mary looked into Christ’s tomb she saw, “*two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of the Jesus had lain.*” (John 20:11-12). Bullinger compares these to the cherubim at either side of the mercy seat. And those who were with Christ when he ascended saw two men, or angelic beings who could have been cherubim manifested as men, “*And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;*” (Acts 1:10). They said to those present at the time, “*Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*” (v. 11).

Throughout the history of this earth it appears that two witnesses stood by him when he ruled Israel and during his life on earth as Jesus Christ. And having witnessed his ascent into heaven two thousand years ago will probably “*in like manner*” witness to his return at the end of this age.

They will be the ones who will powerfully pronounce his return, “*And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this*

manner be killed.” (Revelation 11:3-5).

It is during their witnessing at the end of this age that the gospel of the Kingdom of God will be preached to all the world, “*And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.*” (Matthew 24:14). This is something that man has not yet achieved!

Although the Bible does not definitely say whether the two witnesses will be angelic beings or human there is enough evidence in the Bible to suggest that they will most likely be angelic beings. But some may have difficulty with the concept of spirit beings being killed and resurrected, which is prophesied for the two witnesses (Revelation 11:7-11). However, we need look no further than the example of Jesus Christ who had a spiritual pre-existence, became human - and was later killed then after three days was resurrected back to a spiritual existence.

False Witnesses

As the world moves closer to the end-time configuration will we see more false witnesses pronouncing Christ’s return? According to the Bible many shall preach in the name of Christ yet deceiving many “*For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.*” – “*And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.*” (Matthew 24:5 see also 11). Some false prophets will be so convincing that even the elect are in danger of being deceived, “*Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there*

shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” (Matthew 24:23-24).

The words “*Lo, here is Christ, or there*” indicate that they will proclaim his return predicting when this event will take place as Luke confirms, “*...for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them.*” (Luke 21:8). This is exactly what many are doing today, the more blatant of which are those who claim to be one of the two witnesses. Luke says not to follow these false prophets who make such predictions.

The two witnesses are coming to give testimony (Revelation 11:7). God requires two witnesses to give testimony under his law, one alone has no validity (Deuteronomy 17:6 and Matthew 18:16). Those who claim to be one of the two witnesses have no validity unless there is a second witness.

The Church is warned to beware of men because they may not be what they seem, “*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*” (Matthew 7:15).

They are filled with the vanity of their own words, “*Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*” (Ephesians 5:6).

They will make merchandise of those who follow them, “*And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you.*” (II Peter 2:3).

Those who think they may be some special witness or prophet are warned not to deceive themselves, “*Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.*” (I Corinthians 3:18). This includes all who claim to be prophets, special witnesses, or anointed ones.

Pray that you will not be deceived and that you will be led into truth so that you will recognize the true witnesses when God sends them to announce the soon coming return of His son. **Ω**

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What About ‘Works’?

The apostle Paul makes clear, in I Corinthians 13, that all the “good works” in the world won’t - without proper motivation, without the implanted divine Spirit - gain anyone admission to the Kingdom of God.

“Works” is a bone of contention between religious groups. “Faith alone” say most from the Protestant community. “Not enough” say the Roman faction. There may not be a vast gulf between the positions.

But what are these “works”? The recently-revived sale of indulgences as a free pass out of purgatory incenses Protestants. Salvation, these imply, can be bought. On the other hand, the latter look askance at any believer who isn’t “involved”, who perhaps doesn’t observe the church festivals - Easter, Christmas, daily Mass *etc* - or who doesn’t do the “soup run”.. All are forms of *works*.

Good Works

Christians, motivated by the Spirit, will be inclined to “...*as we have time, let us work good toward all, and especially toward the household of the faith*” (Galatians 6:10 CEV). That is a reflection of the “Jesus way”: “...*God gave the Holy Spirit and power to Jesus from Nazareth. He was with Jesus, as he went around doing good and healing everyone who was under the power of the devil*” (Acts 10:38).

Some evangelists claim to heal, cast out demons *etc*. But the usual works, though spiritually motivated, are very material, and take the form of hospitals, health-related clinics, feeding and sheltering the homeless.

All are praiseworthy - but are not the spiritual works exemplified by Jesus: “... *the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek;*

he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD” (Isaiah 61:1-2).

The “good works” of Jesus Christ were accomplished miraculously by Spirit-power. [Note that Jesus equates the “meek” (Isaiah) with the “poor” (Luke 4). The latter refers to those of the general populace willing to hear Him - the “poor in spirit.”]

Change of Heart

So - good works in whatever form sprout from pre-existing faith (James 2:18). What is needed is a *change of heart*. Conversion.

In secular terms conversion is defined as *a change of form, state, substance; transform; transmute*. Alchemists have sought to convert base metal to gold. That’s what God does in humanity; He converts base human nature to spiritual pure gold - a long process, usually!

It happens by the action of the indwelling holy Spirit. There’s transformation. There’s a different mindset. There’s a willing submission to the Word of God. - a wholly different outlook. There is joyous acceptance of the way of life revealed in the Scriptures - no matter how difficult the way may become. Writes the apostle Paul: “...*Don’t be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him*” (Romans 12:1 CEV).

[The steps you need to take are explained in our free articles **What Do You Mean - ‘Repent’?** and **Coming To Baptism**]

That way of life was imposed on ancient Israel as their “national con-

stitution.” It had its laws, obedience enforced by powerful sanctions. That Law still applies - now written by the Spirit in the willing human mind. Now a matter of personal choice - enlightened by the Word - in its application.

What of the “holy days”?

Some may wonder about the observance of “days”. Are not they, too, “works”? Yet isn’t their observance required for salvation? An acquaintance, for example, thought he had to stay in bed all Sabbath day to comply.

The answer lies in that transformed mind. Since creation God has had but one way of life, one form of religious observance - adapted to the different eras. Abraham, for example. The LORD told Isaac: “... *And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*” (Genesis 26:4-5).

Those who have undergone “conversion” have taken on a new, the *Godly*, mindset. A Muslim converted to the true faith will abandon Friday worship, will no longer observe Ramadan. A traditional Christian abandons Christmas, Easter, Sunday, saints days.

For all such “converts” the form of worship is that proclaimed in the Christian Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments. [They are outlined in our booklet **God’s Holy Days**’. You are invited to request a free copy.] It is “...*the faith once for all delivered to the saints*” (Jude 3).

As the apostle points out (*eg* Galatians 3), any form of law-keeping, no matter how diligent, won’t save us. Only the personal application of the sacrifice of Jesus enrolls us in the divine Kingdom.

Consequence of Neglect

However, should we neglect the holy days - let them slip - then that new Godly mind-set gradually erodes. Matters of the spirit are not given priority. Worldliness takes over. Says Paul:

‘Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him’ (Hebrews 2:1-3).

Paul, later in Hebrews, provides an example: *“...let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching” (ch 10:24-25).* It’s a Hebraic exhortation to observe the Biblical holy days.

God’s Spirit in the Christian prompts us to obedience. But neglect, closing our ears to the Spirit, leads to *“...trampling the Son of God, and having counted common the blood of the covenant in which he was sanctified, and having insulted the Spirit of Grace” (v.29).*

Christian Liberty

Christians - those who willingly follow the Bible teaching, who have “converted” - are free to follow God’s revealed path according to personal conscience informed by the Scriptures.

He or she is, through the sacrifice of Jesus, forgiven his past transgression of the divine Law - which defines sin. God says: *“...I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jeremiah 31:34).* And:

Who We Are

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* is an international association of independent local assemblies - Christians who meet together for worship, instruction in the faith and fellowship. Each assembly is self-governing according to Bible principles, but co-operates through our Conference with other like-minded assemblies to work towards agreed evangelistic goals.

These goals are within the framework of the commission set for his church by Jesus: “going, therefore, disciple all nations, baptising them...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). He further commanded that we “Shepherd...[and] feed my sheep”.

To these ends we publish Bible-based literature (eg our quarterly *Newsletter*, a bi-monthly outreach magazine *New Horizons*, the *Bible Basics* on-line home study course). The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of independent fellowships and scattered brethren.

*We cordially invite all independent fellowships of whatever size - and individuals - to associate with us in this worldwide ministry. Our **Statement of Beliefs** and a **Publications Catalogue** is available from any of our addresses. We are pleased to offer you, without charge, any of our publications.*

“...As far as the east is from the west, So far has he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pities his children, So Jehovah pities them that fear [reverence] him” (Psalm 103:112-13). The slate is wiped clean.

Sin after baptism - we all do! - and *“...we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, And he is the propitiation [LXX: atoning sacrifice] for our sins” (I John 2:1-2).*

No longer, that is, need we bring **Ω**

along an animal sacrifice. The death - and resurrection - of Jesus is all-sufficient. Obedience to Law can in no way bring forgiveness. Not even holy day observance - witness the need for pious Jews to repent. The apostle Peter told them: *“...Repent and be baptized, each of you on the name of Jesus Christ to remission of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).*

The Law, however - the guide to Godly living - remains! Writes Paul: *“What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? Let it not be! But I did not know sin except through Law” (Romans 7:7)*

Not All in the Mind

As said James: *“...if anyone is a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, this one is like a man studying his natural face in a mirror; for he studied himself, and has gone away, and immediately he forgot of what kind he was. But the one looking into the perfect Law of liberty, and continuing in it, this one not having become a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in his doing” (James 1:23-25).*

In sum, the divine Law is implanted in the mind of the truly converted individual by the indwelling Spirit - for *“...if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Romans 8:9).*

The Spirit of Christ - the mind of Christ, the very attitude of Christ - upon conversion resides in embryonic form in the newly-begotten child of the Eternal God. Nourished up in “mother church” he or she grows to Christ-like spiritual maturity - to be born fully of the Spirit at the resurrection from the dead.

Each Christian is responsible to maintain contact with the Body - the church. There we learn “the wisdom of the ages” - the Law of Life and liberty as administered by Jesus.

Safety... cont'd from p.3

1) *Your mind!* Without clear thinking, you may misunderstand or misread portions of Scripture and follow a deceptive path. So, let us all think clearly.

2) *The Scriptures.* Your whole belief system is based on what your mind does with the Scriptures you have studied. Don't believe what mankind says about the Scriptures - study them yourself - and only believe what you have proved to yourself. If you allow others to do your studying and thinking for you, you will run a high risk of being deceived.

3) *The Holy Spirit.* Millions of people have studied their Bibles endlessly and have not been able to come to true conclusions about what the Bibles says. Why? Because they did not obey God and receive His Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32). The Holy Spirit leads us into all truth (John 16:13). So using your mind and the Scriptures and obeying their teachings will help you and I follow the guiding of the Holy Spirit.]: *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."* (Romans 8:14)

The Fourth Element

What would you guess to be the fourth element? Writes wise King Solomon: *"Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety"* (Proverbs 11:14). And: *"The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the LORD"* (ch 21:31). Adding: *"For by wise counsel you shall make thy war: and in multitude of counselors there is safety"* (ch 24:6)

Yes, safety, spiritual safety, is a combination of God's Spirit working through the Scriptures, your mind, and, the fourth element, a *multitude of (wise) counsel*. Our world is a free-spirited place where most people enjoy being free to do whatever they choose. Hence, we

have a world of evil and wickedness. Most people do not want wise counsel— they prefer to avoid possible restraint and....many are deceived!! Will *we* be? Not if we apply the four elements above. For maximum spiritual safety, we should all choose five or six people that we consider to be wise (preferably true believers) and involve them in our major life decisions. Many are deceived and many lives are wrecked because of poor decisions made with little or no wise counsel. Solomon again: *"He that walks with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed"* (ch 13:20)

A Classic Example

Would you have felt spiritually safe in the meeting recorded in Acts 15? Peter was there; Paul was there; Barnabas was there, as well as James and many others. Wow! What would it have been like to have been there and to have seen the writers of the New Testament in action? I think you would have felt spiritually safe! But why? Because of a multitude of wise counselors:

"When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem

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unto the apostles and elders about this question... And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, "Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe" (Acts 15:2, 6ff)

Notice ... they began with *"much disputing"* and ended with *"being pleased"* and of *"one accord."*

The outcome:

"Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barnabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia... It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul"

(Acts 15:22-23)

So the minds of these men, plus the Scriptures, plus the Holy Spirit and a multitude of wise counselors, produced the most beautiful end result. That's spiritual safety.

And Jesus answered and said unto them, "Take heed that no man deceive you." (Matt 24:4)

Christ has commanded us to let no man deceive us. We must be alert and have our strategies in place, to avoid being deceived. Now is the time to have on the whole armour of God. Ω

MiniStudy

Resurrection Reality

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (I Peter 1:3)

In modern speech the term *hope* usually has a negative edge. “*I hope so*” you exclaim, thereby signifying some doubt about the outcome. Not so in the Christian Scriptures. *Hope* in the Scriptures is one of the most positive of virtues.

- It’s often said that we are “*a world without hope*,” that mankind is doomed to destruction - by his own hand or by the anger of nature. Individuals, too, often fail to cope with what life throws at them: “*it’s hopeless*” they say when the black cloud of depression settles around them
- Hope (Gk *elpis*) in the Bible, however, has a positive ring - assurance, confidence. It is one of the three great and enduring and uplifting virtues named by the apostle Paul: “*...and now abides faith, hope, charity, these three*” (I Corinthians 13:13). And like the other two, hope can be nourished, strengthened. It’s not a vague aspiration but a reality, a matter of substance. It’s a “*living hope*” (I Peter 1:3)
- It is closely linked with the symbolism of the *Feast of Weeks* - the annual seven week period of the spring harvest, which culminates in the *Day of Pentecost*. These seven weeks were initiated by the harvesting - by the priests - of a sheaf of barley on the Sabbath evening associated with the *Feast of Unleavened Bread* in Israel. This was prepared and “waved” before the LORD in the Temple the following morning (Sunday). It signified the nation’s gratitude for the fruits of the earth, their hope of an abundant harvest. None of the new grain harvest was to be eaten before this annual ceremony
- There is, however, a deeper meaning. For that wavesheaf offering was but a type of the resurrection of Jesus Christ on that Sabbath evening after three days and three nights in the grave, and His presentation to the Father on Sunday morning - the first of the firstfruits spiritual harvest: “*...now has Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep*” (I Corinthians 15:20). Jesus is the first one ever to have been raised from the dead in a spirit body [Request the article: **The Empty Tomb**]
- Man is a material being energized by the human spirit. When we die we are “dead as a door-nail”. No life after death - *except by means of a resurrection*. This is the great and uniquely Christian hope of those who “*...follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb*” (Revelation 14:4). They are themselves “*...a kind of firstfruits*” (James 1:18). But *everyone who has lived* will come out of their grave. Jesus tells us that “*...the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation [judgment]*” (John 5:28-29)
- For Christians especially, hope lies in resurrection. It is a certainty. No matter how long dead, no matter how they died - all in whom is the holy Spirit will, at Christ’s coming, burst from the chains of death to unending life in a perfect spirit body. Paul informs: “*... [I] have hope toward God... that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust*” (Acts 24:15). Indeed if this were not so Christianity itself is no more than a lie (I Corinthians 15:12-22)
- In Christ we become “*sons, heirs of God*” (Galatians 4:7). As we are “*... children, then [we are] heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together*” (Romans 8:17). That’s the “*glory of God*” for which we live in certain hope (Romans 5:2). We may suffer for the faith - but: “*...the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*” (8:18). The people of God throughout the ages have often suffered extreme privation - but they remained faithful and are assured “*...a better resurrection*” (Hebrews 11:35)
- Hope, however, is not limited to Christians for, as Jesus said, *all* will be called from the grave. That means hope for every man, woman and child who has lived, however dire their circumstances. After the millennial reign of Jesus and the resurrected saints they will be resurrected for a term of being “weighed in the balance”, and being faced - with utmost clarity - with the opportunity to embrace the Gospel of Christ. They, too, may then experience the hope of the glory of God - to be part of the divine Family Ω

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