

NEW

Horizons

Vol 11 No 6

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addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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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

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Mankind has long sought someone to deliver us from our woes. God has provided such a One in His Messiah

Civilization has the notorious habit of degenerating. It's the pattern that has pursued mankind through the millennia, and we don't know how to fix it. When we nearly reach rock bottom we often turn to a 'strong man' for deliverance. Led by an often charismatic 'saviour' the nation blindly unites in his (it's usually male) support against a common enemy, or he solves major problems. It may work effectively for a time. Human nature being what it is it usually turns sour - though the utopian dream persists for all of us.

From the earliest stirrings of civilization there has persisted the elusive mirage of a golden age of universal

peace and prosperity. We are still waiting for it. But that dream will be fulfilled - *guaranteed*. For it has been underwritten by no less a hand than man's Creator.

Troubled Beginning

Man has indeed descended. But contrary to popular belief that descent is from the high plateau of perfection. We have "fallen." But "...before the world began" (II Timothy 1:9), before the creation of the pinnacle of life, mankind, the Creator God had prepared a recovery plan.

Our first parents heeded the whispers of the enemy of God and of man in the guise of a serpent - Lucifer, Satan. Addressing the spirit being the LORD said: "...and I will put enmity

between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He will bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15). It's easy to overlook the significance of this statement. Adam and Eve had just sinned. Despite their immediate origin from the very hand of God; despite face-to-face contact with their Creator; despite access to the Tree of Life - yet they rejected their heritage and asserted control over their own lives and on their own terms. Result - disaster.

They experienced the awesome consequences for nearly the thousand years of their physical existence. Death overtook them, and - made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) -

the purpose for their creation was annulled. Sin separated them - and us - from Him (Isaiah 59:2). Drastic consequences demand drastic remedies, and God already had His Plan ready. More than ever sin's consequences today need that remedy.

A Promised Messiah

History is strewn with the relics of messianic myth. [Read our article *God's Grand Design*] Saviours have come - and gone. Religions have been spawned by myths about those who have died and been resurrected. Parallels have been drawn, for example, between the Hindu Krishna and Jesus. Both crucified, descended into hell, resurrected and to return again as Conqueror riding a white horse.

Islam looks to the Mahdi or Muntazar - a deliverer in the image of Mohammed. Buddhism has its Maitreya. In Hinduism he is Kalki, the last

Avatar. Aztecs, Japanese, Sioux, Eskimo - all have their version. He is a powerful leader who will unite the world in peace. Judaism also looks to a future Messiah: the *Moshiach*. But all have their origin in one solid reality - the Creator's certain promise of a Deliverer. The oral histories, records, traditions of all nations derive from that Promise, passed down the centuries.

Christianity, of course, acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah, God's Anointed, and the Scriptures are the most comprehensive testimony that in him is the fullness of that Promise. Jesus is the embodiment of all the prophecies of the Scriptures concerning Messiah. The Christian understanding comes from the Hebrew Old Testament, enlightened by the New.

Bible Testimony

In effect God told Satan: "*For a limited time I allow you to wander to and fro on Earth causing mayhem within My creation. But a descendant of this woman whom you have deceived will in ages to come bear a child who will defeat you despite your attempts to destroy him and his work. He is My Anointed, My Messiah, My Son.*" The Christian Scriptures are the record of that mayhem, that struggle, that triumph.

The Messianic plan touched countless generations, affecting individuals and nations. To this day countless men and women participate in that eternal plan.

The Scriptures through the inspired words of the prophets and apostles are a crystal clear testimony to Messiah. God has never left himself without witness to all nations - Jew and Gentile - in that He has expressed His goodness through bountiful na-

The Promised Messiah

ture despite our idolatry and rejection of Him (Acts 14:17). Faithful men and women, too, have since creation carried the burning torch of witness to Messiah's continuing presence and future coming (II Peter 1:21, 3:2).

Enoch, for example, bore witness to a future coming of the Messiah: "...and the seventh [generation] from Adam, Enoch, also prophesied to these men, saying, Behold, the Lord came with myriads of His saints" (Jude 1:14). His grandson, Lamech, figured his son Noah might have been the promised Deliverer (Genesis 5:29). And certainly the end of the then world came in Noah's days. He preached righteousness to a dying but unheeding world (Genesis 6-7, II Peter 2:5).

As the centuries rolled by others kept alight the flame while the nations sank again into idolatry. Uniquely, Abraham, in Babylon, responded to a call from God (Hebrews 11:8ff). The LORD told Isaac "...in your 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). "one seed" Paul tells us: "...He says not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to your seed, which is Christ [i.e. the Messiah]" (Galatians 3:16).

Moses, too, refers to Messiah: "...I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him" (Deuteronomy 18:18). The apostle Peter and Steven confirm this refers to none other than Jesus the Christ (Acts 3:22, 7:37).

Prophetic Insight

Over time the LORD increasingly

revealed details of the Messiah.

- Born of a woman - a virgin: "...therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14)
- Of the tribe of Judah: "...nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh come: And unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be" (Genesis 49:10)
- And born of royal lineage: he would be born from a descendant of David (Isaiah 7:13-14, Revelation 22: 16). This was common knowledge in the time of Jesus: "...But the Pharisees having been gathered, Jesus questioned them, saying, What do you think about the Christ [i.e. Messiah]? Whose son is He? They say to Him, David's" (Matthew 22:41-42)
- The place of his birth was foretold: "...and you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, being least among the thousands of Judah, out of you He shall come forth to Me to become One ruling in Israel; and His goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity" (Micah 5:2, Matthew 2:1-6)
- The era of his birth and subsequent death were accurately predicted: "...and after sixty two weeks, Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself. And the people of a coming ruler shall destroy the city and the sanctuary" (Daniel 9:26). Though there's some doubt as to the exact start/end of the period it clearly brings us to the time of Jesus the Messiah. God acts on time: "...but when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Galatians 4:4)
- How Messiah would be treated by his contemporaries was accurately foretold (Isaiah 52-53)
- The manner of Messiah's death was perfectly detailed (Psalm 22)
- ...as was his resurrection: "...You will not leave My soul in Sheol; You will not give Your Holy One to see corruption" (Psalm 16:10)

- Numerous Old Testament passages describe the return of Messiah and his purpose: the "restitution of all things"

Utopia At Last

The Messianic golden cord binds history from man's beginning to man's end! God has not forsaken our world. His Plan moves inexorably onwards to complete fulfillment and none can frustrate it. In God's perfect timing His Anointed, His Messiah Jesus, will return to a world that has fully given itself over to "the Serpent" - the spirit who thought he could depose the Father from His throne and rule the Universe.

Rejection

In early first century Judaism the expectation of Messiah's appearance was at fever pitch. The rejection by the Jewish establishment of Jesus as the Messiah resulted in overthrow of the nation and the scattering of the people. To this day Messiah for them remains a future event.

For Christians Messiah has indeed come, as a fellow-man, as our Saviour, as our sin-bearer, as our advocate with the Father. He is in process of recruiting and training a mighty army of men and women fully committed to him and to his plan. We await his return as King of kings and Lord of lords - master in the political realm and the religious realm.

Despite two millennia of witness the majority of mankind continue to reject him, his truth obscured by "...the god of this age [who] has blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving, so that the brightness of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God, should not dawn on them" (II Corinthians 4:4). Satan still stalks God's garden!

But any who sincerely seek him will find him. If you are willing to commit to his service we invite you to contact us at any of our addresses for more information. **Ω**

Request the free article:
God's Grand Design

The following passages in the Old Testament are the ones that Jews consider to be messianic in nature or relating to the end of days:

Isaiah 2, 11, 42; 59:20
Jeremiah 23, 30, 33; 48:47;
49:39; Ezekiel 38:16; Hosea 3:4-3:5; Micah 4;
Zephaniah 3:9; Zechariah 14:9; Daniel 10:14

**Life often appears to be “unfair.”
Is God to blame?**

There is still a glitch in the “software,” says one angel to another. “Bad things are still happening to good people.”

Was the angelic being right or wrong? Bad things do indeed beset folk who appear to lead near blameless lives. Accidents, illness, cancer, premature loss of a child or parent. It happens all the time: “...there is a just man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked one who prolongs his life in his evil.” But why?

A short answer is “time and chance,” suggested by wise King Solomon: “I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the mighty; nor even bread to the wise; nor even riches to the men of discernment; nor even favor to knowing men. For time and chance happen to them all” (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

Random Events

Some “bad things” are random. An erratic driver maims or kills a pedestrian. Random for the victim - but what of the driver? He may have had an unexpected heart attack - random. Or he may have been influenced by drink or drugs. *Not* random but a personal choice with dire consequences.

A diabetic - “good” or “bad” - loses a foot to gangrene. Random? Maybe, but it possibly results from a lifestyle choice of atrocious diet. The local vicar dies of lung cancer the result of a lifetime indulging the tobacco habit. Again, not random. A promiscuous teen - perhaps from a “good” family - develops an STD; not random, but a consequence.

Now take the nation. Why do some nations prosper while others wallow in disease, poverty, corrupt leadership? No - there was, for the latter, no glitch in the software. It results

A “Software” Problem?

from choice. Good Christians in a nation like Zimbabwe suffer alongside their non-Christian neighbour - who may also be “good.” But sometime in the nation’s history choices were made. Sound government was submerged in corrupt self-serving practices.

Case Study

Ancient Israel is a case study. Their “founding father” Abraham by faith secured for them the role of a chosen nation (Isaiah 41:8-10). They were to be “...a kingdom of priests for Me, a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). It was a covenant, and Israel’s part was to submit to God’s guidance.

Consequences!

God’s part in the Covenant was to guarantee blessing:

“...The LORD will make your businesses and your farms successful. You will have many children. You will harvest large crops, and your herds of cattle and flocks of sheep and goats will produce many young. You will have plenty of bread to eat. The LORD will make you successful in your daily work. The LORD will help you defeat your enemies and make them scatter in all directions. The LORD your God is giving you the land, and he will make sure you are successful in everything you do. Your harvests will be so large that your storehouses will be full”

Deuteronomy 28:3-8, CEV

Such blessing was the effect of following God’s guidance. But, conversely, “curses”, the opposite effects, resulted naturally from disregarding the design spec, as Israel’s subsequent history informs us. It applies through every aspect of life, to every individual, to every nation.

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

Indulge a poor diet, smoke, mainline, over-drink, be sexually permissive, strive to ‘keep up with the Joneses’, live dangerously, then expect adverse consequences. Our epidemic of childlessness, for example (Deuteronomy 28:18), is largely attributed to promiscuity or abortion.

Whose Fault?

So, is that God’s fault? Clearly not. Buy a delicate instrument and it functions optimally only when you follow the designer’s instructions. In Hebrews we are told: “...For if that first covenant had been faultless, then would no place have been sought for a second. For finding fault with them...” (ch 8:7-8). Not with the Covenant, notice, but with the people.

It isn’t the original “software” that’s the problem. The users of the software, the human mind divinely implanted in our first parents, corrupted the code and we have ever since continued to run a faulty program. It was *sin*, disobedience to the divine program, that has corrupted human decision-making. And sin, not applying the manual, accounts for most of our personal, national and global problems.

So yes, God bears ultimate responsibility, but in the same way that your computer’s designer is responsible for the rules of its operating system. But *you misapplied or ignored* them. When the Scriptures say “*God did [such and such]*” it often is in this sense. Ecclesiastes 6:2 is a possible example. So, not the software’s fault, but the user’s.

Note well, however, that “bad things” can happen apart from individual action. All of us experience adversity that results from outside ourselves For example, the general effect of six thousand years of

cont’d p.8

As life advances, few can look back without some regret. There is a cure: remember the future

“If I had my life over...” We’ve all heard that at some time, may even have expressed it. We won’t, of course, and the best we can do is learn any lessons from previous experience.

Youthful exuberance can leave a legacy. Those years when we flirted with cannabis. Regrets that we ever used tobacco. Perhaps sexual laxity or a failed relationship or foolish business decisions. Some may have committed to a suspect organization or ideology now seen as naive at best. Others have spent maybe years in a religious organization only to be disillusioned by shattered expectations.

Most folk put such behind them: “let bygones be bygones.” For some, however, it is a challenge and can nourish a “root of bitterness” that mars day-to-day existence. Terrible things have happened to so many, the half-century of conflict in Ireland is an example. Torture, murder, rape, “knee-capping” isn’t easily put from memory, nor should it be. Or the loss of someone close through separation or death. Or perceived wrongs perhaps inflicted by trusted confidants. How can we cope?

Solutions aren’t easy to come by. They are individual and each of us searches for a way to lighten our darkness. Grief is an essential part of healing and should not be curtailed. There are, however, some general principles, drawing on age-old wisdom. The Christian Bible is such a source. It is a “potted history” of how, during thousands of years, individual men and women have coped with the vagaries of life.

Look Forward

The apostle Paul cites a long list of these individuals, summing up their lives as: “These all died by way of

faith, not having received the promises, but seeing them from afar, and being persuaded, and having embraced and confessed that they are aliens and tenants on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13). He singles out the patriarch Abraham who, “...looked forward to a city having the foundations of which the builder and maker is God” (v.10). They all looked to the future.

Paul provides further insight: “*And if children, also heirs; truly heirs of God, and joint-heirs of Christ, if indeed we suffer together, that we may also be glorified together. For I calculate that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to compare to the coming glory to be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God*” (Romans 8:17-19). Elsewhere he adds ‘*If we only have hope in Christ in this life, we are of all men most miserable*” (I Corinthians 15:19).

In this life the divine promises are experienced by hope. Not “hope so” but an assurance that they are guaranteed to become reality. Those cited by Paul had coped with horrendous experiences:

“...who through faith overcame kingdoms, worked out righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the mouths of the sword, acquired power from weakness, became strong in war; made armies of foreigners to yield. 5 Women received their dead by resurrection; but others were beaten to death, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others received trial of mockings and of floggings; yea, more, of bonds and of prison: they were stoned; they were tried; they were sawn in two; they died by murder of sword; they went about in sheepskins and in goatskins, being in need, being afflicted, being ill-treated; of whom the world was not

worthy, wandering in deserts, and mountains, and caves, and the holes of the earth” Hebrews 11:33-38

That is real suffering and, true for most Western Christians today, Paul tells his readers: “*You did not yet resist unto blood, wrestling against sin*” (Hebrews 12:4). Yet when we are troubled by events no matter how trivial - Christians can reflect on the “*glory that lies ahead.*”

The apostle Paul drew the short straw in life’s lottery, suffering in Christ’s service. He experienced persecution from fellow country-men and from the Roman government. He was abandoned by close colleagues. Some professing Christians, even, thought to “...add affliction to my bonds.” You can read a potted autobiography in II Corinthians 3:23-33. It may bring tears to your eyes. Yet can anyone be more positive?

Count Your Blessings

Focus on the future, Paul says. But also, here and now, on the positive. Writing to the poverty-stricken brethren in Philippi and reflecting the words of Jesus he says:

“Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and by petition with thanksgivings, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. For the rest, brothers, whatever is true, whatever honorable, whatever is right, whatever pure, whatever lovely, whatever of good report, if of any virtue, and if of any praise, think on these things” Philippians 4:6-8

Good advice. When past hurts assail us, hurts we can now do nothing about, the pain may also be eased by simply listing, on paper if it helps, present blessings. The Bible, God’s Word, is clear that we are not just flotsam adrift on the sea of life, not imprisoned by our past or our present circumstances but able **cont’d p.8**

“The story of Jesus begins December 25.” Does it?

The Western, and increasingly worldwide, belief is that Jesus Christ came into the world December 25. The date is annually celebrated as *Christmas*, a festival no longer confined to the Christian faith. Indeed it is fast becoming a universal celebration. The date is disputed, for many believe the correct time is earlier in the year, around September. [Request the article *The Feast of the Nativity*]

The Jesus history, however, has a much longer pedigree than his nine months in the womb.

Human Birth

The life of Jesus is well documented, and even the arch-enemies of Christianity recognize him as a real flesh-and-blood person. You need to be pretty dumb not to recognize his birth in first century Palestine among the Jewish people, whatever your opinion of his mission. And that he gave his name to one of the world’s major faiths, with over two billion calling themselves “Christian.” There is more evidence for his existence than there is for Julius Caesar and many other historical figures!

“the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin who had been betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. And entering, the angel said to her, Hail, one having received grace! The Lord is with you. You are blessed among women! And seeing this, she was disturbed at his word, and considered what kind of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, Do not fear, Mary, for you have found favor from God. And behold! You will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you will call His name Jesus” (Luke 1:26-31)

That may not sound surprising, a run-of-the-mill pregnancy that happens multiple millions of times yearly. What happens next makes the difference. Notice this: “... *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise:*

When his mother Mary had been betrothed to

Joseph, before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:18). No sexual relationship was involved, but Jesus was the direct son of the Father acting by His Spirit. Jesus, in other words, had a pedigree stretching back through eternity. Do we have any evidence for that?

Only a tiny fraction of mankind has ever denied the reality of “God,” however He may be understood. Only a self-existing eternal Spirit could bring into existence a material creation. The nature of that Being is variously portrayed in the traditions and scriptures of different faiths. The most logical, clearest, understandable account is in the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and expanded in the Christian New Testament. It provides the direct words of the Creator conveyed by mediators.

God Invisible

The Eternal God who stands behind His creation is described in the Christian Scriptures as *Father*. That’s how Jesus (the Son of God) describes Him, prays to Him, instructs us to pray to Him, worship Him: “...*So, then, you should pray this way: Our Father who is in Heaven*” (Matthew 6:9). As children of God, “sons and daughters,” it is natural that we, too, so address Him. The perfect Father - that’s His unchanging character.

God, however, has never been seen

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is for many a
‘Book of Mystery’

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God’s messenger

by human eye: “...*No man has seen God at any time*” writes the apostle John (John 1:18). Not only so, but “... *the Father that sent me, he has borne witness of me. You have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his form*” said Jesus (John 5:37).

That leaves us with a conundrum, for Adam and Eve “...*heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day*” (Genesis 3:8). The people of Israel heard the “*voice of God*” (Deuteronomy 4:33). Moses desired to see God but was told: “...*You can not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.*” (God graciously allowed Moses an obscured glimpse (Exodus 33). Time and again “*God spoke*” to nations, prophets, priests and people. What, then, is this “voice?” Who did they see? Who appeared time and again through the millennia to men and women?

Visible God

At certain times, we’re told, God spoke to His prophets, who recorded His message. We don’t know how; an inner voice, an audible sound, a sensation? At other times, however, we are told He, under various names, “*appeared.*” Notice Moses’ encounter with God (Exodus 3). We are told that *God* (v.4) spoke to him from the burning bush. This (v. 2) was “*the angel [messenger] of the LORD*” (*Heb JHVH, or Jehovah*).

Numerous appearances of “the LORD” to mankind are recorded in Scripture, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Moses, to all Israel, to Balaam, to Gideon, to Solomon. In New Testament times to Joseph, to Zacharias (father of John the Baptist), to Saul (Paul). Clearly this “messenger,” JHVH, fully represents the Father, and was totally at one with Him.

To judge by his actions he exercises

all the Father's power and authority. He it was who was sent to assess and judge a world that had corrupted itself, and who sent an obliterating flood (Genesis 6). He judged the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and destroyed them (Genesis 19). It was He who engineered the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. It was JHVH who exercised judgment on the House of Israel and the House of Judah. He inspired the prophetic writings, and conveyed through them the promise of a Deliverer and Saviour. Said Isaiah: "...For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this" (ch 9:6-7).

God, then, is presented in Scripture as a unity, a unity of thought, a unity of action, one Spirit. There's the Father, immortal, invisible. Then there is His interface with the physical world, His messenger, His Spokesperson, also named JHVH, also God, the Word ("*...and God said*"). By JHVH-Elohim the physical creation came to be. All God's personal dealing with man was in the name of JHVH-Elohim (Genesis 1-2).

Fulfilment

In the unveiling of the divine plan God was to become one with humanity: "...the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). *Immanuel* - 'God with us'.

The prophet Micah (late 8C.BC, a contemporary of Isaiah) adds:

...But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though you be little among the

thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting [from eternity]. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travails has brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God Micah 5:2-4

The prophesied Ruler, the Anointed, the Messiah, was, says Micah, 'from eternity', but was to be born of a woman of Judah.

The century prior to the Christian era bubbled with anticipation of the immanence of the long-awaited Messiah. And not only in Judaea, for he was expected widely, and at that time. The prophet Daniel predicted the coming of Messiah; Jesus came precisely on Daniel's timing (Daniel 9:24-27). The Magi from Persia, for example, shared the expectation and searched for "the King of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2); it was a term synonymous with "Messiah," and they knew where to look for him, in

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. He was the true Light, which lights every man that comes into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name John 1:1-12

the territory of Judaea.

Moses, too, foretold the coming of a future prophet. The apostle Peter quotes him: 'A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall you hear in all things whatsoever he shall say to you' (Acts 3:22).

The editor of Deuteronomy, probably Ezra (5th C BC), tells us: "*And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face*" (ch 34:10). Jewish commentators refer this "prophet" to Messiah.

But no-one in history other than Jesus of Nazareth reflects Moses so precisely. He fulfilled the multitude of predictions concerning "*that Prophet*." He is Messiah, and is none other than the incarnation of JHVH, the promised seed of the woman who would "*bruise the Serpent's head*", and ultimately destroy him.

Jesus Christ is the Messenger of, the very reflection of, JHVH-Elohim. The prophet writes: "...the Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom you delight in: behold, he shall come, says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 3:1). He is that "Word" who spoke and it was done. **Ω**

Shiloh

"The sceptre [rulership] shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come" (Genesis 49:10)

Historically, Judah was the dominant Israelite tribe, and the prophecies indicate Messiah would be born from within it. *Shiloh* is variously interpreted but can refer to "one sent," as was Jesus (I John 4:9-10). It is universally recognized as a reference to Jesus; when he came Judah's rulership waned and, and as Jesus predicted, ceased to exist as a nation. The Scriptures repeatedly tell us that Jesus was sent by the Father.

There's a kind of peace in Northern Ireland...for now

A smiling Ian Paisley was pictured with Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams following the "historic," an over-played word, agreement to share power in Northern Ireland. A wearied sense of relief has settled over the Province following nearly four decades of sectarian conflict and over three thousand murders. Northern Ireland no longer dominates the headlines.

Not everyone, unsurprisingly, is deliriously happy. There have been resignations from Dr Paisley's party, the DUP. Dyed-in-the-wool red, white and blue Protestants see the "Good Friday Agreement" as betrayal, as do deep green Republicans. Many on both sides of the divide don't yet have closure, indeed some have yet to bury murdered loved ones, still "missing."

"...no peace"

Many view the political love-in as an unacceptable compromise. Questions are asked. How could the Protestant majority representative, and a church minister at that, find agreement with a killing machine? Why has the Irish Republican Army's infrastructure not been totally disbanded? And why is the IRA's Army Council still active? Why is it still funded?

Talk to the man-in-the-street and you are disabused of the notion of "peace." Fear persists. Armed thugs continue to control their "turf," the legacy of decades of lawlessness. Drug wars persist, as do barbarous knee-cappings and summary "justice." Unrepentant killers are released from prison to again walk the streets. Especially in border areas there's "ethnic cleansing" as "the others" are intimidated into leaving their homes.

No long-running dispute has an easy solution. Politics is one strand in the complex divisions in Northern Ireland. The Nationalists are determined

to dispose of the border between the United Kingdom and Ireland (Eire), and have shifted tactics from "war, war" to "jaw, jaw." The strategy is on track, with Nationalists now power-sharing with Unionists. Demographics, the population is for the moment near enough balanced, will heavily influence progress.

The Religious Factor

Nor can religion be excluded from the equation. There remains a deep divide between Roman Catholics (mostly Nationalist) and Protestants (almost entirely favouring union with Great Britain). "Papists" and "Prods" don't mix!

That "divide," however, is in process of erosion. In common with modern trends, the barriers are being dismantled. Many young are now intermarrying, a practice that in the past forced many mixed couples to emigrate for their own safety. Children from both sides of the divide are for the first time in school together. The decreasing influence of religion, especially in education and in business, blunts the sharp edge of sectarianism. Then there's increasing dialogue, Catholic and Protestant clergy sharing church services, supporting joint projects. (Though not everyone is supportive.)

The reason for the religious conflict is of course well-known: the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. In Northern Ireland, at the main inter-face between the two faiths, political and religious issues were sharpened. The North's institutions were Protestant-biased, and Catholics were the "subversive enemy." They resented the role of under-dog, and conflict was inevitable.

Confused Christianity

A dispassionate observer might rightly be confused. There are, of course, obvious differences between the two faiths. The role of Pope, for example; or the Roman emphasis on

A Kind of Peace

But in reality they have a shared faith. Both believe in Jesus as Saviour, and in God the Father. Both quote the same Scriptures. Both believe the (unbiblical) doctrine of an "immortal soul" and, incongruously, in the resurrection from the dead. Both believe in a Judgment with the outcome either Heaven or a fiery Hell. Both worship on Sunday, observe Christmas and Easter, observances nowhere found in the Bible.

Perhaps there is a dawning realization of this commonality, though the dominant force is, and ever will be, Rome, which claims to be "always the same." In the light of Bible prophecy full capitulation is in due time inevitable.

Prophetic Scenario

Many students of Biblical prophecy conclude that in the end-time there will arise an all-powerful world-dominating political and military entity in continental Europe. This final conglomerate of ten nations will in concert be a short-lived unstoppable force, which will ally with a deceptive miracle-working religious power, seen as paganised Christianity. All who oppose their authority, which will be backed by the power of the Devil, will be hunted down and killed: "...the dragon was enraged over the woman, and went away to make war with the rest of her seed, those keeping the commandments of God, and having the testimony of Jesus Christ," (Revelation 12:17)

Current activity on both the political and religious fronts lends credence to this scenario. The moral and economic decline of the Anglo-Saxon nations contrasts with the strengthening of the European Union, a situation encouraged by the Vatican. A "United States of Europe" under Catholic domination has long been

Software...cont'd

disobedience to divine guidance. We could, in this context, cite ignorance of Biblical hygiene principles. Or, the spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted disease, all avoidable. Or the Biblical principles of financial management and of justice.

Specialist Help

That built-in fault will be rectified. Even now the Creator holds out the solution, the tool-box to "fix it." Anyone who chooses to follow The Way can escape some (not all, for we live in a world corrupted by sin) of the adverse consequences. **Ω**

Peace...cont'd

its dream, a resurgence of the "Holy Roman Empire."

Despite the doctrinal similarities, there is no doubt that the nonconformist Protestant understanding of Christianity, though in many respects far off the mark, better reflects the Biblical teaching. But both have departed seriously from the Biblical faith, introducing practices that would make the apostles' hair stand on end. The rising tide of ecumenism now surges round solid evangelicals and threatens to engulf them in even more false teaching, what Paul called "doctrines of demons."

With political power in its grasp, the church historically has not been slow to wield the axe, sometimes literally. Witness the demonic sixteenth century attempts to exterminate those who would make the Scriptures available to the masses in the vernacular: Wycliffe, Tyndale, Cranmer and their supporters for example. They were burnt at the stake, hacked to pieces, beheaded, exiled in a devilish attempt to bury truth.

Given man's diversity, and inability to forge lasting peace, attempts to encourage inter-faith dialogue (e.g. the *World Parliament of Religions* or the *Three Faiths Forum*) are laudable. But they simply lower the op-

Future...cont'd

to control our minds.

Human Nature

The history of mankind is too often presented as a slow climb from the inanimate (that's hard to swallow!) through primitive animal life, barbarism and then to attain our present "pinnacle of perfection."

Not so. In reality man has fallen from his original created state of harmonious relations with his environment and his Creator. It has led to hostility towards revealed wisdom. That's why we get into trouble and, eventually, have regrets about our past behaviour.

A prime coping principle is therefore to face our past. The Bible labels our destructive behaviour "sin," the transgression of God's instructions for life, His Law (I John 3:4). Whether or not we recognize it as such, our past and present sin [literally, *missing the mark*] affects us. Some effects can't be avoided. A hand lost in a drunken rage, for example, won't grow again. But if uncontrolled anger or drunkenness continue as present character traits they

position to this coming worldwide end-time religion.

Northern Ireland is a preview of the worldwide future for all Bible-believing Christians. (Most Christians don't really believe the Bible!) Professing Christians (most, sadly) when faced with persecution, "*resisting unto blood*," will simply roll over and "*worship the Beast*." Anything for a quiet life.

Jesus warned of this coming persecution of the faithful (e.g. Matthew 24:9). The eternal reward for faithfulness to the Word of God far eclipses short-term pain: "*..he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved*" (v.13). When that "end" comes, peace, permanent peace, will be established. **Ω**

need to be dealt with to bring peace of mind. The Bible term is "repentance," a change of mind and life-style. Reflection brings a cleansed conscience: "*Tremble and do not sin. Speak within your own heart on your bed and be still...I will both lie down in peace and sleep; for You alone, O Jehovah, make me dwell in safety*" (Psalm 4:4,8).

Those Old Testament stalwarts of faith confessed their sin, made sacrifices. They looked forward to the ultimate sacrifice, Jesus Christ, for total forgiveness.

Resurrection Glory

This life may be troublesome. But for those committed to God's service the future is glorious. Those in whom is the Spirit of God will burst from the grave, be transformed into spirit, no longer limited by the flesh and its woes.

There will be no more sorrow, no more pain but an endless productive life in the company of the Saviour.

When we suffer, when "sorrows like sea billows roll," *then remember the future!* **Ω**

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MiniStudy**THE FEAR OF DEATH**

“...and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:15)

“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28)

Death. It’s awesome to know that it is one certainty in store for all. Rich, poor, powerful, weak, master, slave - all of us face it. It’s a rare person who doesn’t at some moment contemplate his or her parting from this world. It can strike fear in the soul. And, at least subconsciously, fear of death affects all. We need to understand why.

- Death, except for a particular class, is certain. As sums up the Christian Scriptures: “... *it is appointed unto men once to die*” (Hebrews 9:27). We are born, we live, we die. The writer later states of the righteous: “...*these all died*” (ch 11:13). We all go “...*the way of all the earth*” (King David). In youth we don’t give death a thought: we are invincible. Death is for others. But as we head for our “*threescore years and ten*” all too often an icy fear grips us. Not even the atheist is immune
- If we have lived a decent and full life surely we should not be afraid when the Grim Reaper approaches. Yet the fear of death hangs over every battle-field, every hospital. We do all in our power to avert that moment when death knocks at the door. (only *in extremis* do we say “do not resuscitate.”) We wake to the warning signs of an impending heart attack, and fear strikes: “*I may die,*” and we go on a crash diet. A friend succumbs to cancer, and stubbing out our cigarette we think “*that could be me.*” We use every device, every pill and potion, every “magic formula,” to put off that inevitable evil day
- Then there’s the uncertainty most have about life *after* life. What happens then? “...*after this the judgment.*” Will I be good enough for “heaven?” Or, is “hell” my deserved fate? And if so, what does that mean? Milton’s *Inferno* isn’t at all a pleasant prospect! The universal concept of “hell-fire” (Gk. *Ge’henna*), common to all major faiths, is indeed frightening. This cultural falsehood contributes strongly to our fear of death
- But that’s not all. For the death of every human results from a self-inflicted death sentence on our species, *homo sapiens* (Genesis 2:17). Our species is unique, set apart from the animal kingdom by divine purpose. (The lower species don’t sin; they die as a matter of course, even before Adam sinned.) Our first parents chose to reject the “Law of Life,” compliance with which would preserve life indefinitely. The result? Death affected themselves and every descendant until this day: “*Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned*” (Romans 5:12)
- Satan (the first sinner) binds many to a lifetime of a fear of death. Through his death Jesus annulled, for those who commit to him, the power of Satan to entice man to sin (Hebrews 2:14-15). Whether or not acknowledged there’s an instinctive understanding that death follows sin. Wrote James: “...*every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death*” (James 1:14-15)
- But in Christ that fear of death dissipates, driven out by his perfect love. Wrote the Psalmist: “*precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints*” (Psalm 116:15). The people of God through the millennia have faced death in hope - the certainty of a future resurrection from the dead to unending life **Ω**

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*in New **Horizons***

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