

new **Horizons**

Vol 22 No 3

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addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



inside...

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CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

With around two thousand Christian denominations vying for your attention, it's easy to miss the important issues of life and religion. It's our hope that through *New Horizons* our readers will come to understand the true meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and by His apostles in the clearest of terms - and recorded for us in the Scriptures. Over the centuries that truth has been buried, dug up, buried again. Our desire is to restore the simple apostolic message. We hope you will be excited by what the Scriptures reveal about life, and the horizons beyond.

Who We Are

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* is an international association of independent local assemblies - Christians who meet together for worship, instruction in the faith and fellowship. Each assembly is self-governing according to Bible principles, but co-operates through our Conference with other like-minded assemblies to work towards agreed evangelistic goals.

These goals are within the framework of the commission set for his church by Jesus: "...going, therefore, disciple all nations, baptising them...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). He further commanded that we "...Shepherd...[and] feed my sheep".

To these ends we publish Bible-based literature - eg our bi-monthly e-mail Newsletter **OUTREACH**, the **NEW HORIZONS** magazine, the **BIBLE BASICS** on-line home study course, and a 32-lesson **BIBLE 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* or a *Publications List* please request it from any of the addresses listed or go to our website: **www.cgom.org**

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Few stop to think why Jesus of Nazareth is called *Christ*

We are accustomed to the Bible terms *Christ, Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus etc* but the significance of those titles too often may pass us by. What does that strange word ‘Christ’ mean? Is it more than just an alternative name for Jesus? Why did it seem to earn him respect, even among his own often hostile compatriots?

Most Bible students are of course aware that ‘Christ’ derives from the Greek *christos*, meaning *anointed*, which is equivalent in meaning to the Hebrew *mashyach* (there are alternative spellings). We say *Messiah*, and Christians recognize this applies to Jesus.

Defined

But Jesus is not the only Messiah! To anoint in this context is to set someone aside for office by anointing the individual with oil. Thus Queen Elizabeth was so anointed at her coronation in 1953—as have all British monarchs. It is the most sacred part of this service, and symbolic of the monarch receiving God’s Spirit. The implication is that they rule by His authority, the divine right of kings’. The ceremony was widespread in Mediaeval Europe

The practice of solemn anointing for

kingship was known in ancient Egypt and among the Canaanites and Hittites, and likely having been early on introduced by God.

Indeed the Bible records God’s interaction with the descendants of the patriarch Abraham. He formalized their rituals and called for the anointing of the priests He had chosen ‘...*you shall anoint them, and you shall consecrate them, and you shall sanctify them. And they shall minister as priests to Me*’ (Exodus 28:41).

Until the time of Samuel Israel had been governed by a succession of individuals whom God had chosen. Because of gross

Christ is King

misbehaviour by Samuel’s sons the people demanded that Samuel ‘...*appoint a king to us, to judge us, like all the nations*’ (I Samuel 8:5). Several centuries before God had granted permission—when they should request it—for them to appoint a king, though He added wise guidance, since almost universally ignored (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). All Israel’s kings and priests were anointed during their coronation. For example, God chose (v.1) David to succeed the failed Saul:

A Messiah-like individual also is spoken of in Islam—the Mahdi, who will appear at the end of time. (Some anticipate he will appear during 2018.) He will bring justice to the world.

‘...*Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of Jehovah came upon David from that day and onward*’ (I Sam-

uel 16:13).

King Jesus

The Bible prophets had predicted the overthrow of our world order when ‘...*a king shall reign in righteousness*’ (Isaiah 32:1), equated with a time when ‘...*Jehovah of Hosts shall reign in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem; and before His elders is His glory*’ (ch 24:23). The prophet Zechariah notes: ‘... *the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one*’ (ch 14:9).

In a clear reference to Jesus’s return from heaven he tells us: ‘...*his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives*’ (v.4), echoing the angelic message to the disciples at his ascension: ‘...*this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet*’ (Acts 1:11-12).

A Real King

The prophet Micah had long ago predicted: ‘...*out of you [Bethlehem] shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting*’ (ch 5:2).

And after Jesus was born we find the eastern magi, clearly aware of such prophecies, in Jerusalem asking ‘...*Where is He that is born King of the Jews?*’ (Matthew 2:4). The tyrant King Herod (the Great) understood this as a threat to his throne and dynasty, *cont’d p.3*

Nations at Risk

‘The West’ is poised on the edge of social and economic collapse. Can we be rescued?

Radical change has engulfed the Anglo-saxon nations, and observers think we are on the way out.

The *United States* in its electoral choice has gambled the nation’s stability by selecting a business tycoon without political experience as its President— seen by many as a leap in the dark. He won, though the popular vote was close.

The *United Kingdom* has ventured to leap into what many see as a step to a bright future freed from foreign domination, and viewed by others as a blind leap into isolated chaos.

After forty years linked to what began as an era of economic co-operation with our continental neighbours in Europe but has evolved into a political ‘United States of Europe’, just over half of those who voted in the United Kingdom (17.4 million) chose the independence route.

Clearly—divided nations. Both are economically powerful, the USA dominating the world, the United Kingdom number five globally. But problems abound.

Playing with Fire

If you have already entered your underground bunker or have prepared it you *know* there’s trouble ahead. Many of us wear blinkers and are blind to the impending chaos. The rest of us just get on with life, hoping for a new dawn.

Nations measure their global standing by their gross domestic product— by their economy. So, too, the average household where there’s a tendency to align with our more prosperous neighbour. Yet for the sensible family (unlike the nations, apparently) there’s much more to success than the bank balance; there’s the obligation to recognize spiritual values.

We discipline our children. We stay

‘in the black’ financially. We have a strong work ethic and take responsibility for our actions. We have, above all, a link to the world of spirit, a guiding force enlightening our conscience and directing our steps.

Not, though, our nations. The United States for example, has a debt of some twenty-six trillion dollars (some calculate fifty). That’s 26 followed by twelve zeros. The United Kingdom has a 2;6 trillion deficit. How long can we survive? (Average UK income is 26 and *three* zeros!)

More Than Cash

But there’s more to success, to prosperity, to greatness than a fat bank balance. Jesus, in his parable of the rich farmer, hits the nail on the head: ‘...*This is how it is with those who pile up riches for themselves but are not rich in God’s sight*’ (Luke 12:21). Rather: ‘...*A good reputation and respect are worth much more than silver and gold*’ (Proverbs 22:1). For individuals *and* for nations.

What’s ‘Bad’?

Our Creator reserves the right to set standards, described throughout His Word: ‘...*To honor the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil ways and false words*’ (Proverbs 8:13). *He* determines those false and evil ways written large on human conscience and written large for all of us to see in the Scriptures. Too often they are ignored, especially by nations and not least by our own:

- far too many elderly and infirm languish in sub-standard homes, reserves often funneled to finance the feckless
- soft justice leads to an increasing level of violent crime, laws unenforced
- unchecked rampant promiscuity and adultery contributes to divorce, broken families and sexual disease, while disrespect for human life destroys life in the womb and perverse sexual practices pervade the media

and is legalized by our governments

- personal property is unprotected, the safety of citizens sidelined
- dishonest testimony in Courts of Law goes unpunished

Responsibility

Yet Government is responsible to care for all such matters, their failure undermining the fabric of the nation and leading down the path to self-destruction.

Self-aggrandizement—that ‘...*pride and arrogance*’ (Proverbs 8:13)—of our leadership involves us in destructive foreign interventions with a rising death toll and mass migrations, while putting national safety at risk through the dismantling of our armed forces.

God—our God—warned ancient Judah: ‘...*[the community of] Sodom, she and her daughters, have not done as you and your daughters have done; this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and her daughters. Also, she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. Also, they were haughty and did abomination before My face, so I turned them away as I saw fit*’ (Ezekiel 16:49-51). It’s a reflection of our ‘civilization’.

Warped Perspective

Sittings in both Houses of the UK Parliament begin daily with prayers. One states: ‘*Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and her government, to Members of Parliament and all in positions of responsibility, the guidance of your Spirit. May they never lead the nation wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but laying aside all private interests and prejudices keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all mankind; so may your kingdom come and your name be hallowed*’.

That is what is said—but it is just so many empty words. The ‘...*guidance of your Spirit*’ is not sought, the Scriptures not examined to seek—and follow— that guidance. That is the key to national stability. Ω

‘No Other Choice’ The Protestant Reformation has of late come under increasing scruti- ny. Can it survive?

Five centuries after Jesus walked the earth and initiated his church, the local church in Rome had gained ascendancy over most of the Western world and became known as the *Roman Catholic* [ie universal] *Church*. A thousand years later its authority was challenged by a German monk, Martin Luther (in 1517). Another five hundred and the Reformation itself has come under fire—even from Protestants.

Appalled by the gross corruption of the established church Luther was the catalyst for a rising tide of dissent and dissatisfaction among Christian believers—grown weary of the Inquisition and the oppression of the Popes. His chief concern was the lack of proclamation of the Gospel, indulgences and rejection of the *Canon of the Mass* which Luther described as “that abominable concoction drawn from everyone’s sewer and cesspool.”

Counter-reformation

The established church convened a Council (the *Council of Trent*) in 1545, continuing until 1563, to counteract the reformers teachings, to clarify Catholic beliefs and to reassert papal authority. It was attended by about forty Bishops during its twenty-five sessions.

The last fifty years has seen a weakening of Protestant resolve to resist the Roman heresies. The *Council*, called by Pope John 23rd, stirred the ecumenical movement—the desire to unify the churches. It has since snow-balled and culminated at the beginning of this century in the historic signing by all major denominations of an agreement on *justification*

Note: All Council decrees down the centuries remain in place and cannot be changed. The decrees of *Trent* were reinforced in the 1962-65 Second Vatican Council.

Christ Is King *cont’d from p.1* and determined to search out and kill the young child. A real threat, given the Messianic fervor of the time.

At his show-trial Pilate asks Jesus: ‘...Are you the King of the Jews?’ *And Jesus said to him, you say it*, in confirmation. Jesus was so accepted by huge numbers. Matthew records his entry into Jerusalem. As his crucifixion drew near Jesus had commissioned an ass, part of a symbolic gesture signifying his royalty: ‘...they led the ass and the colt. And they put on them their garments, and set Him on them’ (Matthew 21:7). Many disciples and other citizens were aware of this and there was great rejoicing

An incident at the enthronement of King Solomon, David’s son, sheds light on this. News reached David that Adonijah tried to usurp the throne to which God had appointed Solomon:

‘...[the King’s retinue] went out and caused Solomon to ride on King David’s mule, and caused

by faith. The document, in fact, was a Jesuit fudge that distorted the Biblical doctrine, but was close enough to deceive those who signed—except, perhaps, for the pope! Also signing were the leaders of the Protestant denominations.

The 1545 Council, as noted, assembled to counteract the reformers. It was at stalemate—as they faced the truth of Luther’s teachings—with some wanting change, and the Catholic position was ‘saved’ only by the intervention of Bishop Reggio.

The Bishop focused on one Protestant teaching which clinched the argument in the Roman Church’s favour. This is the record of his intervention, evidence that swayed

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

him to go to Gihon. And Zadok the priest took the horn of oil out of the Tabernacle and anointed Solomon. And they blew with the ram’s horn, and all the people shouted, Let King Solomon live! And all the people came up after him. And the people were piping with pipes, and rejoicing with great joy’ (I Kings

It was traditional for the new King to express humility by ‘riding on a donkey’ at his coronation. Solomon was then borne to Mount Zion: ‘... I have set My king on My holy mount on Zion’ (Psalm 2:6-7). On entering Jerusalem Jesus, too, proceeded at once to Zion, to the Temple mount.

Jesus, as noted, will at his return be ‘...king over all the earth’. But he also had a legal right to possess the throne then occupied by Herod Antipas, who was appointed (38BC) by Rome, and as recorded by Matthew and Luke. Both Joseph (his *legal* father) and Mary (his mother) were direct linear descendants of King David, of the royal seed. Both royal lines are thought to have terminated in Joseph because of lack of heirs.

Jesus truly is King!

Ω

the Council:

‘This was the inconsistency of the Protestant practice...that gave to the Catholic Church her long-sought and anxiously awaited ground on which to condemn Protestantism and the whole Reformation movement as only a selfishly ambitious rebellion against the Church authority’.

Canon and Tradition, 1859

‘The Protestant claim that they stand upon the written Word only is not true. The written Word explicitly enjoins the observance of the *seventh* day as the Sabbath. They do not observe the seventh day but reject it.’ *ibid*

This satisfied the Bishops, who then proceeded to reinforce and re-affirm the traditional teachings of the Church. The logic of this argument is unchanged. As said one participant: ‘**Sunday or Saturday. There is no other choice**’ Ω

Insight from Paul

The apostle Paul's letters shed a bright light on our walk with God

The apostle is firmly grounded in 'the Scriptures'—the writings of the Old Testament, not least in his understanding of the process of creation and our human origins. He writes: *'...by him [Jesus] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible... all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist [hold together]'* (Colossians 1:16-17).

- In a reference to Genesis (*ch.1 v.3*) he says to the brethren in Corinth: *'...God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness'* (II Corinthians 4:6), echoing God's revelation to Moses *'...let there be light'* (Genesis 1:3)
- The account passed on by Moses of what befell our first parents is also a foundation teaching of Paul: *'...Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression'* - 1 Timothy 2:14)
- Adam, Paul reasons, was a uniquely created being shaped from clay and direct from God's hand: *'...The first man is of the earth, earthy'* (I Corinthians 15:47). And in *v.45*: *'...The first [in order] man Adam was made a living soul'*
- When he addresses mankind's nature Paul recognizes, with Genesis (and indeed the rest of Scripture) that man is a mortal being, that when we die we are truly dead and that we enter a passive state. We are oblivious to our surroundings and, as he describes it, *'asleep'*. We

await our resurrection to judgment. He refers to Genesis 2:17: *'...in the day you eat [the forbidden fruit] you will surely die'*. Man was not created immortal—he could die

- A further reference to Genesis by the apostle is to 'the serpent', Satan: *'...as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ'* (II Corinthians 11:3). The account is in Genesis *ch 3*. Paul also makes reference to this malign being under other guises—*'...god of this world'* (II Corinthians 4:4), *'...the prince of the power of the air'* (Ephesians 2:2)
- We further see that the apostle accepts as historical the Old Testament characters, referring for example to Moses a score of times, to Abraham, to Noah, to Jacob, to Esau.

The apostle thus directs us to understand Genesis to be reality and not a collection of myths. All of Scripture is to be understood in the light of these foundation principles.

In this, of course, Paul reflects the mind-set of Jesus who said: *'...beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself'* (Luke 24:27). All the Scriptures, he says, are written *'...for our learning, that...we might have hope'* - Romans 15:4).

How about you? If you want to unlock the door to eternal life you must follow the example of Paul's hearers: *'...they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so'* (Acts 17:11). Ω

Asleep...at the Bible?

Most of us will on occasion fall asleep while on our knees, awakening with our heads planted on our Bible. But what about the Bible? Does sleep overtake you when you study God's Word?

The term 'study' perhaps scares you—sounds too much like work. Time spent with the Bible for many Christians means a cursory reading of the Psalms or Proverbs. Or it may simply be limited to John 3:16.

Contrast this approach with that of the Christians in Berea: *'... every day they studied the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was really true'* (Acts 17:11). And why not, for Jesus said *'... sanctify them with your [God's] word; your word is truth'* (John 17:17).

To be made holy, to be sanctified, is surely the purpose, the goal, of every true believer. And it is through regular study—and application—of God's Word in our lives that we begin to become Christ-like, to become *'...perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect'* (Matthew 5:48).

Study that isn't structured, however, can lead to the eyelids drooping. So we offer you a chance to have some guided study through the Words of life. You are invited to apply for our free study course. Ω

STUDY THE WORD
Be sure to enroll for our free 32-lesson Study Course. It's a key to what is for many a 'Book of Mystery'

Jesus solemnly warned his hearers to be aware of those who would pervert his message

Dr Billy Graham who recently died aged 99 had a marked effect on countless lives with his message—consistent for seven decades—that ‘*Jesus is the answer*’. Millions have read his *My Answer* column or attended his crusades and become familiar with that word *gospel*.

In view of the numerous warnings and admonitions by Jesus and his apostles concerning the nature of the ‘gospel’ everyone who ‘evangelizes’ is judged by high standards: ‘*...we should not all try to become teachers. In fact, teachers will be judged more strictly than others*’ (James 3:1).

The apostle Paul warns his hearers: ‘*...If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed [Gk. anathema]*’ (Galatians 1:9). The authentic gospel had been presented by Paul, but others were distorting his message, thus putting the salvation of their hearers at risk. He perceives their motivation as being their desire to ‘*...please men*’, to avoid persecution, curry favour.

No Easy Ride

The history of evangelism confirms that this attitude of ‘men-pleasing’ permeated the church even in its early years. We find even the apostle Peter was rebuked for his hypocrisy in dealing with Jews: ‘*...[Peter] withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision*’ (Galatians 2:12). His behaviour affected many around him, both Christian and Jew.

Jesus had made clear that the path of discipleship wasn’t going to be an easy ride: ‘*...Enter through*

Is There Another Gospel?

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, because narrow is the gate and constricted is the road that leads to life, and there are few who find it!’ (Matthew 7:13-15). What would be needed, in other words is true grit, a willingness to stand up and be counted.

Notice Jesus says that entry to the Kingdom is embraced by ‘the few’. Vast committed crowds won’t crowd through the ‘church doors’. Certainly there will be ‘many’ who would be attracted to Jesus, but few stay the course.

Failed Harvest

Jesus, in Matthew 13, gives us an overview of the fruit result-

‘Everyone hearing the Word of the kingdom, and not understanding, then the evil one comes and catches away that which was sown in his heart. This is that sown by the roadside. And that sown on the stony places is this: the one hearing the Word, and immediately receiving it with joy, but has no root in himself, but is temporary, and tribulation, or persecution occurring because of the Word, he is at once offended. And that sown into the thorn bushes is this: the one hearing the Word, and the anxiety of this age, and the deceit of riches, choke the Word, and it becomes unfruitful. But that sown on the good ground is this: the one hearing the Word, and understanding it, who indeed bears and yields fruit, one truly a hundred-fold, and one sixty, and one thirty.’

ing from evangelism, comparing it to a harvest. The ‘seed’ sown is ‘*...the Word of the Kingdom*’ (v.19), the ‘good news’. According to Jesus most seed does not reach maturity, doesn’t bear fruit.

Some ‘seed’ falls by the roadside but is simply lost, for ‘*...the evil one*

comes and catches away that which was sown in his heart’. Other texts (eg II Corinthians 4:3-4) make clear this is the majority of those who hear the Gospel: ‘*...If our gospel is being hidden, it has been hidden in those being lost, in whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving, so that the brightness of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God, should not dawn on them*’. [See side-panel]

Jesus, in Matthew 7, adds a warning: ‘*...Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inside are ravenous wolves*’ (v.15). It is these false teachers that are largely responsible for setting the obstacles in the way to the Kingdom, who deplete the ‘soil’, harden the hearts, of the majority of those who come within ear-shot of the true Gospel.

Their ‘gospel’ is false. They are ‘*...false apostles, deceitful workers transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And did not Satan marvelously transform himself into an angel of light? It is not a great thing, then, if also his ministers transform themselves as ministers of righteousness*’ (II Corinthians 11:14-15).

Only an estimated 2% of those who ‘decided for Christ’ at a Billy Graham crusade were new to church-going. 80% of these were estimated to lose interest within a year, fewer than one third lasted over three months.

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unsigned articles are by the Editor

More Obstacles

Some, however, hear the message and are intrigued by it or see it as the answer to their day-to-day problems. When they find that Jesus has demands more like walking bare-foot on stones they give up. They crumble when faced by hostility from family and colleagues. They have not nourished the seed through the ‘means of grace’ (study of the Scriptures, prayer, meditation *etc*) and their roots wither.

Having heard the message, others persist for a time but become tangled in the daily grind of caring for family, or perhaps the effort required to climb the ladder to success—distractions from the spiritual, and interest fades.

Good ground

That ‘narrow and difficult path’ deters many and ‘...*there are few who find it*’. These few, said Jesus, are ‘good ground’ in which the seed of God’s Word can flourish and produce sound spiritual fruit.

Life throws at each of us a variety of experience. Adversity and life experience in general, for some, prepares the heart to welcome the ‘seed’, yet hardens the heart of others. It is those who are welcoming, the good ground, of whom the Father takes note and draws to Himself: ‘...*No one is able to come to Me*’ said Jesus, ‘*unless the Father who sent Me draws him*’ (John 6:44).

But the criteria for His choice are not their ‘goodness’ nor their intelligence nor their social or financial status. Wrote the apostle Paul to the Corinthian church:

‘...you see your calling, brothers, that there are not many wise according to flesh, nor many powerful, not many well-

born. But God chose the foolish things of the world that the wise might be put to shame, and God chose the weak things of the world so that He might put to shame the strong things. And God chose the low-born of the world, and the despised, and the things that are not, so that He might bring to nothing the things that are, so that no flesh might glory in His presence’.

So—not often the rich or powerful or those ‘born with a silver spoon’. Such may be too comfortable, too ‘snowflake’, too cosseted, too self-sufficient or too shallow to give serious thought to their spirit nor interested in the divine plan for man. God wants a successful outcome for each person whom He draws to Jesus, and He chooses them wisely, inviting each at an appropriate time.

Jesus’s ‘parable of the sower’ tells us that most who express an interest in the Gospel message in this life won’t stay the course but will be side-tracked. How can we tell who’s who?

The answer is—*we can’t*. For who apart from the God-head knows what is in any individual’s heart; He alone is qualified to judge. Someone may appear well-nigh perfect, but who knows what goes on behind closed doors. Taught Jesus: ‘...*Allow both to grow together until the harvest. And in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather the darnel, and bind them into bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my granary*’ (Matthew 13:30).

[Of course, there is, as Paul wrote, a time to exclude someone from our fellowship when their ‘fruit’ is clearly disruptive, and until they change.]

Fruitful Outcome

The Father, too, looks for fruit. He wants us to ‘become perfect’ (Gk.*teleos*: *complete* Matthew 5:48), wants our lives to mirror the character of Jesus expressed through our obedience to His revealed will.

Life’s purpose is for mankind to be transformed from flesh to spirit, to become ‘...*joint heirs with Christ*’ (Romans 8:17) and to work alongside him throughout His eternal Kingdom

Change!

When we reach one of life’s crossroads we may stumble into that ‘God-shaped hole’ that lurks in all our lives. *Is there life beyond life? Does God exist? Will God forgive me?* We then enter on that cycle described in Matthew 13—the seed blows across the field, or falls on the tarmac, or doesn’t root adequately or gets strangled by weeds. *Or we bear fruit.*

The ‘rich young ruler’ is a stark warning. He claimed that from childhood he had observed the commandments, listing the last six of the ten. [The first four of the commandments were the cultural background of the nation.] Not enough, Jesus told him, for you serve an idol, in your case, riches. If you want to be perfect (Gk.*teleos*) sell everything and follow me. There’s more to our relationship with God than merely keeping the commandments.

What the Father looks for is transformed hearts, lives oriented to a family relationship with Him, and reflecting in their daily life the spirit of His commandments—the ‘...*perfect law of liberty*’ (James 2:12).

Jesus expressed the guiding principle of his life as: ‘...*I cont’d p.8*

DAY TIME

We don't give much thought to it—the 'day'. It's there, always with us day and night, 24 hours, seven in a week, 365 of them in a year. All so familiar, and with us since the beginning of time

Then there's the not so precise definition. *His day will come. Doomsday. In my day. Call it a day.* This fuzziness of meaning we take in our stride. And when we turn to the Scriptures the fuzziness continues.

Jesus said '*...Are there not twelve hours in a day?*' Then we find that Adam, were he to sin, would die '*...in the day you eat of [the forbidden fruit]*' (ch 2:17). Yet he lived a further nine centuries plus. *The Day of the LORD* spans more than twenty-four hours. Then there is the account of creation by Moses: '*... These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day [Heb.yom] that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens*' (Genesis 2:4). But there is an anomaly here, for he had just recorded that it took *six* days for Creation (ch 1). 'Day' clearly is not limited to twenty-four hours!

Symbolism

We note that in *Genesis 1* God ended each 'day' with the observation '*...the evening and the morning were the ...day*'. Closure. But when God addresses the seventh day when He Himself rested there is no closure. His work of creation was complete, but the seventh 'day' continues. As wrote the author of Hebrews: '*...he [Christians] that is entered into*

his [continuing] rest, he also has ceased from his own works, as God did from his' (ch 4:10).

There's much symbolism in the Scriptures and we might consider the days of creation as symbolic. Look at it this way. God set in motion the processes for a physical creation in which to carry out His plan. By His awesome power He shaped the invisible 'dark energy' with which He had created 'space' into planets and stars and galaxies: '*...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). Having sited Earth in its perfect location in space God, using natural law, proceeded over perhaps billions of years to prepare it for human occupation.

There followed a series of divine interventions in six stages each of countless aeons during which earth's eco-systems matured. The creation of mankind was the pinnacle, and there has since been no special creation. Each was symbolized as a 'day'. Then, when all was completed, '*...God rested from all His works*'.

The Week

God then divided time into seven-day units—a unique system that had no connection with the planetary movements, as do the month (moon) and the year (sun). Each 'day' represented a symbolic commemoration of a particular phase of special creation. The *seventh* was a memorial of the

whole of creation: '*...in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day*' (Exodus 20:11). The seven day week proclaims the LORD as our sole Creator. God set it as a marker so that man could identify the one and only Creator God.

It is noteworthy that each phase of creation continues in our day. *Space* continues to expand generating new dark matter. *Earth* continues to rearrange its physical

features through volcanic and seismic activity. *Vegetation* continues, from its created genetics, to generate variation. And the purpose of the whole creation, *mankind*, is still a 'work in progress' as God the Father selects

from among us—and trains—those individuals who will reign with Him in His approaching earthly Kingdom and throughout eternity. God initiated the processes, each after its kind, and they continue to unfold in accord with in-built law.

This interpretation of early *Genesis* may be alien to many of our readers, but is worth considering in light of the vast research findings of geologists and cosmologists. They are faced with hard facts which they report—but (the scientific approach) they are not unwilling to change tack when the facts warrant it. Properly understood, natural science and the Bible are in perfect harmony. Ω

7th-day
When Israel became a nation God set before them their Constitution, at the heart of which was the obligation to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. It had been instituted at Creation ('...made for man' - Mark 2:27) as a blessing for all of mankind. He placed His stamp of authority by Himself entering into a Sabbath rest: '*...in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day*' (Exodus 20:11). He notes: '*...on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made*' (Genesis 2:2)

Many 'Creationists' believe the entire physical universe was created in one act of creation some six thousand years ago. Unless God was out to deceive us the testimony of the rocks assures us there were billions of years of activity to bring us to today. The popular 'Big Bang' theory is out of favour and some cosmologists now believe that perhaps the material creation condensed from the 'dark energy' that makes up 90% of the material universe—a 'substance' described by a modern cosmologist as '*...completely alien to us: invisible to our eyes and quite beyond our physical experience*'.

‘I WANT THAT...’

The apostle Paul calls it idolatry. It is perhaps the most insidious of God’s commands. It blights the life of individuals and of nations.
Covetousness

It is, in essence, a desire that can grow to an obsession for the unlawful. I want that new car, that house, that cruise—yet all beyond my means. Envy, too—the neighbours’ life-styles, their family, their jobs. And next door’s wife or husband. All *covetousness*.

That desire, that lust for what you don’t or can’t have or afford can become soul-destroying and often leads to financial ruin. It can squash contentment and lead to misery, to broken and unhappy families.

Our nation is strewn with untold numbers of debt-ridden families. The world is littered with deb-ridden nations. (The USA is in hock to the tune of \$24 trillion, the UK £2 trillion. That’s with twelve zeros.)

Evil Triplets

Condemned time and again in the Scriptures, covetousness is a many-headed evil—but is usually focused on *money or possessions or sex*.

We have, for example, become used to those lottery winners who soon end on the street, having spent all. The apostle Paul warns us: ‘... *But those purposing to be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts, which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all evils, by means of which some having lusted after it were seduced from the faith, and they themselves pierced through by many pains*’ (1 Timothy 6:9-10). The desire for wealth can divert us from the true riches.

What, then, ought we to strive for?: ‘...*a good reputation and respect are worth much more than silver and gold*’ (Proverbs 22:1).

Next is that driver of human relationships, *sex*. No longer condemned as a

wrecker of families, a destroyer of wealth, a source of disease, as *sin—adultery* and *casual sex* (the coveting of an illicit relationship) are condoned throughout society to the detriment of national and personal health and welfare.

The apostle Peter, referring to the scourge of bent preachers, says: ‘...*They want to look for nothing but the chance to commit adultery; their appetite for sin is never satisfied. They lead weak people into a trap. Their hearts are trained to be greedy. They are under God’s curse!*’ (II Peter 2:14). Greedy, often, for a relationship that is forthrightly condemned by God.

Now our third deadly triplet: the desire for *possessions*. ‘*Keep up with the Jones’s*’ is a by-word. That shiny new car that’s beyond your means, a larger residence, designer clothing, that more attentive family, a foreign holiday, health? Again, diverting us from a relationship with our Creator (Matthew 19:16-22).

Divine Perspective

Hear wise words from Paul: ‘... *godliness with contentment is great gain. For we have brought nothing into the world, and it is plain that neither can we carry anything out; we will be satisfied with these*’ (1 Timothy 6:7). Elsewhere he adds: ‘...*owe no-one anything but to love one another*’ (Romans 13:8).

How much heart-ache, how much distress, would be saved if we disciplined ourselves to live within our means, if we were to heed Paul’s admonitions.

Or listen to the Psalmist: ‘...*It is better to live right and be poor than to be sinful and rich*’ (Psalm 37:16). Max out your credit cards, indulge in that shiny new car or unaffordable mortgage or exotic holiday or a designer wardrobe—and face eviction or bankruptcy and shame. Too many that way end as street-sleepers.

Better to apply the wise advice God provides. Aspire to succeed—but *curb your ‘wants’*. Ω

Another Gospel..cont’d

do not seek My will, but the will of the One sending Me, the Father’ (John 5:30). And as this apostle wrote later in his life: ‘...*the one keeping His commandments abides in Him, and He in him*’ (1 John 3:24).

In joyously observing God’s commandments, in other words, we lock ourselves into our relationship with the Father, the architect of all creation, as ‘...*my sons and daughters says the Almighty*’ (II Corinthians 6:18). Indeed, as pointed out by the renowned ‘apostle of love’, John: ‘...*We show our love for God by obeying his commandments, and they are not hard to follow*’.

There are, then, sincere Christian preachers occupying the world’s pulpits who may be unaware they are purveying a *false* gospel. (Though there are many who knowingly do so!) Jesus told his hearers to be wary: ‘...*Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy [preach] in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many works of power? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, those working lawlessness!*’ (Matthew 7:22-23)

You need to be sure.

Ω

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MiniStudy**When Jesus Returns**

*'What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the world?' (Matthew 24:3)
 '...the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the
 inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left' (Isaiah 24:6)*

Among Bible readers there is much confusion as to the nature and sequence of end-time events. A majority, perhaps, believe they will be removed from the calamities prophesied for that time (the 'secret rapture') - their destination being heaven. Others look to a safe place somewhere on earth—maybe a wilderness area in North America or in the Middle East or in New Zealand. Yet others see the return of Jesus as heralding the total destruction of our planet for a thousand years, followed by a 'general resurrection for judgment. We will try to untangle the prophetic threads.

- First understand that '*...the end of the world [Gk.aion]*' refers to the end of an era, an age, and *not* the end of the physical planet. *aion* has a variety of translations in the King James Bible: *ever, age, world, eternal etc* but none imply destruction. Jesus will return from heaven '*...as you have seen him go*' (Acts 1:1) but he has not finished with Earth
- is certain, from the prophecies, is that we are indeed headed for our 'Armageddon' - a universal time of devastation with loss of life far surpassing anything from history. Think world war. Yet we haven't learned from that history! News bulletins warn that we are on the brink of world suicide whether from nuclear weapons unleashed by accident or design, or from deadly toxins or from untreatable diseases or from famine and water shortages
- The modern world has witnessed an incredible increase in knowledge—though confined largely to technological advances, many of which are of course beneficial. But it certainly hasn't increased the wisdom of leaders, who try 'this and that' but don't know the way to a lasting worldwide peace and prosperity. And why? Isaiah has this insight: '*...The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant*' (Isaiah 24:5). At mankind's creation we entered into a covenant with the Creator; we could live and prosper endlessly—if we followed God's guidance: '*...I will look upon [the rainbow], that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth*' (Genesis 9:16)
- As 'the end of the age' approaches human greed and incompetence and natural disasters will decimate the world's population—described as the worst calamity to ever hit mankind (Matthew 24:21). Not a sudden worldwide flood instantly eliminating all mankind but several years of catastrophic destruction and terror that even our modern emergency services can't help, and leaving few survivors: '*... 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)
- Into this world, then, comes the Messiah. Following devastating wars Jesus Christ will '*...stand in that day [at that time] upon the Mount of Olives*' to the east of Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:4). He will be accompanied by the resurrected saints, now immortal spirit. As noted by Isaiah (*ch* 24:6) there will be '*...few men left*'. That 'few' is the small physical remnant of his people Israel with whom He enters a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31), together with people from all nations. They will be organized to build a new civilization under the guidance of the resurrected saints. The cities will be rebuilt and the land cleansed and restored: '*...It will take the Israelites seven months to bury all the corpses and make the land clean again. Everyone in the land will help bury them*' (Ezekiel 39:12-13). All will embrace God's holy days—as, for example, *Tabernacles*: '*...every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles*' (Zechariah 14:16). . (The 'saints' are those in whom dwells God's Spirit having had a 'heart change' ['repentance'] and been baptized and remained faithful to Jesus Christ.)
- The purpose of Messiah's coming is to take the reins of government out of human hands: '*...Then the LORD will be king over all the earth; everyone will worship him as God and know him by the same name*' (v.9). There follows a thousand years of 'project restoration' when the divine law will be universally applied by all nations: '*...he [the LORD] will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off*'. Ω

for further background read:

Key to the Book of Revelation

http://www.cgom.org/Publications/Booklets/Key_to_Revelation.htm

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