

# new **Horizons**

*Vol 16 No 4*

*July/August 2012*

*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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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

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# new Horizons

Issue No 94

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## God acts among us on a pre-arranged time-table

There's nothing random about when God enters the world of man. He has a plan—worked out before the material creation took shape. And He sticks to it, manipulating events to ensure the desired outcome. James, brother of Jesus stated: '*...Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world*' (Not that God enforces us to submit to His will, but that He works circumstances to bring about that desired outcome.)

A careful reading of history convinces that God has pre-determined specific events. And those events impact the world exactly when He predicted.

He '*...has made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation*' (Acts 17:26). Sings the Psalmist: '*...The LORD brings the counsel of the heathen to nought: he makes the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel [plans] of the LORD stand for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations*'.

God is the mover and shaker of events among men! What He determines will happen: '*... The LORD of hosts hath sworn, say-*

*ing, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand*' (Isaiah 14:24).

[Our leaders—secular and religious—take note: unless you get in harmony with God's plans, your own schemes are doomed to fail!]

## The Framework

Built into the creation's design there are '*... lights in the firmament of the 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 term

*the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law*' (Deuteronomy 29:29). Wise King Solomon adds: '*...It is the glory of God to conceal a thing*' (Proverbs 25:2).

## Messiah's Birth...

Such divine timing is especially clear in the life and times of Jesus the Messiah. *When he was born was not a random event but: '...when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law*' (Galatians 4:4).

## In Due Time

'seasons' (Heb *mo'ed*) It is variously translated but it refers to God's 'appointed times'—*a fixed time*, as for example specified times to observe God's festivals (Leviticus 23). Or seasonal—as with harvest seasons.

## Hidden from View

But not all such 'appointments' are clear to us: '*...It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in his own power*' (Acts 1:7). Or, addressing the prophet Daniel: '*...Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end* (ch 12:9).

Conversely: '*...times are not hidden from the Almighty*' (Job 24:1). And through Moses: '*...The secret things belong unto*

It was the fulfillment of a promise made four millennia before: '*... You [the Serpent] and [Eve] will hate each other; your descendants and hers will always be enemies. One of [her offspring] will strike you on the head, and you will strike him on the heel*' (Genesis 1:15 CEV).

At Jesus' birth an elderly devout man, Simeon, is described as having '*...revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ*' (Luke 2:26).

## ...and Ministry

The ministry of Jesus was also foretold, a prophecy given through Daniel, one of God's prophets living in the sixth century BC.

That prophecy (Daniel 9:24-25),

widely known as the 'Seventy Week' prophecy, foretold the time of Messiah's ministry. It outlines a period of 490 years beginning with a decree from a Gentile king regarding the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The prophecy—in three time periods—was accurately fulfilled when Jesus, referencing a related prophecy by Isaiah concerning his ministry, proclaimed: '**This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears**' (Luke 4:21).

In the New Testament, Titus confirms: '**...[God] has in due times manifested his word through preaching**' (ch 1:3). Precisely what Jesus did in that synagogue in Nazareth. Mark, too: '**...Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent and believe the gospel**' (ch 1:14-15). His royal birth was, too, anticipated by the Magi from 'the East' (Matthew 2:2).

### End of Days

The Scriptures make clear that Jesus was fully aware of the Father's time-frame for his life—and death. At Cana as his ministry was beginning—he told his mother '**...my hour is not yet come**' (John 2:3-4). It wasn't the time for his public manifestation through miraculous powers.

Yet as death approached Jesus makes clear that the time for him to fulfill his destiny had arrived: '**...The Master says, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at**

Prophetically, a 'year' is 360 days. This must be considered in counting time elapsed over a 6000 or a 2000 year span. There is a discrepancy of almost 15 days per thousand years from the 365.25 day year. Scripture chronology truly is a mine-field!

**your house with my disciples**' (Matthew 26:18). John adds: '**...Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father**' (John 13:1). A couple of hours later, in Gethsemane', Jesus wakens the weary disciples with the words: '**...Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners**' (Matthew 26:45).

Reflecting on the crucifixion of Jesus, Paul says: '**...when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly**' (Romans 5:6). In writing to Timothy he says: '**...[Jesus] who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time**' (I Timothy 2:6).

### Time Spans

What God predicts through His prophets will come to pass. Not only so—they happen on time, His time. There are units of time revealed in the Scriptures—long periods (such as 2520 years, 360 years, 70 years), short periods (eg the precise prediction of the birth of Isaac, Genesis 17:21, 21:2).

Truly '**...To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven**' (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

The divine plan moves inexorably onward. As we approach the return of the Saviour we can expect further unveiling of that Grand Design: '**... How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?**

**And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was above the waters**

**of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by him that lives for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when they have made an end of breaking in pieces the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished. And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my lord, what shall be the issue of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are shut up and sealed till the time of the end**' (Daniel 12: 6-9).

But a word of caution. Many have taken in hand to predict when that end will be. For Augustine it was 650AD, for William Miller it was 1884, Jehovah's Witnesses 1914, Herbert Armstrong 1975. An evangelist predicted an end to seven years of the Great Tribulation for 2005. And then there is the Mayan prophecy—misunderstood to predict the end of the world this year, 2012.

### Be Prepared

It is for each Christian to 'keep their powder dry'. '**...be you also ready: for in such an hour as you think not the Son of comes**', said Jesus.

When trouble looms there's a tendency to look the other way, hoping it will simply go away. Jesus predicted this attitude will mark the last days. It will, he said, be just like Noah's day—everyone carrying on with daily life and ignoring the warning signs. Their end came *suddenly, unexpectedly*.

Wrote King Solomon: '**...When you see trouble coming, don't be stupid and walk right into it-- be smart and hide**' (Proverbs 22:3 CEV). **Ω**

**Will miracles persuade you of the claims of Jesus? Or is there another ingredient?**

**Steven Kieler**

A "Righteous Gentile" is the phrase used for those non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. At Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem, over 11,000 'Righteous Gentiles' are honoured, Oscar Schindler probably being the most name recognizable. Of those 11,000 almost 5,000 are Polish.

Going beyond the Holocaust, let's search the Bible for a particular "Righteous Gentile."

We begin with a little background for our search. Here is a snapshot of the Roman military about 30AD.

A centurion is an officer having charge over 100 men, some scholars think it was 128 men because two centuries made a band of soldiers. A legion was from 3000 to 6600 men. Jews were the C.O.'s (not commanding officers but conscientious objectors) of the day. That is to say, they were exempt from conscription.

We will be looking at the story of a centurion to see what we can learn, No, what we *must* learn. He is the one who said the beautiful words in Matthew 8:8 "*Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.*"

Also of note is that this story unfolds in Capernaum. Here is a connection, Capernaum and miracles. Capernaum means consola-

tion or comfort. Many mighty works were done there but what did it profit them? (Matthew 11:23) "*And you, Capernaum, which are exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in you, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.*"

Think of all the miracles of the Bible, both Old and New testament. How many times were the people grateful? How often did they see the mighty works—and worship God? Mostly, they went about their business or reverted to their evil ways almost immediately.

The ten lepers in Luke 17 are an example; ten were healed but only one turned back and gave thanks and praise. And Israel is notorious for returning to idolatry even after many mighty miracles.

I knew a man who was surrounded by a spilled pot of molten brass and was not burned. To the best of my knowledge, he is no longer associated with the church.

How many of you have seen or experienced a miracle, perhaps a healing or just something that goes beyond chance or circumstance? I won't ask if that deepened your faith or if you dismissed it like those in Capernaum but it is a question we must ask ourselves: Have I ever seen or experienced a miracle? How was I affected and for how long?

## A Righteous Gentile

With that background let's find the lesson of the centurion.

Luke 7:1-10 "*Now when He [Jesus] had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.*"

So far we see that this gentile centurion really loved his slave; now we'll see what the elders of the Jews thought:

*And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: For he loves our nation, and he has built us a synagogue. Then Jesus went with them." [And here is confirmation of the centurion's humility] "*And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not yourself: for I am not worthy that thou should enter under my roof Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto you:*" [Now he exhibits faith] "*but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say to one, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my servant, Do this, and he does it. When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said to the people that followed him, I say to you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."**

The example of the centurion leads to the question: *Can you have faith without humility?* If you can do all things for and by yourself then you have no need for faith. We know that '*...faith*

without works is dead'. It appears to be the same for faith without humility.

I would conclude from the episode of the centurion that miracles, generally, are ineffective in convincing and converting people because we are forgetful, unthankful, and lack faith. I'm reminded of 1 Corinthians 1:22: "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom." But God continues, for a time, to show forth His mercies. This is reinforced by the fact that many miracles were done in Capernaum, meaning "comfort and consolation"

Consider this; Jesus marvelled at two things:

- Faith of the Gentiles: Referring to the Centurion and others. "When Jesus heard it, He marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." (Matthew 8:10)
- And in Matthew 6:6 He marvelled at the unbelief of the Jews

In a nutshell, God marvels at the belief of the gentile babes and at the unbelief of the converted Israelites and Jews. Now I have to ask myself: Is there a parallel to the world and the church today?

What do you think?

Faith without humility is tantamount to faith without works. It is counterfeit, false. Either way it is faith in self, not faith in God. There can be no room in the heart but for God only. The example of the centurion is faith mixed with humility. Matthew 8:10-12 cements it! Here are Jesus' thoughts about the centurion:

*When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Now that's a frightening thought. Notice that the weeping and gnashing are for 'children of the Kingdom'. That's us! No one will enter the Kingdom without faith, and humility; even the children of the Kingdom will be cast out!

Is that not compelling enough to move us to appreciation, humility and faith? The centurion would be known today as a "righteous gentile". Would to God that I, a spiritual Jew, a child of the Kingdom, could be as full of faith, works, humility, love and righteous as that gentile. Ω

## **Skeletons ...cont'd**

transform our lives: '...we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord (II Corinthians 3:18).

### **Spiritual Image**

We needn't remain ignorant as to that divine image. It was perfectly portrayed for us in the life of Jesus. Paul, however, summarizes it for us:

*Don't be controlled by your body. Kill every desire for the wrong kind of sex. Don't be immoral or indecent or have evil thoughts. Don't be greedy, which is the same as worshipping idols. God is angry with people who disobey him by doing these things. And that is exactly what you did, when you lived among people who behaved in this way. But now you must stop doing such things.*

*You must quit being angry, hateful, and evil. You must no longer say insulting or cruel things about others. And stop lying to each other. You have given up your old way of life with its habits.*

*Each of you is now a new person. You are becoming more and more like your Creator, and you will understand him better. It doesn't matter if you are a Greek or a Jew, or if you are circumcised or not. You may even be a barbarian or a Scythian, and you may be a slave or a free person. Yet Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.*

*God loves you and has chosen you as his own special people. So be gentle, kind, humble, meek, and patient. Put up with each other, and forgive anyone who does you wrong, just as Christ has forgiven you.*

*Love is more important than anything else. It is what ties everything completely together. Each one of you is part of the body of Christ, and you were chosen to live together in peace. So let the peace that comes from Christ control your thoughts. And be grateful*

Colossians 3 (CEV)

All of us fall short. But this is the behaviour that truly marks us as 'in Christ'. Ω

## **a reminder...**

the autumn festivals will soon be upon us—times set apart by the Creator for His formal worship. You are invited to contact us for details of local services.

|                    |                     |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Trumpets</b>    | <b>September 17</b> |
| <b>Atonement</b>   | <b>September 26</b> |
| <b>Tabernacles</b> | <b>October 1-7</b>  |
| <b>Closing Day</b> | <b>October 8</b>    |

## The Resurrection: when?

The resurrection from the dead is the Christian's hope. Where does it fit into the end of the age?

Books galore try to pin-point the year, the month, the moment that Jesus will fulfill his promise, returning to Earth to impose the rule of his Kingdom. And indeed the data can be confusing.

There is, however, a revealed

'pattern of sevens' that provides a framework for end-time events—not only from the Book of the Law but also from the writings of the New Testament. And sets the return of Jesus and the resurrection of the saints in their time context.

The apostle Paul details the time: '*... I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed*' (I Corinthians 15:51-52). Notice *when*. We too often read over this time element, perhaps seeing it a some kind of word picture.

The resurrection of the saints occurs suddenly '*...at the last trump [et]*'. That's a point in time, and it's left to John, at the end of the first century, to develop the fact as revealed by Jesus and recorded in the book of Revelation.

John reveals a framework for the last days:

- end-time events are divided

into *seven* epochs culminating in the return of Jesus, and called 'seals' [of a scroll], each reflecting a series of events as predicted by Jesus [see Matthew 24]

- the *fifth* seal represents what is widely known as 'the great tribulation', during which some Christians will be martyred for their beliefs. The saints are not, in other words, taken to heaven
- the final seal, the *seventh*, is in turn portrayed as a series of *seven* angelic interventions in human affairs, pictured as the blowing of trumpets. It is a time of environmental destruction

### '...A Mystery'

The word here does not mean anything which was in its nature unintelligible, but that which to them had been hitherto unknown. "I now communicate to you a truth which has not been brought into the discussion, and in regard to which no communication has been made to you." On this subject there had been no revelation. *Barnes: Notes*

Bible students widely recognize that there's much symbolism in the Scriptures. That is, words, images, numbers that have a meaning hidden within their superficial meaning.

An example is the use—as in Isaiah 2—of *mountain* to represent a nation or kingdom. *Stars* can represent angels. *Serpent* is representative of Satan.

### Numbers in Scripture

Less well known is the use of numbers in Bible symbolism—though *seven* is generally accepted as implying spiritual perfection. It has been noted, for example, that the first verse of Genesis has a sequence of sevens and multiples of seven.

The verse has seven Hebrew words with in all twenty-eight letters. Writes Reginald Naish: '*The numeric value of the three nouns (God, heaven, earth)...is 777*' He adds, '*There are no fewer than thirty-seven combination of seven in this verse*'.

*Seven*, of course, features in the perfect pattern God built into His weekly and annual festivals There's the seventh-day Sabbath, the seven annual holy convocations, the seven year cycle for the land and the jubile year of release.

Then there's *eight*—clearly associated

- at the *last* of these trumpet blasts, the *seventh*, is the resurrection of the saints, as stated by Paul—'*...at the last trump[et]*'
- at some time following this resurrection there is a series of *seven* final judgments ('the wrath of God') in the presence of Jesus on still unrepentant rebellious mankind—the 'seven plagues'—culminating at the *seventh* plague in a world-wide destructive earthquake and the cry '*...it is done*'

There is, then, no mystery as to when the saints from all ages will rise to be with Christ '*...in the air*', and to accompany him forever (I Thessalonians 4:17). **Ω**

## NUMBERS AND SYMBOLS

with new beginnings and resurrection. It is first associated with Adam's new beginning (Genesis 5:4), with Noah (I Peter 3:20). The final fulfilment—the *eternal* Kingdom—is symbolized by 'the eighth day', the last of the annual holy convocations.

*Twelve*, too, has its symbolism—the number for government. In Revelation it represents the fullness (*ie*, not just a literal 144,000) of the saints who will govern with Messiah after His return. The same pattern of *twelves* is demonstrated by the description of the Temple City—centre of Government in the millennium (*ch* 21:16). It is, like the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle, a perfect cube—again the City is not literal, but symbolic of perfect government under the Father.

### Divine Count

This 'divine arithmetic' permeates the Christian Scriptures from Genesis through Revelation. It is a further indication of the Bible's divine authorship—though using many mouthpieces and over millennia.

It is inconceivable that such symmetry could be achieved by so many authors over such a time span. As wrote the apostle Peter: '*...holy men of old spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*' (II Peter 1:21). One divine mind authored the Scriptures. **Ω**

## Salvation—*why bother?*

**Jesus said it's a 'difficult and narrow' pathway to the Kingdom. Why is it worth the effort?**

'Are you saved, brother?' is the cry of the street evangelist. Salvation is the theme of sermons, lectures, hymns and sacred songs. But saved from what? The underlying implication is 'from hell fire', though in our 'civilised' culture it's a call not so often heard. There are few 'Jonathan Edwards' around to scare us into heaven!. (And they are, in our time, likely to be arrested for it.)

Here are those words of Jesus: '*... the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it. Watch out for false prophets*' (Matthew 7:14-15 CEV). Hardly a warm invite, on the face of it! So why bother? The easy route, Jesus says, is the theme of the false prophet—clearly a road sign to ignore, the sat-nav gone wrong.

Of course, as any diligent student of the Bible will understand, the commonly-held concept of 'hell-fire' (in all faiths) is simply not in the mind of God. He offers salvation, we can choose to accept or reject the offer—and if we reject the gift we will die and our carcase incinerated. That's what the Bible tells us. Said Jesus: '*...Fear him, which after he has killed has power to cast into hell [Gk. gehenna]*' (Luke 12:5). At his last supper he adds: '*... If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are*

*burned*' (John 15:6). And John the Baptist told the religious leadership: '*...the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire*' (Matthew 3: 10). Death first, then burning.

With no place in a perfect universe, the ungodly will die and be hygienically disposed of. Wrote the prophet Malachi: '*...you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet*' (Malachi 4:3).

### Heaven or Hell?

Under normal circumstances we don't joyfully embrace the thought of our death. Even those eking out a tenuous existence do everything possible to prolong a mercifully short life. And in more affluent societies we, with reasonable health, seek to extend life beyond our 'three score years and ten'. But, finally, the Grim Reaper knocks at the door. What then?

Not Heaven, not a fiery Hell—but 'the grave', there to await a resurrection to a renewed life. Jesus explained: '*...the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of dam-*

*nation [ie judgment]*' (John 5:28-29).

[Read the article **Days of Judgment** for further explanation] It is those who have 'done good' who will inherit salvation, and we should explore what that means.

Most Christians hold the concept—usually vague—of 'going to heaven' upon their death, parodied as sitting on a cloud while strumming on a harp. Or 'beholding the face of God' for eternity. Or becoming an angel. Or walking on a crystal sea or on streets paved with gold. In general, though, the detail is blurred. Not so the reality.

### Divine Plan

We are, in fact, saved *to*. Not saved from the 'flames of hell' but saved to become part of the divine Family. Saved to become part of a project that extends through eternity, a project of which we have but a faint comprehension. It's a project that has occupied the divine mind from everlasting. It is, as summed up by the apostle Paul: '*... when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all*' (I Corinthians 15: 28). God 'all in all'. Or, as wrote Peter, that '*...you might be partakers of the divine nature*' (II Peter 1:4). It is for that glorious purpose that we can be 'saved'. It is life after death.

[We are, of course, also saved from—'*...delivered from the wrath to come*' (I Thessalonians 1:10). The 'wrath of God' is that awesome moment when Jesus in all his power and majesty returns to deal with the remnant of unre-

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unsigned articles are by the Editor



## Faithful Skeletons

The prophet Ezekiel envisions a ‘...valley full of dry bones’ (ch 37). Inert. Dead. Lifeless. Useful only to be buried and mourned. There’s a lesson here for believers.

The apostle Paul warns of the danger of ‘...a form of religion’ (II Timothy 3:5). A skeleton, in other words. The bare bones of religious practice without the flesh—its heart and its soul. We might consider what this might mean in the context of the church of God.

The skeleton, of course, is essential—without it we wouldn’t get far. It’s our skeleton that gives us recognisably human shape, the form that distinguishes us from other creatures—even from our so-called ‘nearest neighbour’, the ape family.

And that’s so in the matter of our faith. We need the form on which to hang the ‘flesh’. Sadly, too many stumble along as barely living spiritual skeletons.—all form and little or no ‘flesh’.

That form is age-old, with roots dating from the first man, Adam, to whom the Creator revealed His desired form of worship. Indeed the very heavens were designed to be our guide: ‘...Let there be lights in the firmament of the 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).

Apart from the seven-day week, the ‘heavens’ provide the markers for the months and years. The

divinely appointed days for worship also depend on them. (They are outlined in Leviticus 23.)

These days for divine worship are the ‘form’ of the true Biblical faith, no other days being acceptable to God for His formal worship.

Observing this form of worship, then, a true believer will certainly be recognizable. He or she, however, might well attract the label of ‘Jewish’, or a ‘legalist’, or ‘salvation by works’. The form is mere ‘dry bones’. Essential, yes. But there’s more to our life in Christ. What, then, is the ‘flesh’?

### Life-changing

The apostle Peter addressed his fellow Jews on the Day of Pentecost. Believers all, and all observing the form. But Peter demanded change: ‘...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:38).

So stricken with true heart-changing remorse (II Corinthians 7:10) that they had crucified their Saviour Messiah, and being cut to the heart, many did repent, did change. That day about three thousand were baptized in the name of Jesus. A life-changing experience, for as a result they received from the Father His indwelling Holy Spirit. They each became a ‘new creature’ in Christ.

A work of transformation had begun in their lives. As the apostle Paul addressed the Roman

### Salvation ...cont’d

pentant humanity. It is *after* the resurrection of ‘the saved’ to eternal life.]

While the Father extends the opportunity to join His Family to *all* who hear, yet He carefully selects those who respond, nurturing them as His children. After all, He must co-exist with the faithful for eternity.

Why salvation? So that we may experience life beyond the grave—for eternity.

That we may fulfill the purpose for

which we were created—sons and daughters of the Almighty Father God (II Corinthians 6:18). That the experiences, the lessons, of this life may not be lost but be preparation for our part in our Father’s glorious unending Plan to people the Universe.

If, then, *you* should sense the drawing of the Father to His Son, Jesus—don’t neglect that call. Nourish it, and fulfill the purpose for which you were born—*salvation*. Ω

Christians: ‘...*be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*’ (ch 12:2).

The ‘skeleton’, the ‘form of religion’, remains—but now is furnished with a changed heart that, guided by the indwelling Spirit and the Scriptures, will, *cont’d p.4*

*Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him*

Hebrews 2:8

# The 'Seven' Enigma

Bible students are familiar with the concept that the number seven has special significance to God in relation to mankind, as highlighted in the Scriptures.

There is a recurring pattern of 'sevens' which bind together the various strands of the tapestry of the divine plan for us. They recur in our worship—but have serious practical implications for all of mankind.

## Divine Worship

Just one aspect of God's revealed worship has been retained within Christianity at large—Whit-sunday, usually held in late May. It is a remnant of what in the Bible is called the *Feast of Weeks* or the *Feast of Firstfruits*, and in the New Testament, *Pentecost*.

Pentecost simply means 'fiftieth' and derives from the former term, *Feast of Weeks*. Beginning (early Spring) with the offering in the Temple of a sheaf of the first-ripe barley, seven weekly Sabbath days were counted and the following day—the fiftieth—was Pentecost (Leviticus 23:15).

[Christians are familiar with the word because it is seen as the 'birthday' of the church, as recorded in Acts 2. Thousands were baptized that day, and the tradition later arose of dressing in white for baptism—hence 'Whit(e)' Sunday.]

## Seven Festivals

Pentecost, however is just one of *seven* divinely appointed festivals God gave for His worship—each with personal and prophetic significance. Among the most an-

cient of religious festivals they are listed in Leviticus 23. Each of these 'sabbaths' is a time to assemble with like-minded brethren for instruction from the Scriptures and for fellowship. And each has deep significance personally, nationally—and prophetically.

## Pattern of Sevens

We have, then, the *seven* day week, the *seven* weeks leading to Pentecost, *seven* annual festivals. Two of these festivals last *seven* days—the *Days of Unleavened Bread* in early spring and the *Festival of Tabernacles* in autumn.

The pattern is developed further with every *seventh* year set aside as a 'sabbatical'. *Seven* of these sabbaticals (forty-nine years) lead to a celebratory fiftieth year—the Jubile (Leviticus 25: 8ff).

## Consequences

Not least because their obser-

vance honours the one Creator God, the practical application of these sabbaticals by the nations would lead to economic and social stability, and peace with our neighbours or victory over enemies (Leviticus 26:2-12).

And the reverse—as we are now experiencing—economic turmoil, disturbed weather, social upheaval, widespread illness, unwise government, loss of sovereignty (vv. 14-34). And around the world, wars, drought, famines.

## Experience

Ancient Israel experienced this sorry cycle, called in Scripture 'seven times punishment'. It is the natural consequence of our failure to observe the 'Law of Sevens' (vv. 2-3, 43). The final—the seventh—cycle is national destruction and exile (vv.33-34).

For ancient Israel this continued seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11): *'...them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years (II Chronicles 36:20-21).*

For the modern descendants of ancient Israel (and from the Scriptures we know they will still survive until Jesus returns) the warning is dire. Our leaders and every individual—you!—must heed that warning. It's time to turn again to the God of our fathers. Ω

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*because of the time you are due to be teachers, yet you need to have someone to teach you again the rudiments of the beginning of the Words of God, and you came to be having need of milk, and not of solid food; for everyone partaking of milk is without experience in the Word of Righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for those full grown, having exercised the faculties through habit, for distinction of both good and bad (Hebrews 5:12-14) exercise yourself to godliness (I Timothy 4:7)*

Babies don't walk. So how do they learn? The first stumbling steps usually end in a fall - but they don't give up, nor do the parents. Eventually, by reason of habit the complex skill of walking is mastered. It's the same with learning to drive. The first moment behind the wheel is scary, but by persistence the complexities become habitual. So, too, with dressing or dental hygiene - we know how to unthinkingly put on our clothes, clean our teeth. They become habitual.

- as the children of God we are to '*become perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect*' (Matthew 6:33). Jesus is the perfect example, and a Christian should emulate him. But we have not yet reached that lofty goal, even though we are, now, God's children (I John 3:2)
- all humans develop what can be considered 'bad habits'. *What are yours?* How about anger? Or lying, pride, lust, vanity, selfishness, greed, laziness, an over fondness for strong drink? Are you struggling with such? If so there's a way to learn to safely and successfully walk a godly path
- habits (good or bad) develop in the same way. In every human there's a God-given inborn facility - habit formation - that enables us to by-pass unnecessary laborious effort. We don't have to daily figure out how to put on our shoes, tie our laces, clean our teeth. Godliness, too, can - must - become habitual
- every habit (behaviour pattern) develops by practice. We *lie* because we learned to get out of a hole by lying. We deal with our emotional turmoil by *anger* because we learned to deal that way, perhaps followed dad's example. The apostle Peter writes of those who are '*trained in greed*' (II Peter 2:14). Paul, of those who have '*exercised the faculties through habit for distinction of good and bad*' (Hebrews 5:14). And he urges Timothy (I Timothy 4:7) to '*exercise yourself to godliness*'. All use the same word - related to our *gymnasium* - implying training, focused effort
- in the Scriptures God provides a two-pronged principle for habit-forming success: *put off* and *put on*. We could ask, When is a thief not a thief?: Not because he has stopped stealing, for who knows what he would do under economic pressure. Rather, Paul emphasises, it is when '*The one stealing, let him steal no more, but rather let him labor, working what is good with the hands, that he may have something to give to the one that has need*' (Ephesians 4: 28). The apostle gives seven examples - read vv.25-32. Other Biblical examples may be found in I Peter 3:9, III John 11, Matthew 16:24 - an example from the words of Jesus, I Thessalonians 1:29, Isaiah 55: 7
- but change becomes permanent only by our persistent and enduring diligent effort to '*put off*' a wrong habit and to '*put on*' the desirable habit. We need to determine what are the 'good habits' [*see p.4*]
- recall Paul's admonition: '*exercise yourself to godliness*'. (I Timothy 4:7). *Godliness* - how God wants us to live, how Jesus behaved - is our goal. It is explained in the Scriptures: '*Wherewithal shall a young man keep his way pure? By taking heed thereto according to your word*' (Psalm 119:9). In the Scriptures is all we need to know about what behaviour is godly - and what is not (vv.19-21)
- by diligent effort some, unaided or with the help of wise counsel, may change an undesirable habit. But that's a serious but achievable challenge (*cf* the number who want to stop smoking *etc*): '*Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also may do good who are accustomed to doing evil*' (Jeremiah 13:23). It is possible to change our habitual pattern of behaviour!
- in-depth change, however, is a '*fruit of the Spirit*' (Galatians 5:22f). The character of God - perfectly reflected in Jesus - is summed up in those fruits. Only the indwelling Spirit can transform hatred to *godly love* (as described in I Corinthians 13), or impart *divine peace* (Philippians 4:6-7). '*And likewise the Spirit also joins in to help our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes on our behalf with groanings that cannot be uttered*' (Romans 8:26). Through confident prayer we find '*grace to help*' (Hebrews 4:16)
- '*cultivate your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is working in you both to will and to work for the sake of His good pleasure*' (Philippians 2:12f). That is, He works for our perfection Ω

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