

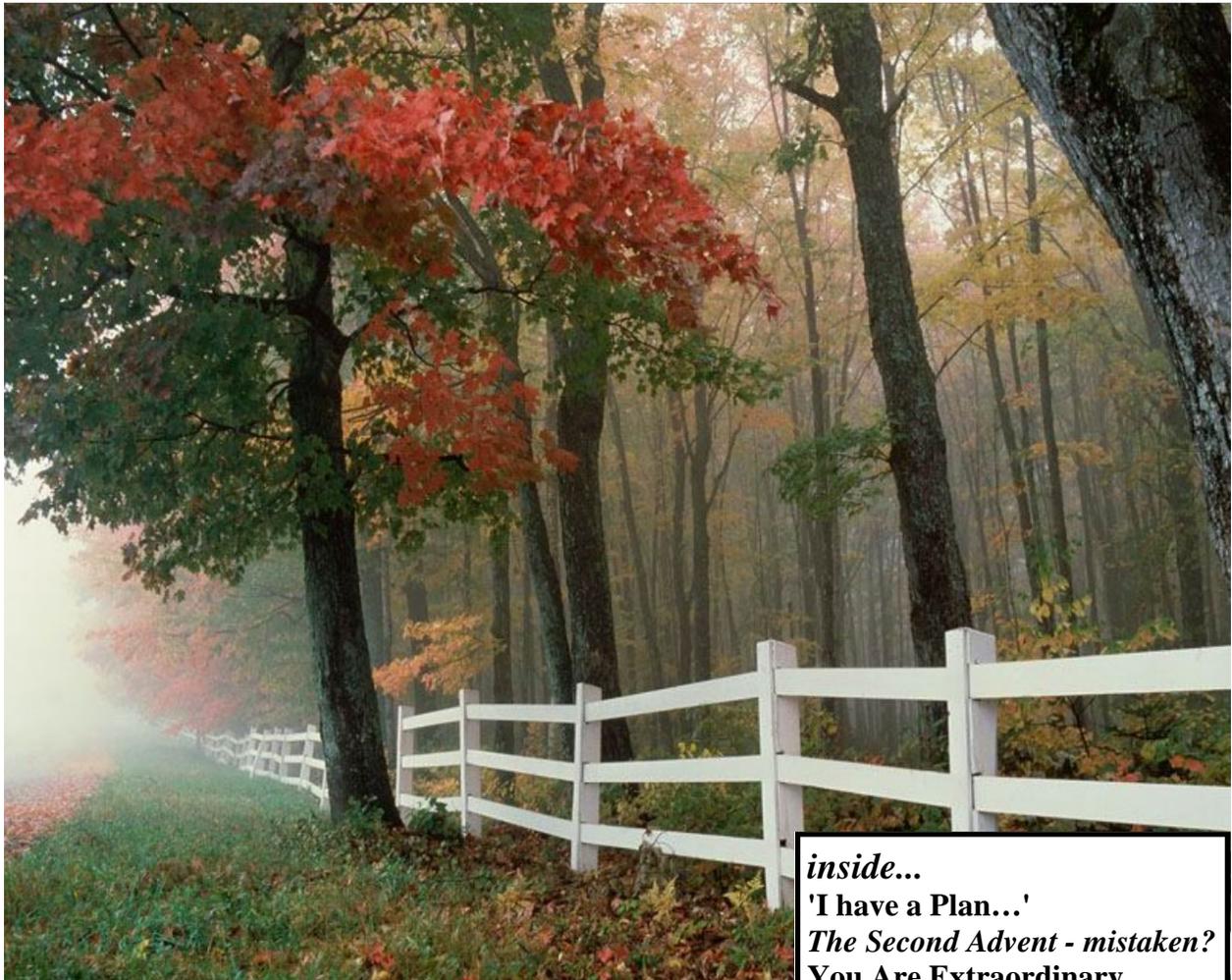
NEW

Horizons

Vol 11 No 5

September/October 2007

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



inside...

'I have a Plan...'

The Second Advent - mistaken?

You Are Extraordinary

Be a Good Steward

Will You Live Again?

CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

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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new Horizons

Issue No 65

September/October 2007

From man's beginning God has a "plan for the ages"

God plans but man meddles. That could be the motto that explains our world. For since the earliest records it is clear that all that man touches crumbles to dust. We strive to build Utopia - it disintegrates. We formulate religions, we develop economic systems, we evolve forms of governance, we foster international relations. None of them, despite our best effort, work for long - and we stumble along.

Yet there is a plan. It is presented to us in detail but was, from its inception, trashed by all of us personally, nationally, globally. When implemented it guarantees that long sought-after Utopian dream. And it will come, for the Plan is God's.

The divine Plan has a timetable, the end result set in stone. In His time, but obscured to us, there will at last be peace on war-torn Earth. No wars, no famine, no poverty, no pollution of earth, land or sea. Earth's bounty will be universally available, disease conquered.

The trouble is - we don't like the medicine, and every effort is made to develop "alternative therapies." Anything to avoid the real thing. The Creator, however, has myriad routes to circumvent human attempts to subvert the Plan. He predicts the outcome, the natural consequences, of a course of human activity. Believe Him, do the right - and He "repents;" the adverse consequences are averted.

That's what much of "prophecy" is

about. An example is the predicament of God's prophet Jonah. Nineveh (it is in modern Iraq) was "an exceedingly great" and populous city wielding influence in the Middle East. But it was a violent city and God, through Jonah, predicted its overthrow. It didn't fall. So - God got it wrong? No, for all the citizens, from the King down, changed. They heeded the warning, and lived.

The Olive Tree

There's a weird notion in wide circulation that our species has climbed an "evolutionary tree," that life suddenly and miraculously - and it's perhaps the greatest of all miracles - appeared from absolute nothingness, leaving man clinging precariously to the top branches. In fact, sane scholarship concludes man arrived in one piece - mature, physically complete, competent. It has been downhill ever since.

Ever since, that is, man chose to reject the Maker's instructions on how to build Utopia. [Request the article

The Law of Life]

There is, however, another "tree," a "tree of life." God has ever had but one way in which He may be approached. Adam and his wife knew of it, as did their family. The "tree" is symbolized by an olive tree, and is symbolic of the one true religion, accessed only by faith. Historically, true believers are represented by Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and a "cloud of witnesses" throughout the millennia. You can read their story in Hebrews 11. All had access through faith to the "tree of life."

The prophet Jeremiah tells us that "Israel" is that olive tree: "The

LORD called your name, A green [ie flourishing] olive tree" (Jeremiah 11:16).

The apostle Paul tell us:

...if the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and you [Gentiles], being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if you boast, you bear not the root, but the root you. You will say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not you. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in his goodness: otherwise you also shall be cut off. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

(Romans 11:16-24)

Israel of the Spirit

Not all *physical* Israel, then, represent the true Israel, but the remnant of believers in every age who remain faithful to the truth.

Simply because you may be a physical descendant of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob (Israel) does not make you a true Israelite. For Gentiles, too, can - as Paul says and on the same terms - be a part of the true Israel. It's not a racial or national designation, but spiritual. It's a mat-

"/
Have
a
Plan"

ter of personal faith. And part of the Plan.

God's Plan

The "Tree" is representative, and personalized, in Jesus - God's Anointed. [Christ derives from the Greek for *anointed*.] It is symbolic of none other than Jesus Himself, into whom every true Christian is grafted. As High Priest and King He is anointed with the pure oil of the olive tree.

Jesus is "...the true light that enlightens everyone..." (John 1:9) [No electric then - olive oil was the fuel!] In Zechariah's prophecy (*ch* 4) the "two olive trees" refer to Joshua (the High Priest) and Zerubbabel (the civil ruler) but also to Jesus who is "King of kings and LORD of lords." Both

offices are united in Him as He actively directs the affairs of the Church of God and of the world. Christians, grafted into Him as "kings and priests" (Revelation 5:10), serve with Him in the millennial Kingdom.

Our first parents in the beginning had free access to the Tree of Life. In daily face-to-face contact with the Creator they were instructed by Him in the law of life - how to live successfully in harmony with natural laws. Laws which were both physical and spiritual, and according to which specifications man was shaped. Yet they despised His guidance. A merciful and prescient God, however, had - "before the world began" - provided a way for restoration of their shattered Utopian dream.

That Plan has never altered. By it, man was created to become part of the Family of God. The blueprint is available for all to see, and God has erected sign-posts to guide us to it.

Festival Guide

Built into the fabric of our planetary system is provision for a series of seven seasonal festivals. They are regulated by our sun and moon: "...And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years" (Genesis 1:14).

"Seasons" (Hebrew *mo'ed*) is the term used by the LORD in describing to Moses the annual round of special meetings. "These are the set feasts [*mo'ed*] of Jehovah, even holy convocations, which you shall proclaim in their appointed season [*mo'ed*]" (Leviticus 23:4).

These "set feasts" and the weekly Sabbath are the only divinely-revealed form of spiritual worship ever given by the LORD to mankind. Abraham was praised for his obedience: "...Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Genesis 26:5). Visited by the LORD and two angels he offered unleavened bread; it may well have been a festival time out of Egypt Moses requested the Pharaoh to permit a feast (Exodus 5:1).

The festivals were - alongside the weekly Sabbath - incorporated into the formal worship of the Israelites and for nearly a thousand years they were observed with varying degrees of enthusiasm and sincerity. [They

Request the related free articles:
The Law of Life
Tabernacles - the plan for man,
God's Grand Design

The feasts are outlined in:
God's Holy Days

are outlined in Leviticus 23.]

These set feasts of the LORD (Leviticus 23: 4) were grouped around the agricultural seasons - in spring, summer, autumn. But they were much more than thanksgivings for a safe harvest. For they were guideposts to the divine plan, each portraying an aspect that affects the daily life of each of us.

The prophets, however, warned time and again of the dire consequences of non-observance. The warnings went unheeded. First the House of Israel, then the House of Judah were invaded and enslaved. Israel had substituted alternative days, while Judah abandoned the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. Clearly, observance was important to the LORD!

Way of Cain

Jesus and the apostles, of course, observed the same festivals as did their contemporaries in Judaea. So, too, the entire church (both Jew and Gentile) after that first Pentecost - one of the festival days appointed by the LORD.

Israel's behaviour was, sadly, mirrored in the early church of God. It didn't take many years - even in the days of the apostles - till the visible church went the perverse way of Israel. The revealed festivals were abandoned and the festivals of the surrounding substitute religions replaced them. Thus was the divine plan obscured.

Jude calls it "the way of Cain" (Jude v.11; see also Hebrews 11:4). He refused to follow the LORD's instruction in regard to worship, despising Him. God had commanded animal sacrifice - symbolic of the greater sacrifice of "the seed," Jesus.

Similarly, the "feasts of the LORD" are an expression of the divine Plan for mankind. **Ω**

Some claim that the apostles misunderstood the timing of the return of Jesus Christ to rule mankind. How could they be so mistaken?

"The Kingdom is at hand" Jesus told his disciples. The implication is that they would not wait long before the Kingdom of God came to rule mankind. It's a concept common enough through the New Testament writings.

Certainly the New Testament writers believed Jesus (who wouldn't). Paul, for example: *"The night is far spent, the day is at hand"* (Romans 13:12). Again: *"The time is short"* (I Corinthians 7:29). James: *"The coming of the Lord draws near"* (ch 5:8). Peter: *"The end of all things is at hand"* (I Peter 4:7). And: *"For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry"* (Hebrews 10:37). Even John: *"It is the last time"* (I John 2:18).

Did they all get it wrong? Did they really expect Jesus to then and there re-establish an Israelite kingdom (Acts 1:6)? After all that time in the company of Jesus and exposed to the teachings of the Son of God - before and after his resurrection - did they misunderstand?

Israel a Blessing

God's program was indeed to establish Israel as a model nation, an example and blessing to all of mankind. He said *"...if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure to me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation"* (Exodus 19:5-6).

History tells us they fell short, were rebellious, failed to attain their high calling. But the prophets forecast a restoration - *when the conditions would be fulfilled*. The kingdom would, as the disciples understood, be restored to Israel: *"...He shall cause them that come of Jacob to*

take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit" (Isaiah 27:6).

The Church

It's a common misunderstanding in the Christian community that God has *finished* with Israel. Now it's all to do with "the church." Not so. For, as Paul explains, "the church" is *"grafted in"* to Israel - see Romans 11.

The Israel of which he writes, of course, is the *Israel of faith* and not all who may claim descent through the patriarch Jacob.. It is *"the tree of life"* - the true faith that has continued since creation. All Bible-believing Christians are nourished by it. [Request the article **6000 Years of Christianity**]

The church of God is Renewed Israel comprising those Jews and Gentiles in whom dwells the Spirit of God, called out by the Father as one - spiritual - nation, a Kingdom of priests. The church fulfills the role abrogated by the Jews

Israel, then, continues through time. The prophecies of an earthly Kingdom, however, remain and *will* be fulfilled. Guaranteed. They await the return of Jesus the Messiah as King of kings and LORD of lords.

So why did He not return in the first century - as seemingly He promised? What of the nearly two millennia since Jesus said *"...The Kingdom is at hand?"*

Call To Repentance

Neither Jesus nor the apostles were in error, and a careful study of the Scriptures makes the answer clear.

Each quotation from the Bible in New Horizons is from a translation which most clearly expresses the original language

The 'Second Advent': did the apostles misunderstand?

The first days of the church were punctuated by powerful sermons from the apostle Peter. To the Jews he presented the awesome facts of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The evidence he presented that Jesus was their long-awaited Messiah caused a stir, reaching the ears of the religious leadership.

Peter called on his hearers to repent. As did their "fathers" they had rejected all that Jesus and the prophets had spoken. They would not change, refused to repent - despite the evidence set before their eyes.

The climax of his messages are recorded in Acts 3:

But you denied the Holy and Just One, and asked for a man, a murderer, to be granted to you. And the Author of Life you killed, whom God raised up from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And on the faith of His name, this one whom you see and know was made firm by His name, and the faith which came through Him gave to him this complete soundness before you all. And now, brothers, I know that you acted according to ignorance, as also did your rulers. But what things God before proclaimed through the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ should suffer, He fulfilled in this manner. Therefore, repent, and convert, for the blotting out of your sins, so that times of refreshing may come from the face of the Lord, and that He may send forth the One before proclaimed to you, Jesus Christ, whom Heaven truly needs to receive until the times of restoration of all things, of which God spoke through the mouth of all His holy prophets from the age past
Acts 3:14-21 LITV

Notice - it's a call to recognize Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah and a call to repent. The consequence of this repentance? God would send Jesus exactly as was proclaimed by

the prophets.

If...

Some prophecy is *set in stone*, certain to be fulfilled in God's perfect timing - as is the coming of Messiah. But some prophecy is *conditional*.

An example was the removal of God's judgment from the people of Nineveh, as recorded in the book of Jonah. In this case in Acts the imminent return of Jesus was conditional on the repentance of the nation and acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah.

For the second time Israel, represented by the House of Judah, rejected the opportunity to become that "...kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." Their repentance and acceptance of their - and the world's - Messiah, the Anointed One, would have ushered in the millennial reign of the LORD.

Note what Mark records: "...And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed" (Mark 16:20). And what powerful signs! The nation could not avoid the message: *repent or die*.

Testifying before the national and religious leadership (Acts 24) Paul - near the end of his life - said: "...[I] declared both to them of Damascus first and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the country of Judaea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance" (Acts 26:20).

That message permeated the preaching of the apostles throughout their lifetime. Finally, Paul - before the Jewish leadership in Rome - drew the line:

"...Well spoke the Holy Spirit through Isaiah the prophet unto your fathers, saying, 'Go thou unto this people, and say, By hearing you shall hear, and shall in no wise understand; And seeing you shall see, and

shall in no wise perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, And their ears are dull of hearing, And their eyes they have closed; Lest, haply they should perceive with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And should turn again, And I should heal them'. Be it known therefore unto you, that this salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles: they will also hear"

Acts 28:25-29

Repentance didn't happen. After forty years of divine patience and apostolic preaching the axe fell on unrepentant Israel. The Temple, the center of divine worship, was destroyed and the people were slaughtered or scattered. The old way passed and the true faith became personal. The public worship of the LORD would no longer be confined to Jerusalem and a material Temple - but centred in individual human hearts indwelt by the Spirit of God (See John 4:21-24).

Those prophetic time passages are, in other words, conditional. Indeed this is clear from the inclusion of the Greek particle *an*. It is not directly translatable into English by a word but is implied. An example is in this

very passage in Acts - ch 3:20. "...it denotes that the action of the verb is dependent on some circumstance or condition" (Arndt & Gingrich: *Greek-English Lexicon*).

The time was indeed then "*at hand*." As was "*the end of all things*." The "*coming of the LORD*" did indeed "*draw near*." It was "*the last time*." But only if Israel had repented.

In God's good and perfect timing, however, He will intervene to save Israel and all mankind - both from physical annihilation, and spiritually.

Israel Renewed

What of the intervening millennia? Is God just marking time until some date He has in mind for setting up the Kingdom?

In reality, the church fulfills the role abrogated by the Jews of the first Christian century. The church is Renewed Israel comprising those Jews and Gentiles in whom dwells the Spirit of God, called out by the Father as one - spiritual - nation, a Kingdom of priests (I Peter 2:5).

Our mission is to take the message of salvation and of the Kingdom of God to all the world. Those who respond - who repent and are baptized - are "naturalized" in God's new nation and in training as "*kings and priests*."

All Israel will indeed be saved, the true Israel of the spirit restored:

"...They shall come with weeping; and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by rivers of waters, in a straight way wherein they shall not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born. Hear the word of Jehovah, O you nations, and declare it in the isles afar off; and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd does his flock" Jeremiah 31:9-10 **Ω**

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**Be sure to take a look at
www.cgom.org**

**In Christ, our human potential
is boundless**

YOU ARE EXTRAORDINARY

Everybody knows about fingerprints. Of all earth's billions, no two people have the same pattern. Each of us is unique. But did you know that no two hearts are alike? Or stomachs, eyes, livers, nerves, blood vessels? Or brains?

You are, in fact, extraordinary!

On physical examination it is quite apparent that each of us in a very special way is a unique person. Even the shape of the liver differs from one person to another. So, too, its color, and how it reacts inside its special environment. And its size. The same is true in principle for every organ. This, in part, explains why medicine or surgery is a hit or miss affair - an art form!

Our brains, too, differ. The functions of this crowning and vital organ can be mapped out in rough on the cortex. Yet no neurosurgeon can have an accurate knowledge of a particular brain without careful and detailed pre-investigation using all manner of scans and psychological tests.

As one research neurologist, K.S. Lashley points out, "...individuals start life with brains differing enormously in structure." And, "its diversities within the species are of the same general character as are the differences between related species." As that successful and very human psalmist, King David of ancient Israel, exclaimed, "*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body, and knit them together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex. It is amazing to think about. Your workmanship is marvellous...*" (Psalms 139:13,14).

But does such uniqueness have any practical significance?

Indeed, it does. Did you ever wonder why your partner feels pain or cold

or heat more acutely (or less so) than you do? It's because of the striking variation in the sensitivity of our pain or other receptors. Some folk have little or no pain sensation - a fact which might influence your choice of occupation!

Of ninety-seven prize fighters tested in New York, all but ten had a low pain sensitivity! And don't we wrapped-up office types marvel at those bare-chested hirsutes working happily in sub-zero cold?

Then there's color vision. "That curtain is green," you say. But your wife's perception is "blue." Who's right? Well - both, for we each see colors in a special way. Knowing about such differences might lead to more toleration within the family and on the job or the golf course!

You are, indeed, extraordinary. But - so what?

Power-up Your Brain

The bottom line is that each of us has a very distinctive mind. We're each a unique "bundle of nerves" - in the Bible it is described as the "*spirit in man*" - that's capable of immense development, and whatever our age.

The brain consists of a billion inter-connecting neurons mostly present from birth - the "most complicated machine in the entire universe." But the numbers decrease with age, for

millions of cells die daily. "No hope for me, then" you say?

Not so, for your brain can grow whether you are seven or seventy. Whether we're young or old, neurologists now tell us that any learning activity actually increases the size and weight of the brain. And not from eating fish but from mental effort. Said wise King Solomon, "*An intelligent man is always open to new ideas. In fact, he looks for them*" (Proverbs 18:15). The successful human being is one who forever questions his views and looks constantly to improve himself or herself.

Such are not stuck in a rut. Nor need *you* be! All of these factors imply that none of us need feel "a write-off." Simply because during our schooldays we were branded with a particular IQ we needn't feel inferior - not even to our boss. For you are talented in ways that are not inferior to his and are probably complementary. This applies, too, within family relationships!

That old - but ever new - book, the Bible, is a rich vein of practical business and life-style wisdom. So, grasp firmly what Paul said in his letter to the Roman Christians: "*God has given us the ability to do certain things well*" (Romans 12:6).

Each of us - and that includes you - has an incredible potential for personal development. The mathematical genius Albert Einstein once reckoned that we use only .02% of our capacity! We each have a storehouse of unused talent in a combination that is unique to us. We each have, in business terms, our "unique selling points."

STUDY THE WORD
Be sure to enroll for our
free 32-lesson Study
Course. It's a key to what
is for many a
'Book of Mystery'

unsigned articles are by the Editor

So, accept yourself for **cont'd p.8**

Be a Good Steward

Christians are often concerned about 'stewardship' The question may be along the lines of *Must a Christian give a tithe (ie one-tenth) of income to the church? Should you?*

The concept of the tithe derives from the Old Testament practice of the obligation to "tithe increase" for God's service - for example, Leviticus 27:30-32. The concept pre-dates Moses, and a form of it was practiced by Abraham (some three hundred years earlier) and Jacob. In the new nation of Israel the tithe was paid to the authorised Levitical priesthood for their own material needs and for their work in the Tabernacle and the Temple (Numbers 18:20-24). The notion of a tithe was also known to nations other than Israel.

With the passage of three and a half thousand years the details of the tithe have become somewhat obscure. However, the principles remain clear - certainly in "old covenant" terms.

Although disputed, many Bible students consider that there were, in Israel, three separate tithes. The *first tithe* was that mentioned above - for the priesthood. A *second tithe* was for the individual to support attendance at the great festivals held in Jerusalem *eg* Deuteronomy 14:22-27. And every third year and sixth year in seven there was a *third tithe* - given to alleviate poverty in the land. Given human nature it's unlikely they were strictly adhered to!

The obscurity arises from the detail: who tithed? what was tithed? how was it distributed? was everything tithed? For example we're told that every tenth animal was for God. So, what - as with most - if you had only nine or fewer? Was the upkeep and cost of the home excluded? And food? What, indeed, is increase? We

can but guess!

New Testament

In the time of Jesus the tithe was a legal requirement for all Jews, part of their covenant with JHVH. For example, Jesus told the Pharisees that they should even tithe "*mint and anise and cummin*" (Matthew 23:23) - simple herbs.

So how does the Old Testament tithing law apply to Christians?

There is no separate "doctrinal statement" on tithing in the New Testament. There are, however, certain principles deriving from the Old Covenant regulations which, coupled with the "new wine" of faith in Christ, allow us to develop a "doctrine of Christian giving," or Christian stewardship.

The tithes were for the purposes of: support for divine service, support for personal festival attendance, support for the needy. The same principles are applicable today. There is a work for God to be done, Christians need to attend the Festivals, and we still have the needy among us - single parents, destitute, disabled *etc.* All need to be cared for. Good stewardship shows how.

A Key Principle

An important principle is derived from the "Sermon on the Mount." In dealing with other aspects of the Law, Jesus explained that the Christian life is not confined by the Law, but goes beyond it. With *adultery*, for example, he shows us that Christian behaviour cuts more deeply than just the sexual act - it is in the heart. The same with violence - even *anger* transgresses the law of "*You shall do no murder.*"

So, too, with our *resources*: all - whether material or spiritual talents,

or our property, or our money, or our time - all belong to God, and we are but stewards. All is to be used to God's glory. We serve *wholeheartedly and joyously* as we are able! Giving is a "heart thing." We give in response to, and to acknowledge, God's bounty liberally poured out upon us, and in thankfulness for His overflowing mercies. Our giving is not confined by any concept of a strict legal tithe.

Sharing our substance, for the Christian, is a delight. It's an expression of our inner state of thankfulness. Jesus also addresses this in the "Sermon on the Mount." As we "*lay up treasures in heaven*" (Matthew 6:20) we display our commitment to serving God rather than mammon, and to shutting our eyes to covetousness (*vv.*21-24; Colossians 3:5; Ephesians 5:3). Again, sacrificial giving expresses our readiness to trust our loving Father for every material need (*vv.*25-34, Proverbs 10:3).

A Royal Priesthood

Another fundamental principle - often overlooked - is that *the priesthood has now changed*. No longer (since the Temple service ended in 70AD) is it Levitical, nor is it any form of institution. But *it is us*, as partners of Christ (Hebrews 3:14, Revelation 5:10) - whose ministry replaces the Levitical priesthood (I Peter 2:5)!

Every Christian is a member of a "*royal priesthood*" (I Peter 2:9). As such it is our personal responsibility, on the basis of the above principles, to use all our natural talents and our spiritual gifts and all our resources in the service of God. It's not a responsibility we can pass on to others. Each of us is commissioned for total commitment to the service of our Saviour. *Christianity is no soft option!*

Joint Effort

Of course, if you personally are clearly not in a position to do a per-

sonal work (age, illness, family *etc*) converted heart.

then you must decide who you consider is to be trusted to wisely use your resources. Though all of us are obligated to diligently *pray* for the advance of the work of God!

You may decide that your financial gifts are more effectively used in cooperation with others of like mind. This could be to support a joint project - *eg* a magazine or an "evangelist" or other form of outreach that you deem to be personally helpful, or someone or some organization you consider to be doing an effective work for God.

A contemporary example is that local assemblies and individuals around the world contribute to the publishing costs of this our outreach magazine *New Horizons*, to the distribution of thousands of pieces of literature and to finance our various support programs. Pooled resources properly used are usually more effective than individual effort.

Also, our giving certainly - and perhaps primarily - includes donations toward the legitimate expenses (including appropriate remuneration for those who serve the assembly) and outreach projects of the local assembly that we attend.

Buying Salvation

Another key is that we are free individuals not under the thumb of any other human being or organization. As such we are each personally responsible to exercise our freedom in giving - how much, to whom, for what purpose *etc*. It is each Christian's personal responsibility to ensure that what we give is used faithfully and carefully by the recipient.

We are responsible before God who knows our hearts - and both our needs and the depth of our wallet!

What pleases God is a heart dedicated to Him and indwelt and guided by His Spirit. Mere external behaviour isn't necessarily evidence of a

Nor is the amount we set aside for the work of God a factor in whether or not we will be saved (though some would have you believe it is!) Our salvation is a free gift extended through God's love and our Saviour's willingness to die for us. *We can not buy salvation!*

On the other hand a stingy and mournful approach to God and to giving can distort our life, inhibit our zeal and cause us to dry up spiritually (Proverbs 11:24, 26) Wrote Paul: "*He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully*" (II Corinthians 9:6). It *could* conceivably lead to our spiritual demise.

Importantly, the discipline of consistent Bible-based giving and sharing of our resources is a key to a growing trust in God to supply very material need according to His sure promises.

The spiritual principles underlying all our giving are those of joy and thankfulness and sacrifice. *Joy* that we are privileged to be called by God - with a stake in eternity. *Thankfulness* that we know Him and are known to Him and grateful for the abundance of His overflowing mercies and daily provision for our material and spiritual needs. And a readiness to *sacrifice* for the Saviour who sacrificed all for us.

Daily Needs

Out of this thankfulness, then, all God's people delight to return to God His bounty to use to His glory.

Some brethren, however, need to be restrained from giving! For it is a further principle that we are expected to adequately care for, among others, our own daily needs and those of our family (I Timothy 5:15, II Corinthians 12:14, Ephesians 6:2, Mark 7:11). Likely, that's why it was the *tenth* animal that was tithed - if you

didn't have as many as ten animals a tithe wasn't expected! Though, of course, this did not deny the opportunity to give voluntarily of their substance.

Even our carnal human governments recognize the need we have for some non-taxable income! So even for those who believe in a strict legal tithe the implication of this is that if you are not obliged to pay tax you may, of course, donate - but need not feel obliged to "tithe" your small - perhaps fixed - income. What such brethren give, then, is a matter of individual judgment, taking note of our personal responsibilities.

Other Giving

Another Christian obligation is the necessity of funding our ability to worship (Hebrews 10:24-26). It is important to our spiritual growth, and a Biblical instruction, that we fellowship, worship, and be instructed from God's Word by attending the annual Festivals and Sabbath meetings when at all possible. The *second tithe* principle is to finance this and to help us to afford it - for ourselves, and where possible to help other brethren. This implies that we carefully manage our income, budgeting for this purpose.

In attending with the people of God for worship and instruction on the weekly and annual Sabbaths we "*...learn to fear Jehovah your God always*" (Deuteronomy 14:23). It's important for the growth of the Body, the Church. The emphasis is not on "tithing" but on providing opportunity to "*fear God*" through the hearing of - and submission to - His Word.

Care for the Needy

A further constraint on our giving is that there will always be those among us who for some reason are restricted in their finances, even destitute. The principle of the *third tithe* is that we care for such - in a special way for those who are of the Body of Christ (Galatians 6:6-10).

Extraordinary...cont'd
what you are - a special blend of strengths and weaknesses.

Like the employee who hid his talent (Matthew 25:25), the only failures are those who die without taking advantage of their inborn capabilities, and those who don't recognize and offset their weaknesses. Said Helen Keller, "I thank God for my handicaps, for through them I have found myself, my work, and my God."

On the other hand don't accept yourself as you are! Our present attainments are but a step along the way. Much of what we have learned is transient. Science is temporary, with new discoveries forever throwing out old concepts once held as sacrosanct.

Much of what we "knew" as children is probably no longer true. And what we learned about God in Sunday School or at mother's knee is just as likely not to be true! Didn't Jesus

The 'immortal soul': it's Satan's biggest lie! Read about it in this free article:

When Someone Dies

All of us will be raised from the dead - sometime. What happens then? Read the free article

After the Resurrection

warn us about "tradition" (Mark 7:6-9)?

Man the Pinnacle

When God created mankind - yes, He did! - He noted that everything He had created was "very good." Indeed, mankind was the very pinnacle of that creation. He said: "Let us make man in our image after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). (The speaker, by the way, is the one who became Jesus Christ - Colossians 1:15-17.) Even though we are "of dust from the ground" yet we have

the potential - through repentance and the subsequent indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God - to become a part of the divine Family. We can become truly "children of God" (Romans 8:12-17).

God only has immortality - not man (I Timothy 6:16). We don't have dwelling within us some kind of "immortal soul" freshly dished out at our birth. We are not, as human beings, god-like. But we can - through Jesus Christ - become in God's image just as He originally planned!

You - who were made to become in the image of the divine - have an abundant array of undiscovered and unused talent. Use it in the service of God, of your local fellowship, of humanity, and of yourself. **Ω**

The Autumn Festivals 2007

Thousands upon thousands of Christians will soon gather at 'God's appointed times' for worship, fellowship and instruction from the Scriptures. Many will have portioned their income especially for this purpose. As Moses wrote, the purpose is to: 'learn to fear [ie respect] Jehovah your God always' (Deuteronomy 14:23).

These annual festivals are the oldest of religious gatherings, being rooted in the Creation itself. They alone are appointed by God for His faithful ones.

Details of locations for their observance may be obtained from any of our addresses

Day of Trumpets: Sept 13
Atonement: Sept 22

Tabernacles: Sept 27 - Oct 3
Eighth Day: Oct 4

Stewardship... cont'd

Those of us who are in employment will already be contributing for this purpose through their social security payments - currently, in Britain, a whopping 12% of gross salary year in, year out! For Christians, the giving of a *third tithe* is in a sense obsolete, replaced by a generous willingness to share our resources with those in need - *over and beyond* obligations imposed by a profligate government! Each local assembly, indeed, should have a fund dedicated to this end.

Heart Religion

Christian giving, then, is a personal matter between each of us and God. It is a matter of the heart, flowing from the working in us of the Spirit of God who is the source of every material and spiritual blessing.

There is no external coercion, there can be no legitimate demands from men - and no privileges granted for being "a good donor!" All our resources flow from our loving, caring Father in heaven. He delights to see His children sharing this same attitude (II Corinthians 9:7).

In the intent of the hymn *I surrender all* - our giving is not driven by a legal formula but by our willing and joyful and total dedication of our entire being and resources to our Creator, our Saviour, our Provider.

In sum, our commitment to Jesus Christ should energize us to dedicate all our resources in a balanced way to his service.

Let's joyfully honour God and our Saviour with the firstfruits of our substance and of our increase (Proverbs 3:9). The best of our resources - mental, physical, spiritual - are His. Let's each, as good stewards, dedicate our entire life to His service. **Ω**

MiniStudy**WILL YOU LIVE AGAIN?**

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2)

Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, John 5:29 and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment (John 5:28)

The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished (Revelation 20:5)

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming (I Corinthians 15:22-26)

To many it is inconceivable that death ends everything - forever. Surely there's more to life than our brief three-score years and ten. The concept is almost universal. We like to think that our experiences count for something long-term. Indeed this longing for life beyond the grave permeates the major faiths. Christians and Muslims each in their own way seek Heaven. Buddhism merges us into the Deity. The Hindu faith brings us back to a physical existence up or down the scale of life according to our deeds. And many New Age religions subscribe to this latter notion of re-incarnation.

In fact there are elements of truth in all these views.

- All the major faiths promote their religious writings as divinely inspired and true. This ministry bases its beliefs firmly on the Christian Bible which we believe is the true and final Word of God
- If man is simply the work of blind chance and not the work of an all-powerful Divinity who has a plan for us then this physical life is all there is. But there is more to life
- That plan entails the creation of "clay models" who will be transformed by divine energy into spirit. (Man is made of "clay" - the elements of the earth)
- When our physical life ends it's *not* the end. God's plan includes - for every one of us: Jew, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, animist, atheist - a return from the dead: by means of resurrection
- The harvest seasons are an analogy for God's plan for us. Jesus is the *firstfruits* (I Corinthians 15:20) - the first to be transformed from physical life to spirit life by resurrection from among the dead
- There follows "*a kind of firstfruits*" (James 1:18). These are those who in this life commit to follow the firstfruit - Jesus - and have received his Spirit: "*These are the ones following the Lamb wherever He may go. These were redeemed from among men as a firstfruit to God and to the Lamb*" (Revelation 14:4)
- This firstfruits harvest, relatively small, will be resurrected from their grave at the return of Jesus: "*In a moment, in a glance of an eye, at the last trumpet; for a trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall all be changed*" (I Corinthians 15:52). They will live again, never more to die
- What about the rest of mankind - all those since creation, dead and alive, of every race, of every religion and none? They, too, will live again, but in the flesh: "*But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were ended*" (Revelation 20:5)
- The "*thousand years*" - the "*millennium*" - begins with the return of Jesus as "*King of kings and Lord of lords*": the political and religious Head of all mankind
- Each one of us has to come before Christ's judgment seat to answer for our conduct (II Corinthians 5:10). For Christians that time is *now* - an on-going assessment (I Peter 4:17)
- For all others that time is the "*White Throne Judgment*" (Revelation 20:11-15) at which they will have opportunity to believe the Gospel - to have their names "*written in the Book of Life*"
- Those who then continue to reject God's plan in the Gospel are forever removed in an earth-enveloping conflagration (II Peter 3:7). Lacking God's indwelling Spirit they will die and be burned - in the same way refuse was consumed in the *Valley of Hinnom [Ge'Henna]*, Jerusalem's refuse dump. This is "*hell fire*." Compare the fate of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10)

Ω

