

new **Horizons**

Vol 19 No 6

November/December 2015

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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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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It is distributed free on request, being a co-operative voluntary effort financed by the members and friends of the *Churches of God*. We also welcome the financial support of all who benefit from our publications and who wish to labour with us.

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

Issue No 114

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Why on Earth did God create mankind?

In the back of our minds we like to agree with Winston Churchill's statement: "There's some great purpose being worked out here below". Otherwise—what's the point?

We may subscribe to the notion that we are just flotsam adrift on the sea of time, but even so we want there to be a reason. A reason for our creativity. A reason for our incredible potential. A reason for our suffering—surely it's not all in vain!

To answer the question man has come up with a smorgasbord of weird and wonderful religions and philosophies. And remains dissatisfied, frustrated, still seeking.

In fact, there is a hole in our mental processes—a hole which only a Creator God can fill. And He has not left us without hope, without providing for us a glimpse into His awesome purpose for His human creation—a Plan.

The Plan Unwrapped

Every invention, every game originates deep in our cortex as a thought, evolving form and shape. God, too. Existing endlessly as divine Spirit and before the appearance of matter He devised a plan to share His being, His awesome power and resources.

We crave power—power over our destiny, power over daily life, power to change and to mould. Yet the more we accumulate the

These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful

more likely we are to misuse it. Hence slavery, hence nuclear weapons, hence despots, hence cult figures.

Yet God made man—weak, self-seeking, mortal, unfit to wield the powers of the universe. It would be pointless to create a race of

Called, Chosen ...and Faithful

automatons: what pleasure conversing with a robot? Nor can He create instant Spirit beings with which to communicate, to enjoy eternity, to share His creative power.

Material Foundations

The plan called for a material universe, created by divine fiat from the invisible: "... the universe was created by God's Word, so that what can be seen was made out of what cannot be seen" (Hebrews 11:3). And on one chosen carefully-prepared planet God created man "...from the dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7)—mortal, but within a driving force ('the spirit in man') capable of communicating with the Creator.

That this frail creature could come to live forever was conceived in the mind of God long

before the material creation: "...In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began. (Titus 1:2). [...'before eternal times': ie before time, the timelessness before a material creation.]

Golden Age

Man at his creation was perfect. That is, he was complete, functional, rational, intelligent. He walked and talked with his Creator and had direct access to divine wisdom. He had, too, the potential to live an unending life.

However long it lasted it was a golden age—productive, exciting as he learned new skills and innovated processes to control and enhance his pristine environment. It was a time for expanding his knowledge of his Creator, of learning His plan for him and his progeny.

In the words of the Creator: "... God saw everything that He had made and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

Picking Up the Pieces

It didn't last. Paradise was lost. Created with the freedom to choose his way of life, our first parent succumbed to the false promise of a pathway contrary to that revealed by the Creator.

His lifespan became restricted. Mankind no longer had direct access to the LORD but had to approach through ritual. Deviation from the revealed Way to successful living resulted in inevitable adverse consequences, with us to this day.

The sorry state of our world bears testimony to our rejection of God's wise guidance.

God's Choice

It's a path man continues to follow, blinded by the same spirit forces that seduced our first parents: '*...the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so that they would not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*' (II Corinthians 4:4).

God, however, has not left Himself without witness. His Way has been visible down the ages and witnessed to by Spirit-guided men and women. It's a universal invitation (Gk *kleros*)—an invitation that requires a response.

'*Many are called [kleros]*' Matthew 20:16) said Jesus. Once we come within hearing of the true Gospel in a memorable way, then we are 'called'. From these the Father exercises His sovereign right (Romans 9:21) to choose individuals to become part of His Family: '*...No one is able to come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him*' (John 6:44), said Jesus. And: '*...All that the Father gives to Me shall come to Me, and the one coming to Me I will in no way cast out*' (v.37). They are the Father's choice, and are

In the end of this age the Gospel will have reached '*...all the world*': Matthew 24:14—all of that final generation will have had the invitation through worldwide proclamation of the true Gospel. (A statement of fact more than a commission.)

The Message was indeed preached '*...in all the world*' in the first century (Colossians 1:16.23). Matthew's record may refer to the area of the then extensive Roman Empire—from India to the Atlantic. But generation succeeded generation thereafter and in context the reference is 'the end of the age', the close of man's rule.

Although those chosen by the Father are '*...a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's possession*' (I Peter 2:9) - yet they have no grounds for boasting of their status (I Corinthians 1:26-27)!

relatively few in number, invited by Him to train as His children, trained to become Christ-like, to be His witnesses on earth, to work alongside Him throughout eternity. Many indeed, are called '*...but few chosen*'.

Heirs of the Universe

The apostle Paul explains to the

brethren in Rome: '*...God's Spirit joins himself to our spirits to declare that we are God's children.*

Since we are his children, we will possess the blessings he keeps for his people, and we will also possess with Christ what God has kept for him; for if we share Christ's suffering, we will also share his glory. I consider that what we suffer at this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that is going to be revealed to us' (ch 8:16-18).

'Glory'. That is perhaps beyond human imagination! But Christians will be '*...joint-heirs with Christ*' (v.17). As says the writer of Hebrews: '*...it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory*' (ch 2:10).

Our destiny—to share the awesome power by which our Saviour brought into being the vastness of creation!

No surprise, then, that the Father has to choose wisely, to carefully train His elect in His ways, to test their willingness to serve, to identify those believers with staying power—who are '*...called and chosen and faithful*'. As said Jesus: '*...You will be hated by everyone because of my name. But the one who endures to the end--this one will be saved*'. **Ω**

Lost...for ever?

Is God unjust for exercising choice in the selection of His Family?

If you, along with billions of fellow human beings, are not during this life 'chosen' by God, or never heard the Gospel—is that just tough luck? Are you destined for oblivion? Or, as is generally believed facing 'hell'? How does that square with a God who loves His creation?

With such inherent power as Creator of all at His disposal wouldn't it be presumptuous to question His wisdom, His *modus operandi*? As says Isaiah: '*...Does a clay pot dare argue with its maker, a pot that is*

like all the others? Does the clay ask the potter what he is doing? Does the pot complain that its maker has no skill?' (ch 45:9).

In fact, for a Being who has existed from eternity and who has endless life the last few millennia of the life of *homo sapiens* are but a drop in a timeless ocean. God has a plan that encompasses *all* mankind!

Time for Judgment

Jesus himself assures us that: '*...an hour is coming in which all those in the tombs will hear His voice. And they will come out, the ones having done good into a resurrection of life; and the ones having practiced evil into a resurrection of judgment*' (John 5:28-29).

Notice—all who have died are to return to life. There is a sequence for this: *First*, Christians at Christ's coming (I Thessalonians 4:14), resurrected to immortality. *Next*, the '*rest of the dead*' at the end of Christ's millennial reign, resurrected *in the flesh* for a period of 'judgment' during which they will be invited to respond positively to the Gospel message: '*...the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were ended*' (Revelation 20:5) **cont'd p.4**

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True religion became corrupted following Adam's sin, but many elements were incorporated in heathen practice and are with us to this day

It is fashionable to overturn the Bible's clear time-line for the pathway of true religion, instead substituting the topsy-turvy notion that religion evolved from ignorant primitive practices.

What the Word of God teaches is that the Creator revealed the manner by which His creation should relate to Him. It wasn't so much a 'religion' as a way of life that provides peace, prosperity and a relationship with God for those who embrace it. But our first parents' rejection of this revealed Way opened a sluice through which flowed all manner of human notions that resulted in the formation of the kaleidoscope of the ever-changing religions we today experience.

Mutant Faiths

Once the relationship with the Creator had been shattered through sin the way opened for 'anything goes' forms of religion—forms inspired by perverted human imagination and inspired by subtle spirit forces. Seeds scattered from the divinely-planted Tree of Life mutated at the hand of man and (fallen) angels.

God, for example, introduced the sacrifice of specific creatures as the way to approach Him at that time. It required the shedding of blood, the animal's life force, a practice that emphasized for the individual the horror of the sin that separated us from Him. Mankind distorted this act of repentance even to the point of the sacrifice of humans. King David writes: '*...Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after an-*

other god: their drink of ferings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips' (Psalm 16:4)

A Brief Life

God created man from the elements found in the soil, to which He added the spiritual driving force—the 'spirit in man'. As Jesus pointed out to Nicodemus, without divine intervention we 'perish' (John 3:16), we are but a puff of smoke or a fading flower here today, gone by sun-down (James 1:10).

We each recognize this and tightly grasp our present existence, at the same time longing to live forever. But when we die we are indeed, like Marley, 'dead as a door-nail'. There is, we recognize, no hope of a continuing life without a return from death—a resurrection. (The alternative is the false belief that we have a 'soul' that is immortal, in which

The sacred writings of other faiths incorporate many of the concepts recorded in the Scriptures, the Bible—the record of that original true faith. They are inherited from the one true authentic original. *Buddhism* (late 6th century BC) in some ways parallels Scripture mores. *Zoroastrianism* (Iran) retains the idea of monotheism, while its festivals are linked to the seasons—as in the Scriptures. It dates from the time of Moses. Dating from a similar period is *Hinduism*, which again contains strands of Hebrew thought not unfamiliar to students of the Bible. One author notes '*...all the Vedic sacrifices correspond with the 'set feasts' of the Hebrew ritual'* (E.A.Gordon). *Mithraism* began '*...on the banks of the Euphrates'* (Cumont). It parallels Judaism in some beliefs, and *Christianity* as it has come down to us includes many of its features, notably reverence for Sunday. The influence of the Christian Scriptures on *Islam* is widely understood. All are faded copies of the original revelation from the Creator.

False Messiahs

case there is the awesome mind-churning uncertainty of our post-death state.)

A Return to Life

The prospect of a return from the dead permeates the Christian Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The patriarch Job (c.1700BC) for instance, muses on life after death: '*...You shall call, and I will answer You; You shall long to the work of Your hands'* (ch 14:15). And: '*...after my skin has been struck off from my flesh, yet this, I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and no stranger'* (ch 19:26-27).

King David sings: '*...goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of Jehovah for ever'*. And, '*...[God] who has shown me great and evil distresses. You will turn me; You will make me live; and You will bring me up from the depths of the earth'* (Psalm 71:20).

Indeed God Himself says: '*...I am He, and there is no other God with Me. I kill, and I make alive* (Deuteronomy 32:39). The Syrian general Naaman implies the same: '*...Am I God, to kill and to make alive?*' (II Kings 5:7)

Isaiah, too: '*...Your dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing'' and the earth shall cast out the dead'* (ch 26:19).

The prophet Ezekiel (ch 37) clearly understood the possibility of a return from the dead, while Daniel (6th century BC) writes: '*...many of them that sleep in the*

dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt' (ch 12:2). Isaiah (8th c.BC) prophesies: '...he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory (ch 25:7-8)—a message reflected by the apostle Paul: '...when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (1Corinthians 15:54-55).

The writer of Hebrews notes that Abraham was well aware of the return from the dead: '*...By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: ...accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure' (ch 11:19).*

Distortion

This universal concept of a return to life, of resurrection from the dead, filtered down through the ages to various distorted man-made belief systems—the Egyptian *Osiris*, the Greek *Dionysos*, the Babylonian *Tammuz* (see Ezekiel 8:14), the Cypriot *Adonis*—all are imagined to have returned to life and were commemorated by various rituals and sacrifices.

Of special note is the obscene cult of *Attis*, imported to Rome in the second century BC. He died, was buried and resurrected—towards the end of March, corresponding with the Jewish Passover and, of course, the death and resurrection of Jesus—which Passover symbolized in the divine plan. It was a pale reflection of the original some thousand years before.

Also of special interest to Christians is the cult of *Mithraism*, for over the first couple of centuries of Christianity it replaced the true faith taught by Jesus and his apostles, and imparted to Christianity many of its features—notably the veneration of the god on Sunday, and celebration of the re-birth of the sun at the end of December. The cult was accompanied by the shedding of the blood of a bull.

A Confusion of Myth

No surprise then that through word of mouth, through written records, through the many 'preachers of righteousness', through memories of events—no surprise that elements of the true faith, however distorted by sinful man, filtered down through the ages and gave rise to the myriad myths and belief systems, a panoply of gods and goddesses for the most part based on twisted versions of historical characters.

Paul again: '*...[We] preach unto you that you should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness' (Acts 14:15-17).*

There is and can be but one Supreme God '*...says Jehovah, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, Jehovah of Hosts: I am the First, and I am the Last; and there is no God except Me' (Isaiah 44:6).*

All claims of divinity and Messiahship are but perverse shadows of the Creator, their so-called deaths and resurrections a vague recollection of the divine plan passed down the ages.

The Middle and Far East experienced the infusion of divine wis-

dom (recorded in the Scriptures) with the exile of the Jews to Babylon in the late sixth century BC. Lauded sages—Confucius, Buddha, Socrates *etc*—merely recycled concepts already understood long before by such as Abraham, Moses and other Bible stalwarts (truths often buried in the sands of time) .

No—there is but one undergirding faith, one underlying philosophy perfectly manifest only in the Christian Bible. Other belief systems may include elements but are but pale and often 'distorting mirror' images of it. **Ω**

Lost...? cont'd from p.2

We catch other glimpses of this in the Gospels. For example, Jesus—reflecting on those of his hearers who rejected his message—states that they will yet face this '*...day of judgment' (Matthew 11:15,20-24).*

These folk, of course, have been in their graves near on two thousand years. They are located in 'hell' (Gk. *Hades*—Matthew 11:23). It is a state in which '*...the dead do not know anything' (Ecclesiastes 9:5) - not even the righteous dead, for '...in death there is no remembrance of you: in the grave who shall give you thanks? (Psalm 6:5, cf 115:17).*

That time will come when the millennial reign of Messiah comes to an end. As said Jesus: '*...the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth' (John 5:28-29).* It's that time when '*...the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished' (Revelation 20:5).*

God is just. God is fair. All will in their time be 'chosen'. And, as today, they must also choose . **Ω**

The End Time

When can we expect the 'end time'?

Looking forward to the 'week-end'? Saturday and Sunday—two days out of the seven. It's the 'end-time' of our week, just under a third of it.

The Scriptures, too, on a larger canvas speak of the end time, otherwise called the 'last days', the 'last time (s)'—though the actual words 'end time' appear only as the '*time of the end*'. It need not be limited to just an hour or two on the divine time-table, the time of the end of human rule! It applies over millennia! Care is needed in how we use the various terms.

When?

The words have varied meaning in Scripture. Jacob, for example, foresees the state of his sons in '*the last days*' (Genesis 49:1) - in the distant future. The author of the book of Hebrews, refers to the time of his writing as '*these last days*' (ch 1:2)—the final period of human rule, the days since the advent of Jesus, while for Peter this period also is '*the last times*', and Paul calls his days '*...the ends of the world*' (I Corinthians 10:11). The apostle John calls his late first century '*the last time*' (I John 2:18) marked, then as now, by '*...many antichrists*' (opponents of Christ).

Unfolding Plan

During this present Christian era God's plan is being further unveiled—as the demonic stranglehold of the mediaeval church over God's Word by such 'antichrists' is being disentangled and the Scriptures are now known worldwide thanks to men like Tyndale and Erasmus and Luther, and many such organizations as the Bible Society. And from the mid-nineteenth century increasing light has been shed on the Gospel taught by Jesus—long buried in false tradition.

Matthew 24:4-28 may refer to the period leading to the destruction of the Temple (70AD).—indeed a time of *thlipsis*. It was followed by the dispersion of the Jews and by the light of the Gospel being all but extinguished during the Middle Ages.

As was told to Daniel: '*...Go your way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end* (ch 12:9). The understanding of the last times is unfolding during this time—on God's schedule.

The messenger, however, gave Daniel some clues as to *when*: '*...Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand*' (v.10). It's a cameo of the persecution of Christians, and the blind spiritual ignorance that engulfs the world in the present age.

Long buried truths are being restored—in preparation for the coming of the Kingdom's establishment on earth. Freedom of religion and democratic norms have facilitated Gospel outreach and the calling of selected men and women to prepare for that Kingdom.

Time of the End

There is a widespread perception that we are now at a point in history depicted as the 'end-time', the time during which our planet and all it contains will suffer extreme privation. It's the time just before the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings to relieve man of his misused right to govern and our mismanagement of the planet. And the coming of the longed-for return of a Golden Age of peace and prosperity for all.

The apostle Peter refers to this time—just before the first resurrection when the people of God are: '*...kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*' (I Peter 1:5).

It's a recurring theme recycled time and again through the ages—and it *will* visit mankind in due course. When wickedness once again is the universal norm and man's self destruction is imminent the Creator will indeed intervene—suddenly.

God works to an 'outline plan' (eg Daniel ch 2) within a predetermined time span, but within that He is flexi-

ble as to timing, depending on our choices. Jesus noted that it was the Father alone who will decide when is the appropriate moment he, Jesus, will return (Acts 1:7).

As warned Jesus '*...be you also ready: for in an hour that you think not the Son of man is coming*' (Matthew 24:44). Ω

Will Christians suffer?

God is often portrayed as sitting at a console and constantly seeking opportunity to press the ZAP button and ready to unleash a bolt of lightening on those who offend Him. Don't get it right, don't live up to His conception of 'perfection' and 'I will punish you'.

It's not unusual for such a time (Great Tribulation) to be viewed as God's retribution on those Christians who are lax in their faith. Don't measure up, it is said, and fiery indignation will engulf you. Persecution and distress ['tribulation'] will somehow turn you to a closer walk with God, to more perfect obedience—indeed to 'punish' you.

AS Christians, when we fail to walk 'in the light of His Word' we inevitably experience the consequences! And our Father will indeed, in love, correct us by an appropriate measure (Hebrews 12).

Jesus foresaw that many believers would be martyred just prior to his return, and worldwide persecution of those who follow Christ is certain to intensify. But it's the inevitable consequence of mankind spurning the Creator and placing their faith in human hands. He did not, however, design a 'great tribulation for such a purpose.

Anciently three men were faced with a fiery death (Daniel 3) for their loyalty to God. Their response?: '*...God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand. But if not, be it known unto you, O king, that we will not serve your gods*'. And they were delivered!

Time to Know God

Do you really understand the nature of God?

You have probably heard the following, or something like it: *'I wouldn't touch that politician (... financial adviser, estate agent, teacher, minister) with a barge-pole. I've heard so many rumours'*. Give a dog a bad name and it sticks!

What about God? What have you heard about Him? Would you want to be in a relationship with the God of your imagination?

Jesus? Gentle, tender, loving, compassionate—what's not to like! But what about that 'Old Testament' God, the 'bearded antediluvian' who ethnic cleansed a territory to help His favoured nation? Who at one stage wiped out virtually all of mankind? Yet the One Jesus was pleased to address as his Father?

Consider. Get to know that maligned politician and you may be surprised to find how helpful he is to your cause, how pleasant, how friendly. You might even become life-long friends! All that original negativity proved to be based on hearsay—for you simply didn't know him. Might the same not be found of God?

God did indeed so act—to remove those who (like the Canaanites) would endanger His plan, subvert His purpose. Yet it is claimed in the Scriptures that He is 'love'. That He is compassionate. That He is merciful and forgiving. And given that He is the all-powerful, ever-living Creator of the vastness of the Universe, the source of the complexity of all life—should we not trust His judgment?

The Unseen God

There's widespread misunderstanding within Christianity as to who is God. In fact, most are unaware that the LORD (JHVH) of the Old Testament is none other than the one who became Jesus, became wholly human.

God the Father to whom Jesus prayed, is invisible to human eye: *'...No one has seen God at any time'* (John 1:18), adding *'...You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor have you seen His form'* (ch 5:37). The unseen God has *'...committed all judgment to the Son'* (John 5:22).

Jesus, in other words, is the same Being as that vilified God of the Old Testament—the same nature, the same character, ready to act in the same way when appropriate! And as he *will* do when he returns to overthrow those who destroy his creation, and to reign over mankind.

Divine Nature

Time, then, to more closely examine that divine nature—in both Old and New Testaments. 'Gentle, tender, loving, compassionate' is indeed a true portrait of Jesus the Messiah. He is popularly portrayed as 'the Good Shepherd, and claims that title for himself (John 10:11,14).

As such he would be totally dedicated to his flock—loyal, solicitous of their welfare and tending to their needs, protective of predators, healing their injuries. And isn't that precisely how the LORD is portrayed in that most famous of King David's psalms (Psalm 23)? As is recorded in Hebrews, *'...Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever'* (ch 13:8)—as he is in both Testaments.

Jesus as a flesh and blood human being experienced and endured all sorts of opposition and suffering, fully understanding what his fellow

human beings experience in life (Hebrews 4:15).

God Is Love

What about his Father—can we imagine that He experienced less anguish at the sufferings of His 'only-begotten' Son? That He doesn't understand the human beings He conceived of and created?

In the last day of his life Jesus said: *'...I and my Father are one'* (John 17:30). They share the same emotions, the same love, the same concern for our well-being.

In the depths of despair as Jerusalem was besieged by the Chaldeans, Jeremiah penned a series of poems ('Lamentations'). In the midst of such horrific suffering he could write: *'...Surely the LORD'S mercies are not consumed, surely His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. 'The LORD is my portion', says my soul; 'Therefore will I hope in Him.' The LORD is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him'* (ch 3:22-25).

'God' is the Family name for both Father and Son (Jesus). Both are thus included in the words of Jesus: *'...God is love'* (1 John 4:8,16). 'Love' embraces all that's good—compassion, mercy, comfort, support, protection. Love isn't a mechanical obedience to 'the Law'—anyone can do that—but the outpouring of the indwelling Spirit of God. It is comprehensively described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. (*Read it!*)

Know God!

To properly know God is to be in a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ, through His indwelling Spirit that imparts His mind, His mind-set, His attitude to life.

His nature—love—grows in the Christian over time as we voluntarily and willingly submit to His will, as it is revealed in 'the Scriptures of truth'. There is no other way to remain a child of the Father, to be in a filial relationship with Him, to intimately know Him. **Ω**

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unsigned articles are by the Editor

The ‘Great Tribulation’ weighs heavily on the minds of many Christians

The Tribulation, as understood by many Bible students, is a historical period of some three and a half years (some say seven) foreseen by Jesus as a time of world chaos. It looms large in prophetic scenarios of the end-time, and is generally viewed as a time of divine retribution—and by some as a time of physical punishment or correction on lax (‘Laodicean’) Christians.

Other Bible students, however, believe that Christians will be whisked away before it strikes and thus escape its ravages—the so-called ‘rapture’. It has been brought to prominence by such works as the ‘*Left Behind*’ series of books and films.

Troubled Times

Having given instruction to his hearers as to how to cope, Jesus said: ‘...*there will be great affliction [Gk. thlipsis—tribulation], 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*’ (Matthew 24:21-22).

Bible prophets are at one in noting that the end-times will be marked by distressing times for mankind—and not least for the two Houses of Israel, who will experience national deportation and captivity following their decline due to wars, famine and disease epidemics as a result of God being side-lined in our national life.

Nor will it be an easy time for Christians who will be singled out for their opposition to the new world order headed by a powerful and brutal anti-Christian despot intent on world domination.

The ‘Tribulation’: *should you fear it?*

It’s the way of the world, for the the human record from earliest times is of ‘wars and rumours of wars’. Having abandoned the Creator’s revealed way of life our

grasp on the way of peace has been tenuous. So, yes—*thlipsis*, tribulation, has dogged our tracks down the ages.

But foreseeing the close of human-led civilisation, Jesus said: ‘...*as the days of Noah, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man*’ (Matthew 24:37). That was a time of widespread violence and depravity (Genesis 6:11).

The apostle John presents this end-time period as ‘...*the tribulation, the great*’ (Revelation 7:14), thus emphasizing its intensity. Jesus marks it as ‘...*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*’ (Matthew 24:21-22). It is the time symbolized by the *Fifth Seal* in the revelation Jesus gave to John (Revelation 6:9).

No Escape?

As the end-time approaches, Christians can expect more than those afflictions that are part and parcel of normal daily life. For our commitment to Christ in those days will draw fire—from neighbours, from the antichristian powers then extant, even from false brethren.

Referring to these end-times Jesus’s focus was on his followers: ‘...*Then they will deliver you up to be afflicted [Gk.thlipsis] and will kill you. And you will be hated of all nations for My name’s sake*’ (Matthew 24:8-9).

The Seals

Each ‘Seal’ of Revelation represents a sequence of events on the world stage. (Ancient documents were written on scrolls and secured by a wax seal.)

In the context of the end-time period of *thlipsis* we should note that it comes to a head *before* Jesus returns to reign. It is immediately followed by ‘heavenly signs’—the sixth seal (Matthew 24:29, Revelation 6:12-17).

The opening of the seventh seal reveals a further time sequence of earth-shattering events—called ‘*Trumpets*’ of which there are seven (they begin *ch* 8). It is only at the end of this seventh seal—called ‘*the third woe*’ and also ‘*the last trumpet*’—that Jesus returns.

The apostle Paul expands on this in his letter to the Corinthians (*ch* 15:52). It is the time of the resurrection of the saints (I Thessalonians 4:16).

The Seven Seals

First Seal	Deception
Second Seal	War
Third Seal	Famine
Fourth Seal	Epidemics
Fifth Seal	Martyrdom
Sixth Seal	Signs in sky
Seventh Seal	<i>comprises</i>
	1st Trumpet
	2nd Trumpet
	3rd Trumpet
	4th Trumpet
	5th Trumpet (1st Woe)
	6th Trumpet (2nd Woe)
	7th Trumpet (3rd Woe) <i>is</i>
	7 Last Plagues

Tribulation –*thlipsis*

The Greek is translated (KJV) *tribulation* some score of times. It is a general word signifying *trial, affliction, anguish, trouble*—once as *persecution*.

Thlipsis indeed. [Hate: Gk *miseo*—malicious feelings towards, aversion to.]

As Christians, however, we can depend on divine support through such times, even should our commitment result in martyrdom.

Notes Paul: '...*No temptation [adversity] has you in its power but such as is common to human nature; and God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength. But, when the [adversity] comes, He will also provide the way of escape; so that you may be able to bear it*' (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Trust Me

Whatever our future may hold as His children we can always trust our Father in heaven to care for us in good times and bad. He doesn't maliciously punish us to 'whip us into line', but He lovingly encourages us to stay close to Him, to stay vigilant.

The coming distressing times (and they can fall on us at any time!) are not an affliction by God on mankind but the inevitable consequence of human failure and human destructiveness—as foreseen by Jesus. The so-called 'tribulation' is not a punishment imposed by God!

God's revealed (in the Scriptures) Way of life, when embraced, is a protective hedge, guarding us from the self-inflicted evils that affect each of us. Non-compliance uproots the hedge, permits the entrance of harmful and occasionally overwhelming influences.

As governments choose to ignore God's revealed path for good governance and trample over His laws which are '*...for our good*' then we can expect increasing tribulation. As always, we must place our trust in Him. Ω

Josiah's Passover

The apostle Paul reminds us that the writings of the Old Testament were written '*...for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come*' (I Corinthians 10:14, Romans 15:4). The restoration of the long-neglected Passover ceremony by King Josiah—one of the 'good kings'—(6th c. BC) has useful guidance as to when it should now be observed.

The king was careful to ensure that the procedure for Passover followed the directions given by God to Moses: '*...Make sure the people celebrate according to the instructions that the LORD gave Moses*' (II Chronicles 35:6, 12 CEV).

As Moses had directed, the Passover lambs were sacrificed on the 14th day of the first month (Nisan) on the calendar then in use: '*...on the fourteenth day of the first month, the lambs were killed for the Passover celebration*' (v.1).

That date is universally accepted by those churches who observe

the Passover annually. But when? The majority of churches insist it is after sundown on the 13th of the month. Others say it should be the daytime portion of the day, at about the time Jesus died on the cross—mid-afternoon, Nisan 15. (Anciently the days began at sundown.)

Josiah's Passover required the sacrifice of some thirty thousand lambs (v.7), despite the number of priests and Levites a lengthy task. No surprise then that '*...the priests, the sons of Aaron, were offering up the burnt offering and the fat until nightfall*' (v.14).

'Night' (Heb. *layil*) occurs over 200 times in the Old Testament, referring consistently to darkness—around 6pm in Palestine. (In several places it is qualified by a word signifying *mid(dle)*—not necessarily 12pm!)

It is clear, then, that the Passover was sacrificed on the daylight portion of Nisan 14 from mid-afternoon 'according to the law of Moses'. Accordingly it was to be eaten before midnight—which was by then the first day of the *Unleavened Bread* festival, a holy day, Nisan 15 (v.17).

Since Jesus is '*...our Passover, sacrificed for us*' (I Corinthians 5:7) the Passover is now celebrated annually as the 'Last Supper' or 'Christian Passover' held the evening before the original Passover at the time of Jesus's last meal with his disciples just before his trial and death (I Corinthians 11:23).

As noted by Paul (*ch* 5:6-8) the church continued to observe the festival of *Unleavened Bread*, (the 'Passover' - Luke 22:1) until the apostate church replaced it with the pre-Christian Easter observance. Ω

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MiniStudy**Why Prophecy?**

‘...no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God’ (II Peter 1:21)

The study of Bible prophecy is almost an obsession with some believers, and has occupied many down through the centuries. Not surprising, for it has been estimated that nearly one third of the Bible is prophetic in some form. Driven, perhaps, by Jesus’s statement ‘*...I will come again*’ there is, unsurprisingly, a desire to know ‘*When?*’ What should occupy the Bible student, however, is ‘*Why?*’

- *Caution* is the operative word when it comes to prophecy, given the range of proffered interpretations! Also, it comes to us in different languages, from different cultures, with different idioms—and from many mouths over many centuries. Bible prophecy isn’t trivial. No crystal ball, no fun-fair soothsayer, no astrologer. It concerns life and death, the rise and fall of nations—and our eternal destiny
- As the apostle Peter makes clear, true prophecy derives from the mind of God, mediated by His Spirit. It is trustworthy. He ‘*...declare[s] the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure*’ (Isaiah 46:10). It is not from the often drug-induced musings of an oracle, no matter how well respected and popular
- *Prophecy is a statement of God’s vision of the future*, leading inexorably to the fulfilment of His masterplan. But it is not set in stone! He does not coerce individuals or nations to obey Him, but so arranges circumstances that mankind at every level voluntarily chooses the path laid out for them. Hence, within His overall timetable, it is pointless for us to seek to pin-point specific events—or dates
- *Prophecy is warning*. In the beginning God created mankind to function perfectly according to built-in spiritual principles. They are our ‘operating system’ and throughout history He has time and again warned of the inevitable consequence of transgressing those principles. We are individually free to choose our path in life, and all in authority—from head of a family to head of a nation—are held responsible by God for our choices: ‘*...He that being often reprov’d hardens his neck shall suddenly be broken, and that without remedy*’ (Proverbs 29:1)
- The Bible presents us with a word picture demonstrating the purpose of prophecy—the book of Jonah. The Assyrians (Nineveh was their capital) were fierce, cruel, unmerciful (eg II Kings 19:17, Isaiah 10:7) and in Jonah’s time were about to reap their reward—God’s judgment. Jonah was sent with God’s warning that He had had enough: ‘*...Repent!*’ He demands. Perhaps the citizens had also had enough of violence (Jonah 3:8–9) - for they swiftly obeyed the king’s urgent call to fast—and to repent, to change their ways—in response to Jonah’s warning. God noted their heart-felt change and their destruction was averted—though many years later they reverted to their old ways (see Nahum). Writes Peter: ‘*...The Lord ...is long-suffering toward us, not having purposed any to perish, but all to come to repentance*’ (II Peter 3:9). Ezekiel adds: ‘*...I [the LORD] do not have delight in the death of the wicked, except in the wicked turning from his way, and so to live*’ (ch 33:11)
- God loves His creation (John 3:16). He has purpose. He has a plan—and raises up nations (Daniel 2, Isaiah 10:4ff) and individuals (Isaiah 44:28) at appropriate moments to bring it to fruition: ‘*...The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying: Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand*’ (Isaiah 14:24). His Word has often been fulfilled—and other prophecies have yet to be fulfilled: ‘*... Behold, the former things have come to pass, and I declare new things before they happen*’ (ch 42:9, 46:10)
- To King Nebuchadnezzar, for example, God in a dream outlined His masterplan for ensuing events up to ‘the latter days’, and His purpose to establish His globe-encircling Kingdom (Daniel 2). That ‘dream’ has yet to have its final fulfilment, but its accuracy to date over two millennia is a witness to His existence; He is the one true God. The ‘four kingdoms’ transpired as prophesied, the ‘fourth’ (Rome/Europe) still present on the world scene awaiting its final demise and the return of Messiah to reign over all mankind: ‘*...the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth*’ (Daniel 2:35)
- Bible prophecy, then, serves to warn us as individuals, to call on nations and their leaders to conform to God’s revealed principles for life and thus avert the consequences of failure to so do—and to demonstrate that He is the all-powerful Creator of all that exists

Ω

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