

new **Horizons**

Vol 18 No 6

November/December 2014

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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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

New Horizons is published by the *Churches of God Outreach Ministries*, an association of independent churches, to make known the good news of the soon-coming Kingdom of God

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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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new Horizons

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God desires that all of mankind become part of His family. Why are so few truly committed?

Jesus commissioned his disciples to: ‘...Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. ..and teach them to do everything I have told you’ (Matthew 28:19-20). The plan for man’s ultimate salvation is presented by God to everyone. It’s a message that was promoted time and again by the prophets of ancient Israel—though not grasped by first century Judaism and, at its beginning, by the early church! The apostles eventually caught on and their zeal spread the message of salvation, the ‘Gospel’ throughout the known world (Colossians 1:6).

The end of our age will come, predicted Jesus, only when it has reached ‘...all the world’ of that final generation (Matthew 24:14).

Salvation, however, is personal—individual and not coercive. It is individually embraced or rejected. It is not national—there is, for example, no such entity as a ‘Christian nation’, though many (notably Britain and America) have been positively influenced by the text book of Christianity, the Christian Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. It is an influence that has waned drastically in recent decades to our collective detriment.

Nations act according to the whim of its current leaders with their individual beliefs and philosophy, tempered only by those with whom they govern, or by their pay-masters. They govern

well when guided by the Bible and its righteous precepts for good government. (The Laws governing ancient Israel are God’s template for good governance.) Individual rulers may claim to be ‘Christian’ - but that doesn’t make a ‘Christian nation’, just a nation that implements some Christian teachings.

Limited Access

Why, then, after two millennia of Christian activity does two thirds of mankind remain outside the—even nominal—Christian fold? And why is there relatively little commitment? For many professing Christians it is Christianity by rote—don Sunday best and off to church, and a coin in the collection plate. Then back to the telly or off to the shops or sports field or to work.

But recall the solemn words of Jesus: ‘...Not everyone who says to Me, Lord! Lord! shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven’ (Matthew 7:21). It’s vital we seek out what is that divine will. That should give pause for thought. For the most part, Christians have come within hearing distance of the Gospel message, but it has washed over them, leaving with little lasting impression.

It is our nature to succumb to the influence of money, power, family, work, romance *etc.* Each can be a force that blocks our acceptance of God’s will and blinds our minds to His calling.

Other Faiths

What, then, of people of other faiths? Or the diminishing numbers who have never heard even the name of Christianity’s founder, Jesus Christ the Nazarene? For the Christian position is ‘... there is salvation in no other One; for there is no other name [Jesus] under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4:10,12).

There is but one God, the Father, who has revealed Himself in the Christian Scriptures—the Old and New Testaments—and He has Himself appointed Jesus as the sole one through whom He will enlarge the divine Family.

There is, too, but one way—a way obscured by the rank overgrowth of destructive influences. Said Jesus: ‘...Enter through the narrow gate, because broad is the gate and spacious is the road that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it,

Pathway to Eternity

The Old Testament is a record of the one true faith, revealed for all mankind from man’s beginning. Within *Judaism*, originally based on it, that faith was amended by oral tradition—and roundly condemned by Jesus.

Islam has incorporated parts of God’s revelation, ascribing it to their god, Allah. It rejects Jesus as the only Saviour (he wasn’t crucified for our sin, it is claimed) and has added other human traditions and practices. *Other faiths*, too, having anciently been exposed to the one true faith, have strands of that faith in their belief systems.

There can be but one supreme God (revealed as a Family), and, logically, one body of belief. There is but one path to an eternal relationship with the Father, but a varied and individual process to finding that path.

because narrow is the gate and constricted is the road that leads to life, and there are few who find it! Beware of false prophets' (Matthew 7:13-15).

Spirit Influence

The early distortion of Biblical teaching propelled the early Christian church into the black hole of 'medieval 'baptized paganism' and the persecution and murder of faithful Christians.

The apostle Paul sheds light on the causes, warning of those church leaders who would peddle perverse teachings to drum up a personal following (Acts 20:30). Many such doctrines he describes as '*...giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils [Gk daimonion]*' (1 Timothy 4:1).

In our natural unconverted state we all '*...once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience; among whom we also had our way of life in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others*' (Ephesians 2:2).

Elsewhere Paul alerts us to the role of Satan in hindering the Gospel message: '*.... if our gospel is hidden, it is hidden to those being lost, in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving ones, so that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ (who is the image of God) should not dawn on them*' (II Corinthians 4:3-4). Satan—the god of this world, our adversary,

a deceiver, a liar—working with his co-rebellious angels leads the whole world astray (Revelation 12:9).

On-going conflict continues between those influences that motivate towards peace and harmony and the influences that seek to undermine the good. The prophet Daniel encountered such opposing forces, as spirit powers sought to thwart God's purpose for the exiled nation of Judah in the sixth century BC (*ch 9*). It's still a behind-the-scenes battle—unseen but deadly—in our twenty-first century world.

As with first-century apostate Judaism, there is, to our day, blindness to the divine plan:

What's the Plan?

God's holy day plan (Leviticus 23) sets out how His purpose will be achieved. The sin that separates us from God can be forgiven through Christ (*Passover, Unleavened Bread*). Then we are empowered by God's Spirit as His firstfruit harvest (*Firstfruits, Pentecost*).

This is followed by our resurrection at Christ's coming (*Trumpets*), to rule mankind for a millennium—exemplified by *Tabernacles*, the last day of which marks a general resurrection in human flesh of those who did not respond in this life.

The final festival (the *Eighth Day*). Looks forward to Eternity, when all will have become spirit, part of the Family of God.

'...their minds were blinded: for until this day remains the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ' Romans 11).

How, then, may that veil be removed? How can we respond to the Father's universal invitation?

Divine Calling

The apostle Peter (II Peter 3:9) notes God's patience with His wayward creation, and is '*...not willing that any should perish, but that all should repent*'.

But, if *you* were God, who would you like to work with for all eternity? Surely you want loyalty. You want unity of purpose. You want proven ability. And you would choose your co-workers carefully. So, too, the Creator God. For, usually (He sometimes makes an intervention), the Father draws to Jesus Christ only those who show an interest, who re-

spond to the moving of His Spirit: '*...No one is able to come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him*' (see John 6:37, 44).

As the Scriptures explain, there are those who will initially respond to the Father's gracious invitation, but for varied reasons will '*...fall by the wayside*' - be diverted by family ties, by building a life, by entanglement with false philosophies. Jesus warned that some will '*...when they have heard, go forth and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of life, and do not bear to maturity*' (Luke 8:14). Adding, for those living at the time of his return: '*...take heed to yourselves, lest haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you suddenly as a snare*' (*ch 21:34*)

Also in the context of the end-times, Jesus notes that it is those who are '*...called, and chosen, and faithful*' who will serve with him in his earthly Kingdom (Revelation 17:14).

The Invite

What, then, is that calling, that invitation to become part of the Family of God, working alongside Jesus Christ for all eternity, joint heirs with him? Who does God select?

It is summed up by Peter: '*... Turn back to God [repent]! Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven. Then you will be given the Holy Spirit*' (Acts 2:38).

Without the Spirit, without our spiritual re-birth, we can't proceed along the path to Eternity, to everlasting life as members of the divine Family of God. **Ω**

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Jesus said, *Be perfect*. How can we attain to that high calling?

For too many Christians it is enough to 'be good'. Be helpful to your neighbour. Avoid harming anyone. Attend church and support its activities. All, indeed, vital expressions of our commitment to Jesus Christ. It is what the Scriptures mean by having '*...clean hands and a pure heart*' (Psalm 24:4).

The Bible writers certainly emphasize such behaviour—summed up by the words '*...love your neighbour as yourself*', quoted over a score of times in the new Testament (eg Romans 13:9, Luke 10:27—the latter illustrated by Jesus' account of the 'Good Samaritan') and not neglected in the Old (Leviticus 19:18).

The accompanying statement of Jesus ('*...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength*' (Mark 12:30) also is expressed outwardly—through avoidance of idolatry, and by our observance of the weekly seventh-day Sabbath and God's annual holy days.

We humans are by nature '*...of the flesh*' and thus adversaries of God: '*...the mind of the flesh is enmity to God, for to the law of God it does not subject itself, for neither is it able; and those who are in the flesh are not able to please God*' (Romans 8:7). Why? Because we lack a vital ingredient—the Holy Spirit.

Human Nature

The 'mind of the flesh', simply, is the mind with which we are born. Its original inborn 'operating programme', however, has been cor-

rupted by a 'virus'—*sin*. And throughout life our response to the challenges of our corrupted nature is recorded by the human spirit, shaping our character.

Sin indelibly permeates each one of us (Romans 7:5). Through Christ it can be deleted, forgiven—but like deleted words on a computer's hard drive, the potential to sin still lurks in the background. As found the apostle Paul, we struggle daily against our human nature (vv. 14-17).

It is through our co-operation with God's Spirit, with Jesus Christ indwelling us that we may conquer our sinful tendencies (v. 25).

Our subconscious minds have no sense of humour, play no jokes and cannot tell the difference between reality and an imagined thought or image. What we continually think about will eventually manifest in our lives
Robert Collier

Beyond the Law

Jesus makes it clear that the external righteousness of observing the divine Law is good—in fact necessary, vital (Matthew 5:19-20).

But not good

enough. In the next few verses he explores the *inner* righteousness, the righteousness achievable only through faith (Philippians 3:9). It's what the apostle Paul calls '*...circumcision of the heart*' Romans 2:29).

Ardent desire may lead us to steal, to adultery. Resentment may lead to violence. Thus James, the brother of Jesus, states (ch 1:14-15): '*every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust [desire], and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death*'. Or, writes Paul, '*...the wages of sin is death*'.

Mind What You Think!

None of us is exempt—not even King David of Israel, a man 'after God's own heart', whose lustful focus on Bathsheba led to his adulterous relationship—and to the murder of her faithful husband and to the death of Bathsheba's child.

Mind and Matter

At the heart of each of us is our human spirit—inextricably linked with our mental processes. Every thought, every action, enters and affects our subconscious, forming our character, shaping the 'inner man' and gives expression to what we say and do. As Solomon recorded, and echoed by Jesus: '*...The heart [our mind] of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds learning to his lips*' (Proverbs 16:23, Matthew 12:34).

The King adds '*...Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life*' (Proverbs 4:23). In other words, '*...carefully guard your thoughts—they change your life*'.

It's what Paul taught the brethren in Rome: '*...Don't be like the people of this world, let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him*' (Romans 12:2 CEV). And to the Philippians (ch 4:8) '*...keep your minds on whatever is true, pure, right, holy, friendly, and proper. Don't ever stop thinking about what is truly worthwhile and worthy of praise*'.

The process of conversion from our inborn state to Christlikeness stems from the divine Law written into our innermost being through the indwelling Spirit of God (Jeremiah 31:33). Ω

Hard Times

They are inevitable. But how do we cope?

Given the state of so much of mankind who daily experience extremes of hardship, it is perhaps over-the-top to write of 'hardship' in our western affluent world.

Despite this overflowing of material goods some politicians continue to bleat about our 'cost of living crisis', while think tanks moan about 'poverty' - in lands which lead the world in material wealth.

Doubtless, some of us fall on hard times. Loss of income from losing a job. Homes reclaimed by the mortgage lender. Debilitating illness. Divorce or desertion. All can strike without warning. Yet—even in a recession there is help from government and charities and friends.

The 'Me' Element

Such distress can, of course, strike out of the blue, without warning, unprovoked. But for the most part the signs are there, staring us in the face—but, alas, ignored. As writes Solomon: '*... A prudent one foresees the evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished*' - Proverbs 22:3).

We are repeatedly warned by the banks: *keep a sharp eye on your finances*. Or, Solomon again, but addressing an agricultural populace: '*...Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and look well to your herds*' (Proverbs 27:23). Such applies, in modern terms, to our finances, our marriage, our home, our work—and our religion.

Be practical, in other words. Take charge, be responsible— for our spending and for our consumption. Ask yourself if you really need an item—new car, larger home, holiday. Budget! It's that ancient principle: *don't covet*.

Prospects

We tend to accumulate possessions, from that 'nice decorative object' to new clothing, to that larger house.

And all without the thought that it could so easily become at some point beyond our means. (A financial 'cushion' is prudent.)

Then there's our long-term future—who will provide for us in illness, in our declining years? Anciently, the aged or infirm were cocooned and cared for within the patriarchal family—days long gone.

Those were also the days when '*...a good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children*' - Proverbs 13:22). A cushion for their potential—perhaps inevitable—hard times. Now largely only affordable by the rich.

Families, now, are scattered or themselves restricted by their own children, by income, by illness, by available accommodation—a whole new culture. (Often it's a *welfare* culture.)

A Time of Trouble

The West has been experiencing some tough years, and many of our readers have found life difficult. But the Scriptures foresee a future time of *extreme* privation from which no-one will emerge unscathed: '*...For there will be great affliction, such as has not happened from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever will be*' (Matthew 24:21). The prophet Daniel, too: '*...there shall be a time of distress, such as has not been from the being of a nation until that time*' (ch 12:1).

Clearly a unique time, a time that will '*...come in on all those [dwelling] on the face of all the earth*' (Luke 21:35).

Divine Wrath

Writing of this same unique short few years, a 'singular' time (ch 7:5), Ezekiel focuses on the House of Israel—the northern confederation of ten nations in late sixth century BC Palestine.

Except that the nations of Israel were at that time scattered a thou-

sand miles away around the Caspian Sea and beyond! And beyond Ezekiel's reach! His prophecy, in other words, is for this same end time, '*...the day of trouble*' (vv.6-7). His reference is to the *end-time descendants* of the House of Israel—notably the Anglo-Saxon nations.

It is '*...an only evil*' (v.5), the word *only* is defined by one writer as meaning '*an evil singular and remarkable above all others*' - Barnes. It is the 'Day of the LORD'. Given the prophet's horrific description of that awesome time—a time of divine justice on an idolatrous people—those will certainly be 'hard times'. Times when we will reap what we have sown (v.8). (We tend to discount how awful our sin is before our holy God.)

Time-line

Daniel more clearly defines the time-line (the precise time still hidden in our day) as when '*... many of those sleeping in the earth's dust shall awake, some to everlasting life*'. It is the time of the 'first resurrection' (Revelation 20:5) at the return of Jesus as King of kings, to reign over all mankind: '*...And at that time, your people shall be delivered, everyone that shall be found written in the Book [of Life]*' (Daniel 12:1).

Jesus spoke of this time of deliverance for his people: '*...there will be great affliction, such as has not happened from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever will be. And except those days were shortened, not any flesh would be saved [alive]. But on account of the elect [those written in the Book (of Life)], those days will be shortened*' Matthew 24:21-22).

Hard times, indeed. But in our present distress and for our future distress the people of God can—at any time—draw on sure spiritual resources: '*...Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths*' (Proverbs 3:5-6). And, said Jesus: '*...I am with you always*'. Ω

When and how should Christians observe God's festivals as is detailed in the Scriptures?

As winter approaches the thoughts of devout Christians turn to the imminent major festival of Christmas. Although a 'post-Biblical' festival—that is, not observed by the early church—it represents (erroneously) the birth of Jesus Christ and is deeply embedded in Christian practice.

But to suggest moving the time of Christmas from December 25 to, say, September would raise howls of protest. That December date is firmly linked in the eyes of most Christians to 'the babe in the manger'. But timing *is* important, as is made clear in the Scriptures in regard to those festivals that the LORD (Leviticus 23:2) instituted for His people for all time. Concise instructions, given to Moses by the LORD, are provided as to *when* to observe them.

Bible Time

Anciently in Bible lands time was recorded in a way unfamiliar to modern ears. The year, for example, started in the spring, not January, and the first month (Nisan) is the beginning of the Biblical festival year. As a result the Bible dates need to be matched with our modern calendar—a complex task but one that has been calibrated for many years ahead.

Spring Festivals

On the 14th day of the Biblical first month (*Nisan*, March-April) begins the annual *Passover* festival, a feast of seven days (Ezekiel 45:21), also known as *Unleavened Bread* (Mark 14:12). This is, of course, significant for Christians as it was on this day Jesus was crucified, dying just as the Passover lambs were due to be sacrificed in the Temple that afternoon.

[But given the awesome events surrounding our Saviour's death—widespread darkness, the tearing of the massive Temple veil, the earthquake (Matthew 27:45, 51)—the sacrifices may have been abandoned

that year!]

As the sun declined into the 15th Nisan (days began at sundown—'evening') a holy day began, called the first day of the annual *Unleavened Bread* festival. It is a 'Sabbath of rest' wherein we abstain from our business activities. The last day, the seventh, of this festival is also a holy day (but not the days between).

Unleavened Bread was observed by the early church (I Corinthians 5) by removing all leavened products—*ie*, those containing a raising agent—from their homes and by abstaining from them (v.7) for the seven days of the festival. By eating unleavened products daily we are reminded to always 'put on Christ' throughout our Christian life (*cf* Galatians 5:9, 16-26).

(Given the many strange customs associated with the modern Christian festivals—pancakes, coloured eggs, rabbits, sunrise services, decorated trees, lying about men in red body suits, over-indulgence *etc*—this practice of eating unyeasted ('flat') bread should not raise eyebrows!)

Seven weeks after the *Unleavened Bread* festival is the *Day of Pentecost*—a celebration familiar to all Christians. It, too, is an annual Sabbath (no work) and always falls on a Sunday. It is marked by worship services and fellowship.

Initially a celebration of the seven weeks of wheat harvest, which was then ending, it represents God's firstfruits harvest—the calling and training of a body of believers in preparation for their role in the coming thousand year reign of the Mes-

God's Festivals

...how we observe them

siah: '...these are those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, as a firstfruit to God and to the Lamb' (Revelation 14:4).

Autumn Festivals

All '...My feasts' (Leviticus 23:2) have important significance for Christians, and indeed for all of mankind—for without the events that inspired the spring festivals there is

Passover/Lord's Supper

Christ, notes the apostle Paul, is '...our Passover sacrificed for us' (I Corinthians 5:7). He died at the time the representative Passover lamb would be sacrificed in the Temple—the time of the evening sacrifice, the 'ninth hour' as the sun declined and the day was ending on Nisan 14. [*cf* Leviticus 23:27, 32]

After the lamb was sacrificed it would be prepared for the shared Passover meal and eaten before midnight on the 15th, the first day of the festival. (Jesus was now in the tomb.)

Supper Time

Jesus and the Twelve had gathered the previous evening for a pre-Passover supper (Gk *deipnos*, not *pascha*). As it proceeded he washed the feet of the disciples and introduced the symbols of bread and wine saying, '...this do in remembrance of me'—the *Lord's Supper* or *Christian Passover* it has been variously called.

There is a clear distinction between the Passover proper and the supper of the previous evening. No mention of the lamb or its sacrifice or attendance in the Temple, for example. Also, the word used by Paul (I Corinthians 11:23) for bread is *artos* (daily bread) and not *azumos* (unleavened bread). Passover is a family occasion, but the family members, though present in Jerusalem, were not at this supper.

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unsigned articles are by the Editor

no salvation for any of us. And for the world the autumn festivals map out its awesome future.

In all, there are—besides the weekly Sabbath—seven annual rest days on the divine calendar. Each is a ‘holy convocation’, a Sabbath, a special assembly for worship, for instruction, for fellowship. And each is a day when God’s flock are to cease from their normal daily work. The last four of these Sabbaths are in the seventh month, which is today known as *Tishri*.

‘End of the World’

On the first day of this seventh month is the **Day of Trumpets** (eg Numbers 29:1), a Sabbath. It is this day that introduces what is widely called ‘the end of the world’. On this day teachers of the Word explore the numerous Scripture texts in both Old and New Testament which explain its significance.

As with all the festivals (except the next one!) it is a joyful time of feasting, an *agape* (Gk)—‘...feasts of charity’ (Jude v.12). Yes—God approves of feasting, and has provided for it in His Word! On this day of *Trumpets*, for example ‘...all the people went to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words which were declared to them’ (Nehemiah 8:2, 12). See also Deuteronomy 14:26.

Reconciliation

The ‘end of the world’, however, isn’t just about destruction. Man’s day is coming to an end—and perhaps billions will in the end times die from wars, famine, disease. But there will be survivors (Isaiah 24:6) who will emerge distraught from the chaos—and repentant, seeking reconciliation with God.

The next of God’s festivals concerns this reconciliation. It is called the **Day of Atonement**, and is observed on the 10th day of the seventh month (Leviticus 23:27).

Not surprisingly it is a day of fast-

ing, for mankind is emerging from millennia of sinful opposition to the perfect divine way of life. Beginning at the end of the 9th day (Leviticus 23:32) Christians fast—taking neither food nor liquid—for the entire day until sundown on the 10th.

Atonement highlights the need for reconciliation through the forgiveness of sin—attainable only through the death and resurrection of our Saviour, Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, the ‘...*desire of all nations*’.

It’s at this point in the divine plan that the malign power that presently entwines itself into government and into the world’s religions will be vanquished by the returning Christ. Satan will be restrained from his worldwide influence—perhaps portrayed in part by the ritual of this *Day of Atonement*.

Our God Reigns

As the end-time unfolds, the remnant of the nations descended from ancient Israel—the House of Israel—will unite with the House of Judah (the Jews) and be gathered by the returning King of kings, Jesus Christ under a new covenant (Jeremiah 30-31). He will lead them back to their rightful heritage—Palestine.

Then begins the thousand year reign of Messiah (known as ‘the Millennium’). There will be one supreme world ruler—Jesus returned from heaven as King of all earthly rulers. There will be one LORD of lords—one God, one faith, one Law. This millennium of peace, prosperity and security for all earth’s inhabitants is represented by the next of God’s feasts—the **Festival of**

Every adult Christian who is physically able should fast on *Atonement*, younger persons by choice if supervised, the elderly with medical approval. Medication should not be suspended.

Tabernacles.

Tabernacles is a seven-day festival which begins the 15th of this seventh month. The practice is for all to go to a suitable location—a kind of ‘convention’ when Christians are to gather for seven days of worship, of Bible instruction from skilled Bible teachers, and fellowship.

The first day of the festival is a ‘holy convocation’, a Sabbath, when no work is done. It is patterned on the annual ‘pilgrim feasts’ in Israel—though in this age we are not required to go to Jerusalem (John 4:21) where everyone dwelled in booths (‘tabernacles’). Instead, our ‘temporary dwellings’ are hotels, B & Bs *etc.*

The instruction focuses on this time of rule by Jesus and the saints (cf Pentecost), and on how we can best prepare for our role in that Kingdom.

Given that so many brethren are geographically scattered and unable to regularly fellowship on the weekly Sabbaths, *Tabernacles* is an opportunity for them to meet others of like faith.

Eternity

The last festival of the year, also a Sabbath, is the ‘**Eighth Day**’. It follows the day after the last day of *Tabernacles* and represents Eternity. The Israelites were free to leave their temporary booths and move into permanent accommodation—symbolic of the meaning of the festival.

The *Eighth Day* or ‘closing day’) represents the completion of God’s plan for mankind— *cont’d p.8*

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DIVINE WRATH

‘God is love’. How is that compatible with His ‘wrath’?

Angry. Genocidal. Uncompromising. Is that how you view God as portrayed in the Old Testament? Well—you could be right. For the Creator gets angry—at sin and what it does to us. Nor will he allow individuals or even entire nations to stand in the way of His purpose. And He is indeed uncompromising in regard to His Law.

Take that last point, divine Law. Most—even Christians—seem to view it as an imposition, a burden, a restriction of our freedom. Yet on analysis, with clear-headed thought, it is the opposite!

Is it a burden that God forbids murder? Or false witness? A burden that we respect our parents, the elderly in general? Given that we are drowning in debt personally, nationally and globally is it burdensome that He advises against ‘conspicuous consumption’ and its cause—covetousness? And what’s wrong with insisting that we should rest one day a week? Don’t many cry out to be released from the burden of the seven day week?

Natural Man

The world is awash with violence, economic chaos, greed, hatred—for that is man’s (and woman’s!) nature. ‘Civilisation’ is but the visible skin obscuring our darker side. And when our interests are under serious fire out goes our superficial civilized reaction. As writes, perceptively, the sixth century BC prophet Jeremiah ‘...*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?*’ (ch 17:9). We ignore that nature at our peril.

A moment’s thought and you will agree with what the apostle Paul describes as our ‘earthward inclina-

tions’, our in-born nature:

wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful
Romans 1

Elsewhere he adds ‘...

...fornication [ie unlawful sexual activity], impurity, sensual passion, unholy desire, and all greed (for that is a form of idolatry). angry and passionate outbreaks, ill-will, evil speaking, foul-mouthed abuse—so that these may never soil your lips...falsehoods
Colossians 3

All such is an affront to the holy God, the Creator of all. So no wonder that ‘...*because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience*’ (Ephesians 5:6).

God’s Wrath

As writes the prophet Ezekiel: ‘...*Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath*’ (ch 22:1).

Is God, then, just sitting on His throne in heaven waiting to vent His anger on every misdemeanour, casting down lightning bolts for each? ‘Chewing nails and spitting rust’, as it were?

When the Psalmist appears to rail against evil-doers he is simply reflecting God’s attitude—and, believe it or not, the attitude of ‘gentle Jesus’: ‘...*Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate you? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against you?*’ (Psalm 139:21).

The Psalmist, however, provides a different view of God: ‘...*The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of*

great mercy. The LORD is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works’ (Psalm 145:9ff).

We Are Responsible

But how is Gods wrath expressed? Ezekiel again: ‘...*their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, says the Lord GOD*’. In other words, ‘...*you will harvest what you plant, reap what you sow*’ (Galatians 6:7). For the most part, we bring it on ourselves.

Mankind is perfectly suited for life on planet Earth—indeed Earth with its resources was created to sustain the pinnacle of God’s creation. And not only Earth—for man functions optimally only when in harmony with divine Law. Transgress it and we reap the inevitable consequence.

Defy gravity and it hurts. But defy God’s ‘spiritual’ laws and they, too, over time inflict an *automatic* penalty. God doesn’t have to do anything! We bring the ‘wrath’ on ourselves. As writes Solomon: ‘...*Sinners are trapped and caught by their own evil deeds*’ (Proverbs 22:5 CEV).

The apostle John adds another dimension: ‘...*He who believes on the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides upon him*’ (ch 3:36). *Why?* In the beginning man had free access to his Creator, with no impediment to the blessings that flow from submission to His will. We lost that through self-will. And because the natural man now lacks the Spirit of God, he experiences the ultimate ‘wrath’ - death.

Death—that means extinction, for, ‘...*In the grave there is no remembrance of [God]*’, nor ‘...*do the dead praise Him*’ (Psalm 115:17).

God’s will—portrayed through His Law and statutes—is a ‘hedge’ against the woes to which man is subject. As we ignore it we erode the protection it provides. *cont’d over*

Request the short article:
Why Does God Kill?

At the Heart of Christianity

Christians today must approach our understanding of God's Word as revealed in the Christian Scriptures with caution and humility. We are far removed from its original recording by the apostles and their associates in the mid first century,

The Scriptures come to us from ancient languages, through translations from Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic and glimpses of other languages. The cultural practices are often strange to us, as are the use of idioms.

Through study and experience we keep growing towards a better understanding of what Jesus taught personally and through the twelve apostles. There's no room for dogmatism. No room for drawing a line at developing our understanding—'this far and no further'. As wrote King Solomon '*...the knowledge of the holy is understanding*' Proverbs 9:10), and '*Give to a wise one, and he will be still wiser; teach a just one, and he will increase in learning*' (v.9).

Heart of the Matter

Most Bible doctrine *is* clear, and we hold firmly to those teachings. As did the apostle Paul (and all the apostles and prophets) we are '*...determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*' (I Corinthians 2:2). That is the core belief, and all else stems from that root.

The Scriptures, however, are a tapestry woven from many colours and threads of teaching—all forming a coherent pattern. Each strand of teaching illuminates that core, leading to a more

comprehensive understanding of our Saviour, and the Father's plan for us

through him. Our *Statement of Beliefs* provides CGOM's considered current understanding of Bible teachings. It was compiled and tested over many years and we are confident it reflects that pattern. But it is not 'engraved in stone', and we seek continually to perfect our understanding.

On a Journey

Those whom the Father draws to Jesus are in a process. There are many obstacles to our acceptance of what the Bible says—our innate hostility to the holy, our 'indoctrination' from parents, from society—even from our religious background.

In the context of church the Biblical assembly includes men and women and perhaps young people at varied stages of commitment, even perhaps 'outsiders' present out of curiosity or having been invited by members of the congregation. Hopefully, all will come to an understanding of 'the core', to reconciliation with the Father through His Son.

Of course, baptism must follow adequate preparation—the comprehension of what God expects of us, for we must first '*...count the cost*' (Luke 14:28). But reconciliation comes before a detailed understanding of doctrine. Our 'knowledge' of the Father or of Christ doesn't grind to a halt at our baptism (II Peter 3:18)!

Nor does our salvation depend on our 'knowing it all'. Die in the faith within days of baptism—I know this has happened—and you will rise from the grave to be with Christ at his coming. Confused about the calendar? About the use of God's Name? About prophecy?

Festivals ...cont'd from p.6

when all who qualify will have become spirit, fulfilling the purpose for which He created us. It is, too, when God the Father leaves 'heaven' and comes to dwell among us on our planet (Revelation 21, 22).

Our readers are invited to further explore this exciting and meaningful festival plan—a plan that puts in perspective the divine purpose for God's creation. It is, however, only by living the plan, by participating in the festivals, that we can begin to grasp their importance for now—and for eternity. Ω

We are pleased to address any questions you may have about the observance of the festivals.

WRATH ...cont'd from p.7

There is, however, hope of avoiding God's wrath, personally, nationally, globally. We must replant and nourish that divine 'hedge', God's will as revealed by His Law, His written Word.

Otherwise '*... unless those days should be shortened, no flesh would be saved. But for the elect's sake, those days shall be shortened*' (Matthew 24:22).

In the present—and in the difficult years ahead—we can as individuals shape our lives by that Law and avoid His wrath. Unless our nations so do they will follow the path of ancient Israel.

For God still retains the right to personally intervene to ensure His plan for mankind's deliverance remains on track. Ω

What matters is that we each, as urges the apostle Paul '*...put on the Lord Jesus Christ*' (Romans 13:14). That we remain faithful to His revealed way of life. '*...Take my Yoke upon you and learn of me*', said Jesus'. Ω

MiniStudy**The New Birth**

Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God' (John 3:3)

At some point in the years ahead lies an earth-changing event. That moment will emerge from the worst period of turmoil mankind has experienced, or ever shall. Millions will have died from a horrendous few years of war, famine, disease—the result of a world-embracing tyrannical God-defying dictatorship whose time had come, a dictatorship that had been willingly embraced by earth's populace who saw it as salvation from the chaos into which we had sunk. At that moment perhaps millions will experience the most profound change in man's nature since he was created.

- Mankind resulted from the entry into time of the Creator God, when He created man with the purpose of sharing with us His Universe: '*...we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ' (Romans 8:16-17)*
- Made from earth's elements, our first parents yet were created perfect in body, perfect in mind, perfect in spirit. But with the freedom to choose their path: '*...God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him' (Genesis 1:27)*. But an image that was soon shattered through self-will and choosing to give ear to demonic philosophy (*ch 3*)
- As generation succeeded generation man's character and respect for God has decayed, surviving only through God's direct and repeated intervention to keep mankind from total self-destruction (as in the great Flood)—once again to be displayed in the years ahead: '*...except the Lord had shortened the days, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he chose, he shortened the days' (Mark 13:20)*
- Among earth's populace, then, are 'the elect'—men and women chosen, selected, by God. These have responded to His invitation to come to Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sin (John 6:44), have remained faithful and are '*...called and chosen and faithful' (Revelation 17:14)*. It is these who will experience that profound change, truly a 'new birth'
- The apostle Paul details this change: '*...flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption' (I Corinthians 15:50)*. Our decaying human body is incompatible with our participation in God's spirit Kingdom! If we are to live forever, the apostle adds, '*...we must put on immortality' (v.53)*, for while we are in the flesh we don't have it (we don't have an 'immortal soul'). We put on a *spirit* body
- Paul, again, this time to the Christians in Thessalonica: '*...we say this to you by the Word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord shall not go before those who are asleep' (ch 4:15)*. Go where?: '*...to meet the Lord in the air' (v.17)*. This is 'the first resurrection' (Revelation 20:5), when all God's chosen from all ages will— all together, at the same time—be either resurrected (the dead) or 'changed' (those faithful Christians still alive at Christ's future coming). On that day he, with the resurrected saints, sets foot on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4! An angelic messenger confirms this scenario (Acts 1:11-12)
- It is what Jesus told Nicodemus: '*...You must be born again.... Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit' (John 3:3, 5-6)*
- The initial step in this process of, literally, joining God's spirit Family, is to respond to God's invitation, to heed His call, to come to Jesus for forgiveness, to be 'born of water' (baptism) - and to stay faithful to the will of the Father. For, said Jesus '*...whoever shall do the will of My Father in Heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother' (Matthew 12:50)*. Ω

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their regular Sabbath services!*

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www.tulsachurchofgod.net*

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