

new **Horizons**

Vol 15 No 3

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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

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 bi-monthly e-mail Newsletter OUTREACH, the NEW HORIZONS magazine, the BIBLE BASICS on-line home study course, and the 32-lesson 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 or from our web site www.cgom.org. We are pleased to offer you, without charge, any of our publications

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If you would like a copy of our *Statement of Beliefs* please request it from any of the addresses listed

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For many Christians the Old Testament—often labelled ‘the Law of Moses’—is considered to be outmoded with little relevance for Christians, ‘done away’. Others insist it certainly isn’t ‘done away’ and ought to be followed to the letter.

Of course, there is total dependence of the New Testament on the Old. Without it to hand so much of the New’s teachings is incomprehensible. And didn’t Jesus teach ‘... *Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill*’—that is, to reveal the true depth of its intended meaning? Even though much of his teaching is timeless, and can stand alone, yet its full significance is enlightened only by reference to the Old Testament. In

sum, the Christian faith emerges from ‘the Law and the Prophets’.

A Matter of Choice?

Christians assert that the Bible is God’s inspired Word, and the foundation of their faith. As such, are we obliged to observe *all* its precepts and commands? If not, then which? Can we just pick and choose? And who decides—you, or ‘the church’? It is a conundrum for many Bible believers.

The apostle Paul tells us that recorded events in Scripture have

‘...been written for our instruction, so that we may always have hope through the power of endurance and the encouragement which the Scriptures afford’ - (Romans 15:4 *WNT*). And who hasn’t turned, for example, to Psalm 23 and many other texts in times of personal distress!

Further, who would quibble with charitable giving, with honesty, truthfulness, fair pay, caring for the disabled, fair trials for rich and poor, an even temper, not bearing grudge? And, to cap it, ‘...*love others as much as you love yourself*’. All good Christian practice. And all such are advocated in that despised Law—as, for example in Leviticus 19! But what of other texts?

Is the Old Testament relevant for Christians?

National Israel

How did the LORD handle false teachers in Israel? Certainly they must be dealt with in the church. But—in the way God forcefully prescribed for His nation of Israel? Hear the Law: ‘...*that [false] prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he has spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God*’ (Deuteronomy 13:5). That approach may have been that of the mediaeval church. But try it, today!

Or, what if your buddy becomes entangled, say, with Hinduism or Islam and encourages you to join? ‘...*you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people*’ (v.9). Just get the whole church together and stone him or her! (That may be common in Islamic practice, but not for a faithful follower of Jesus Christ.)

What is often missed is that such instructions were given to a physical nation hewn out by God from among the idolatrous nations to be a model state—and for the benefit of all. Their success depended on following the divine Law—which is how man functions best.

Indeed those positive traits listed above (Leviticus 19) reflect that. But humans because of our inborn nature need boundaries, and the civil government is charged to protect its people from within and without. That requires law—sometimes quite draconian.

Nations still need a code of law wisely applied with mercy and without delay—sadly lacking in today’s democratic world. Without clear direction people and nations stray. Records wise King Solomon: ‘*Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil*’ (Eccles. 8:11).

Redundant Law

It may strike our readers as sacrilege to suggest any part of God's Law is 'redundant'. And, of course, none of it is. It is as true today as it has been from the beginning. Its principles are eternal—but the application varies.

Do Christians, then, 'obey the Law' in its entirety? Think about it and the answer has to be 'No'.

Divine Worship

In addition to criminal law Israel's legal system included a range of laws pertaining to the *worship* then extant—relating to the Tabernacle and Temple, and designed to emphasize God's holiness. They included washings, various priestly requirements (finance, restrictions on alcohol, marriage *etc*), ceremonial uncleanness, special attire.

Then there are the many varieties of *sacrifice*. They reflect various aspects of the life and mission of Messiah but are presently suspended (without an altar or Temple).

To these we can add those laws which have reference to personal and public *hygiene*, as in Leviticus 13—in Israel the province of the priesthood, now absorbed into our modern environmental law.

No longer, for example, do we go to a priest for infectious conditions. Such laws are in a sense now no longer directly applicable but are yet sound principles.

But Christians, as said Paul, can live and learn from these varied

Old Testament laws. Take those civil laws—as in Exodus 22-24. Moses outlined sound and wise laws for the proper ordering of society—laws that are well reflected in modern legislation. Indeed legislators and citizens at large would do well to heed the principles there expressed!

The Church Family

For Christians our approach to the written Law has been transformed. The church is in a sense a new nation, a people with distinct identifying characteristics, brothers and sisters—a family: '*...you are God's chosen and special people. You are a group of royal priests and a holy nation*' (I Peter 2:9). It is the '*...family of God*' (Ephesians 2:19).

The church is the new, the spiritual, Israel, the 'Israel of God'. But as Christians we no longer live under Israel's national covenant by which law-breaking incurred a material penalty—*eg* capital punishment for murder, rape, gross sexual misconduct. Though we are of course each subject to the laws of the nation in which we are presently living (*see* Romans 13).

Christians are 'a different breed' because our spiritual genetics have been transformed. The spirit we share with all mankind by birth (Job 32:8) is being modified by God's Spirit indwelling and interacting with our minds through the on-going process of repentance, baptism, conversion.

Jesus was asked about the 'greatest commandment of the

Law' and replied '*...love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind*' and '*...love neighbour as the self*'. Writes Paul: '*...the love [Gk. *agape*] of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us*' (Romans 5:5).

And by that Spirit the divine Law is internally implanted.

A New Agreement

The prophet Jeremiah was inspired to foretell this transformation of mankind, beginning with the remnant of both Houses of Israel. The LORD will form a new relationship with mankind:

"I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, says the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, says the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Christians have now through Jesus already entered into that privileged New Covenant relationship with the Father. Through the indwelling holy Spirit His Law is implanted in our innermost being, in our mind.

The Law and the Prophets express the mind and Spirit of God; Those in whom dwells that Spirit will be minded to apply to their life every principle of the Law as exemplified by our Saviour.

As we apply ourselves to the diligent study of God's Word we come to see what He wants us to understand from His '*...perfect law of liberty*' (James 1:25). Ω

Is keeping God's Law enough?

The apostle Paul has much to say on the matter of God's Law. He tells us, for example: '... *All that the Law says can be summed up in the command to love others as much as you love yourself*' - (Galatians 5:14). And '...*love is the fulfilling of the Law*' (Romans 13:10).

So, if we *do* all that the Law demands we are okay? Not so! Just look at those implacable opponents of Jesus, the Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). Diligent in the Law's observance down to the last herbal leaf. Spanning the globe to turn others to that same Law yet entirely missing the point. Clearly there is more.

Human Failure

Anyone who has lived even a short time knows that with the best of human effort we simply don't fulfill all the Law's demands. Even if we have had God's indwelling Spirit for a lifetime. The apostle Paul surely was aware of this failing in himself (*see* Romans 7).

As Christians, of course, we strive to understand God's Law and to implement it in our daily walk. Our life's goal is to become like our spiritual Father as exemplified by the life of Jesus while here on earth. *Love* is their character (I John 4:16).

And when we fall foul of it? That's why Jesus died, removing our sin '...*as far as the east is from the west*'. But that doesn't stop self-examination and attempting to put our life straight.

The rest of Paul's exhortation is '...*love works no ill to his neighbour, therefore... love is the fulfilling of the Law*'. In other words, if we were to perfectly love our neighbour we would be doing what the Law requires—even without knowing what the Law says! And if we were to perfectly love God as exemplified by the first four of His Commandments—the same.

But, of course, we do not love either God or neighbour perfectly.

Most of us have 'good neighbours'. But to love them as we love ourselves? That's *supernatural*! The 'empirical self' will always win. Such love doesn't come 'out of the goodness of my heart' which is '...*deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*' (Jeremiah 17:9).

So we will learn what the Father desires of us only through the persistent study of His living example—Jesus the Messiah—as recorded in the entirety of Scripture. And note—He is not going to provide any of us with a 'private interpretation'!

Death by Sin

The apostle Paul contends: '...*until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law*' (Romans 5:13). Untill

Quotations from the Bible in New Horizons are from translations which clearly express the meaning in modern terms

The Law of Love

codified for the physical model nation of Israel around 1500BC there were no 'fixed penalties' for transgression of the divine Law. But he then adds that mankind still suffered death—the automatic penalty for sin, which is an attitude of disrespect for the law of God (Romans 6:23, I John 3:4). There were automatic just consequences.

Until Moses, in other words, the divine law [*torah*: guidance, instruction] was oral, handed down from Adam to his posterity and fully obeyed by Abraham as a matter of faith (Genesis 26:5, James 2:21-23).

The divine Law is built-in to our created nature. Like a complex instrument we are designed to function perfectly only as we obey that Law of Love. Transgress it and there are inevitable consequences—societal, social, for body health and, ultimately, physical and spiritual death.

Deliverance

The Father, however, has provided a full remedy. As His plan unfolds over the millennia, the forgiveness of our sin is being extended to all of mankind, for He is not willing that any should perish.

Jesus through his suffering, death and resurrection willingly took our sin upon himself thereby providing forgiveness for our transgression of God's Law. Since then, the Father has drawn many to Jesus to receive that forgiveness—and he will not turn away any who come to him in true repentance.

That repentance implies the implanting of that Law of love *cont'd p.8*

WHAT'S THE TIME?

Throughout the Christian centuries Bible students have asked that question: *What's the time? Just when will Jesus return? Are we now in the end-time?*

Frequently, interpreters of prophecy set dates - and they present 'infallible proofs' of their correctness. So - unless the set dates are yet future to the summer of 2011 they have all so far been wrong - and how correct predicted future dates may be remains to be seen.

Whole denominations are spawned as sectarian interests squabble, and separate to rally round a specific date. Time and again particular dates set for the return of Christ or some other prophesied end-time event have come - and gone - without fulfilment.

Is This the End-time?

The timing of the end of our present civilisation and the beginning of the reign of Christ is set in stone. It will come. The Scriptures paint a vivid picture of the 'state of the world' we can expect at the end.

And sure enough virtually all of it can be discerned in today's world. But does that mean this is the end? Or isn't? Fuelled by chaos in Africa and the Middle East, devastating earthquakes and tsunamis, hurricanes, drought, the water crisis, war in Iraq and Afghanistan, suicide murders and vile terrorism, sporadic pandemics - there's a frenzy of speculation that 'the end is nigh', that Jesus' coming is imminent.

6000 Years

Many Christians certainly believe so. But as always, there's dissent. Many say it is now well over six thousand years since Creation, give or take a very few years. That's based on Archbishop Ussher's calculation: creation, he figured, was in 4004BC, a date widely accepted—at least by 'recent creationists'.

As it is expected by many that mankind would have self-rule for a 'prophetic week' of six thousand years, then Jesus 'should have' returned by now to complete the week with a 'seventh-day rest' for mankind.

The delay could be explained, of course, if there were a discrepancy in the calculation of the passing years. Or by Jesus' own parable to the effect that his coming may be 'delayed'. Which is fair enough, and we could speculate on the reasons.

Perhaps, as a caution, we note that Jewish sources calibrate this present year (2011) as 5771 years since Creation. A couple of centuries yet to go!

Historical Perspective

The setting of specific dates for prophetic fulfilment isn't new. Back in 999AD the notion of a millennium after Christ stirred a frenzy of activity. Then again the terrible events of the twelfth and again the fourteenth century convinced Christians in Europe that the end was near. Twenty million, in Europe - including half the

population of England - died of 'the Black Death' in the three plague years 1347-1349. The continent was on the edge of anarchy.

That the 'Day of Judgment' had come was a view widely held. In recent memory are World War II and the worldwide Y2K fears surrounding 1999-2000. Many prophetic eyes are now focused on next year, 2012 (May 27, according to one).

Whether 1844 was chosen, or 1914 or 1975, or many specific years before or in between or after (dates are still being set!) - Jesus has still not returned. False expectations are induced about our imminent resurrection and an end to life's pain. And those unfulfilled expectations, sadly, have helped turn some Christians aside from faith.

Timely Warning

It's unwise, then, to apply specific dates to Biblical statements. Time periods are indeed prophesied,

though in such a way that they are open to interpretation. Witness the various views promoted in myriad books and articles

down the centuries!

Examples are the '*Seventy Weeks*' or the '*Times of the Gentiles*' or Daniel's set of '*mornings and evenings*'.

Yet various pundits continue to assign specific dates to imagined 'eras' of church history. This notion helped lead to a great 'falling away' from one church denomination, the *Worldwide cont'd p.8*

Request the booklet :
Keys to the Book of Revelation

It helps put end-time events in perspective

The church has a commission—but it is much misunderstood

Proclaiming the ‘Gospel of the Kingdom’

The message preached by Jesus has sounded around the world. Sadly, it is largely ignored and misunderstood. In the days of the apostles, Paul—echoing Psalm 19:4—could say ‘... *their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world*’ (Romans 10:18). Jesus’ commission had been completed. Mission accomplished?

Of course not. Generation succeeded generation and billions more were ‘evangelised’. For God the Father has set a fixed period—symbolized by the seven day week—during which He selects those whom He wants for His growing Family.

But as Jesus predicted, his message became distorted and few respond to the true Gospel he taught.

Today, only a relative few of earth’s six billion plus are dedicated believers. and often considered by ‘mainstream’ Christians (some two billion) to be outside the Christian pale. For the most part they are zealous in efforts to reach out with Christ’s true message.

Kingdom Message

That message is unique—though some denominations claim to be ‘more unique’ than the others! Their distinctiveness focuses on the significance of ‘*the gospel of the kingdom*’ (Matthew 24:14). This is assumed to have the narrow meaning of a reference to the earthly kingdom that Jesus will

return to rule for a thousand years—the ‘Millennium’.

On this presumption vast resources are dedicated to preaching this message, inducing a ‘ghetto-style’ view of the church—‘us and no other’. It’s worthwhile examining this presumption.

The Millennium, it should be noted, is a mere blip on the timeline of eternity. God is King of His creation (Psalm 47:2 *etc*), and has existed ‘...*from everlasting to everlasting*’ (Psalm 90:2). Certainly the coming reign of Jesus Christ must be part of the message proclaimed by the church. But the ‘Kingdom message’ is much more.

Jesus asserted ‘...*I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*’ (Matthew 16:18). It is alive today—though perhaps not so well!—testimony to his insight and authority.

Only a blind church leader would claim that all who say they are Christian are true believers. It’s a label loosely worn. Yet there are millions of sincere believers who

heard the Gospel message. For the most part, however, they have boarded a Christian ‘train’—that is, committed to Christ—but it has headed along a different track. The message was distorted—not wrong. They began with *alpha* but didn’t move on to *omega*.

Gospel of the Kingdom

Central to the message of Jesus is Jesus *himself*. Without him—no Christianity. Indeed the message of the Scriptures, Old Testament and New, focuses on Jesus—his life, his death, his resurrection and his continued presence on earth in his church. That was the message of the apostles as recorded in the New Testament.

While on earth Jesus stated to questioning Pharisees who were expectant of an earthly kingdom under Messiah: ‘...*the kingdom of God is within you*’ (Luke 17:21). That is, it is a ‘heart thing’, and represented by him standing in their midst.

The Kingdom with its eternal King, its Laws, its whole ethos is the realm of the transformed mind. As the LORD spoke through Jeremiah: ‘...*I will write my laws on their hearts and minds. I will be their God, and they will be my people*’ (ch 31:33).

Applied to all human life and politics that transformed mind will—at the return of Christ—usher in an earthly Kingdom overseen by the King of ages together with his *cont’d p.8*

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is for many a
‘Book of Mystery’

unsigned articles are by the Editor

How do you ‘do Sabbath’?

Is there a ‘right’ way to observe Sabbath?

When he first learned of the seventh-day Sabbath, a man I knew ‘observed’ it by staying in bed all day. Some Christians refuse to eat in a restaurant on the Sabbath, but many do. Some won’t light a fire on that day, or prepare food. Yet others are relaxed about its observance treating it as simply a day for leisure pursuits. In Judaism many won’t even switch on a light or cooker. Who is right? Or—is there ‘a right’?

Millions of Christian believers know that the seventh day of the week was set aside at man’s creation by none other than God Himself, the LORD. It is a perpetual day to remember our Creator.

It’s observance is embedded in the mists of time, recorded in the annals of many nations. In many Western nations, in China, in Ethiopia worshippers reverence this day. In the latter nation, for example, it was observed centuries before Moses re-introduced it to the Israelites fleeing Egypt.

A National Sabbath

Moses was tasked by the LORD to teach His way of life to the new-born political nation of Israel. They had been for a couple of centuries under the thumb of the Egyptians as abject slaves during which time they abandoned the way followed by their fathers—Abraham and his descendants.

Central to that way of life was the seventh-day Sabbath—important, for it identified the Creator God in contrast to the many non-gods which by then had come to be worshipped.

To turn Israel aside from the surrounding idolatry the Sabbath was protected by specific guidelines with

penalties for non-observance. Physical penalties were essential for a physical unconverted people. So seriously did God esteem the day He ultimately sent Israel into a long period of exile for their refusal to observe it (II Chronicles 36:21, Jeremiah 17:27).

Following their exile in Babylon, the religious authorities established ever more stringent rules for Sabbath observance, far beyond the strictures imposed by the Law of Moses. To such an extent, indeed, that they became an unnecessary burden on the people—a burden Jesus sought to lift. Sadly, many Christians labour under similar strictures. But that’s not how God sees His holy day.

Sabbath Joy

The prophet Isaiah (eighth century BC) sought to provide guidance. The Sabbath, he says, is a time of joy (*ch* 56:7). It is ‘... a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shall honour him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words. Then shall you delight yourself in the LORD’ (*ch* 58:13-14). A time, then, to focus on *God’s* words, on what pleases Him.

Jesus placed his authority on Sabbath observance. Accused by the religious authorities of unlawful behaviour on the Sabbath he says: ‘...*the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath day*’ (Mark 2:28). And adds, ‘...*The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath*’ (v.27).

It’s a day, in other words, to benefit man. They had on various occasions berated him for healing on the Sabbath, and for ‘snacking’ in a corn field! Yet they well understood the need for acts of mercy—such as rescuing a sheep from a ditch on Sabbath.

A true understanding of Sabbath behaviour would apply this principle universally, said Jesus. If your roof (or your neighbour’s) caves in you don’t wait till after Sabbath to protect family and property.

Sabbath Fear

The Sabbath was given to us for our benefit—for refreshment, as a special protected time to communicate with Him and with our brethren, a time to stand in awe at His creative majesty.

Sabbath isn’t a time to cower before man-made restrictions on its joyous observance. It’s not a time to fear divine wrath for what we may perceive as an infringement of those rules.

Fearful for your salvation because you were delayed at work Friday evening? Or you ate out on Sabbath? Or if you attended a family wedding? Fearful, even, that your church will use Sabbath as a big stick to keep you in line? God, surely, is greater than all that!

It Won’t Save Us

Sabbath observance is *personal*. The *why* and the *when* is clearly detailed by God. The *how* is the responsibility of the individual Christian’s conscience as it becomes enlightened by God’s Word.

Once we accept the divine calling the rest of our ‘pilgrimage’ is a journey to an ever deeper understanding of God’s revelation of Himself and His way of life through the Scriptures. That’s personal, and we each grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus at our own pace—and overseen by Jesus. That applies to how we observe the Sabbath.

Sabbath observance won’t save us! For evidence check the millions of Sabbath observers who have lived since those unbelieving Pharisees who continue to this day to reject Jesus as the Messiah. They were at the receiving edge of sharp rebuke

from Jesus on this matter.

Even so, Christians must still observe the Bible Sabbaths. There's no substitution—not Friday, not Sunday. Not Easter, not Christmas. The seventh day is the day the Creator set aside for our formal fellowship with Him and with our brethren. It is integral to our walk with the Father and with our Saviour. But its value stems from a changed heart, an inner change, our willing submission to the divine instructions as summarized by His *torah*, the great 'law of love'.

All of us are subject to 'delusions'—*false* ideas firmly imbedded in our minds but which we hold to be true. Confronted by truth we are likely to reject it. (For many believers such a delusion is that God has substituted Sunday for His Sabbath.)

Born of human flesh and blood none of us is in perfect harmony with God. Writes Paul to the brethren in Rome: '*... Our desires [KJV carnal mind] fight against God, because they do not and cannot obey God's laws*' (ch 8:7 CEV). It's not in our nature to do His will! That requires a transformed mind' worked in us by His indwelling Spirit and with our active co-operation.

Sabbath Transformed

How, then, do we 'do Sabbath'? Much of the teaching of the Old Testament, as noted above, doesn't apply in our day, having been transformed by the coming of the Spirit.

Do I settle for pre-prepared sandwiches on God's weekly *feast* day? Do I shiver in -20 weather? Remain at home because I would have to fire up the car to get to services, 'church' being more than a 'Sabbath day's journey'?

Christians 'keep holy' the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. We worship the Creator, we fellowship with and learn from brethren at services in far-off venues, we listen and learn from a

The End-time Sabbath

Is our choice of a day to worship important?

The observance of the seventh day for worship is especially significant as this age draws to a close. The religious and secular authorities [the 'beast system'] who are predicted to exert worldwide authority will impose a worship system—a system that contrasts with God's way.

To be powerful enough to command worship implies you prescribe *how* your subjects will worship you. So the 'beast system' imposes its own form of worship—a system that opposes that of the one true God, the Creator. Significantly, it 'makes war' against those Christians who '*...keep the commandments of God*'—*Revelation* 12:17.

Consider the following summary of those Commandments:

- God is one—there is no other. The apostle Paul tells us this individual '*...sits in the temple of God showing himself that he is god*' (II Thessalonians 2:4)
- God says don't worship images. The Beast commands an image of itself: '*...saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast* (ch 13:14 *etc*).
- God says don't take My Name in vain. The Beast '*...was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies*' (v.5).
- And God sets Himself apart from other gods (so-called) by commanding His worship on Sabbath—the seventh day.

Reflecting this Sabbath command (Exodus 20:11), John records an angelic message: '*... Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his*

judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of water' (*Revelation* 14:7).

That's a direct reference to the Sabbath command, implying that the Beast will establish its own day to be worshipped. Indeed the entire system—inspired by Satan (ch 13:4)—is a mirror image of the first four of God's 'Ten Commandments'.

A Word of Warning

In those coming dark days of divine judgment there comes a further angelic message: '*...If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand [cp Deuteronomy 11:18], The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone [ie explosives] in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb*' (ch 14:9, 10).

The message of these chapters of the book of Revelation is that all mankind will be faced with a stark choice. Choose between the worship of this alien self-styled god—or worship the God whose identifying mark is the observance of those first four of the Commandments—including, and notably the seventh day Sabbath. (Exodus 31:13-17).

As God's final judgment unfolds mankind is given countless opportunities to change: '*...And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils...Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts*'.

Obedience to those ten widely-despised commands from the Creator are, in this age, man's last chance of deliverance. **Ω**

teacher who may have travelled many miles. No—we are not constricted by rules necessarily imposed on a nation living cheek by jowl in

the wilderness, or in a country where every neighbour observes Sabbath. That time will come, when '*...they shall teach no more every man his*

Sabbath ...cont'd from p.7
neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, *Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, says the LORD' (Jeremiah 31:34).*

New Wine

Our observance of Sabbath can indeed become lax—that's our nature. But the imposition of unnecessary Pharisee-like strictures will not develop our spiritual muscle. (It didn't save the Pharisees.)

Each of us must, with guidance from mature and informed Christians, '...*examine the Scriptures*' to test all teachings (including this!). Then *apply them* according to our conscience, informed by our present understanding of the Word.

We are now in a new, a different, dispensation. Jesus expressed a vital principle. No longer, for example, do we have to make the physical journey to Jerusalem for festivals - as was *required* under the Old Covenant.

Now we '*worship in spirit and in truth*' and worship is universal. To the Samaritan Jesus said: '*...Believe me, the time is coming when you won't worship the Father either on this mountain [Samaria] or in Jerusalem... God is Spirit, and those who worship God must be led by the Spirit to worship him according to the truth* (John 4:21-24).

The weekly seventh-day Sabbath (and the annual Biblical holy days) are a continuing expression of our true worship. It is heart worship and not mere outward form, as with the Judaism Jesus condemned.

May we all *delight* in the Sabbath. Ω

Law of Love...cont'd from p.3

in the mind and daily walk of all who come to him. Ω

Kingdom ...cont'd from p.5

people gathered from all ages — to prepare a people for eternity.

And Now?

The church of God must focus on proclaiming the true Gospel of salvation through Jesus—not just on a tunnel vision focus on a brief earthly Kingdom 'coming soon'.

Through the millennia few have embraced it fully. But the Father continues to invite all who will to become part of His Kingdom to *repent*—to live a life transformed—through a new covenant with Him, His laws embedded in our thoughts and actions.

The church is commissioned to proclaim this message '*..in all the world*' - as a witness

Beyond that earthly Kingdom lies an eternity of the expansion of the Kingdom of God beyond our wildest imaginings. Truly follow Jesus Christ and you will be part of it. Ω

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*Be sure to take a look at
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Time ...cont'd from p.4

Church of God, when expectations failed of a 'flight to a place of safety' in 1975. Some corporate descendants of that church failed to learn the lesson and continue to this day to raise false hopes. A recent one was January 16, 2010 for 'the beginning of the 'Tribulation' - an unfulfilled 'hope'. Others posit that the 6000 years have not yet expired.

Unshakeable Prophecy

Bible prophecy *will* be accurately fulfilled. That Judgement Day will come. Jesus will return. And right on time - but in the Father's time, a time concealed, so far, from humans. Wrote 18th century Bishop of Worcester, John Prideaux: '*...It is the nature of such prophecies not to be thoroughly understood until they are thoroughly fulfilled*'.

It is for Christians of every age to personally learn the lessons that Jesus outlined for all seven of those first-century churches in Asia: "*Whoever has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*".

However long each of us may live our efforts are to be three-fold:

- *become Christ-like in character* (a mammoth all-consuming personal challenge)
- *keep the faith*; hold firm to sound teaching, seek God's Kingdom above all else—no matter current world events
- and in co-operation with brethren in other assemblies *be witnesses for him* in the world, making disciples everywhere

Ω

Spring Harvest

'...unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall you number fifty days' (Leviticus 23:16)

'Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures' (James 1:18)

The Biblical 'types' can be based on historical events (*Passover*, for example). Or, as in this case, in a natural event - the early grain harvest. Our physical life depends on the produce of the ground, and it is surely right that we recognize the source of this abundance with thanksgiving to the Creator. But the types have a spiritual fulfillment, and the seven weeks of the grain harvest in ancient Palestine are of momentous significance.

- The Biblical festivals are rooted in the physical laws that govern our planet: *'...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). Note that word 'seasons'. In Hebrew it is *mo'ed*, denoting a 'fixed time'. The word is used of the divinely-appointed feasts: *'...These are the feasts [mo'ed] of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons [mo'ed]'* (Leviticus 23:4). They are times appointed for the people of God to assemble before Him, and their place on the religious calendar is governed by those 'lights'
- Earth's produce, too, is dependent on these 'lights' - our sun and moon. The Creator uses these harvests as an object lesson for His creation. They depict His plan for mankind, and the spring grain harvest is at its heart. In Israel, the new corn could be consumed only after special offerings were presented before the LORD. It was called the *Firstfruits* or the *Wave-Sheaf*. Jesus fulfilled this ancient type on the Sunday morning after his resurrection. Because of the Christian's place as the *'brethren of Christ'* (Hebrews 2:11), we are called *'a kind of firstfruits'* (James 1:18). [See our MiniStudy 43]
- It is these latter - faithful Christians - who represent the 'fifty days' of the spring harvest: *'... you shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall you number fifty days'* (Leviticus 23:15-16). The fifty days of the early harvest represent the present era, when the Father is inviting the willing to be the firstfruits of His spiritual harvest. The symbolic fifty days of harvest represent the need for the people of God - throughout the year - constantly to be spiritually nourished, to grow to Christ-like maturity: *'... but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ'* (II Peter 3:18). And to *'be fruitful and multiply'* - evangelize (Matthew 13:8)
- The apostle Paul explains the significance of the *Firstfruits* offering: *'...now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept'* (I Corinthians 15:20, 23). It represents the resurrection from among the dead. He continues: *'...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. Then comes the end'* (vv.22-24). Jesus was the first to be resurrected in spirit form. Then, at his return, all those in whom is the Spirit of God will be resurrected - in the same spirit form - to reign alongside the returned Christ (I Thessalonians 4:14-17, Revelation 20:6)
- The fiftieth day, Sunday, is the *Feast of Pentecost*, familiar to most Christians as the day the holy Spirit came with power upon the disciples (Acts 2:1). The word means *fiftieth*. (This 'seven plus one' theme is common in Scripture. 7 days of *Unleavened Bread* plus 1 (Pentecost); 7 day of *Tabernacles* plus 1; 7 x 7 years plus 1 to the *Jubile* year.) The *Day of Pentecost* - also called the *Feast of Weeks* (eg II Chronicles 8:13) - represents the culmination of the divine plan for this age. It is also the forerunner of the time of Christ's return, when the entire remnant of mankind will have the veil of deception removed (Acts 2:17, Isaiah 25:7, II Corinthians 4:4) - the late harvest, the ingathering of the nations
- *Pentecost* is the only Bible festival for which no calendar date is given in Scripture. It has to be calculated, counted. Contrary to this, in Judaism the date is fixed at the sixth day of the third month - based on fifty days from the first annual High Day of the *Feast of the Passover* (Nisan 15). Note that the *Day of Pentecost* is a 'holy convocation', a High Day, but is not here (Leviticus 23) termed an annual Sabbath - thus making clear that the Sabbath referred to is the weekly one. Jesus, however, fulfilled the typology as the first of the *Firstfruits* harvest. On the day following that High Day (that year a Friday) he was still in the grave having been crucified on Wednesday. He could not therefore have fulfilled the type. God always acts 'on time'; He does nothing prematurely. For example: *'...when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son'* (Galatians 4:2, 4; also Ephesians 1:10; Acts 2:1; Exodus 12:17, 41; Daniel 12:7)
- In sum, Jesus as the firstfruits to God by his resurrection was accepted by the Father next day - on the 'morrow of the Sabbath', Sunday morning. From that day we are to count fifty days, and that (Sun)day is *Pentecost*. He is *'...declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead'* (Romans 1:4). As ever Jesus Christ is the focus of the festival. The seven weeks harvest represent Christians of this era - *'a kind of firstfruits'* Ω

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