

new **Horizons**

Vol 23 No 3

May/June 2019

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 terms clear to those who have 'ears to hear' - 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 Newsletter **OUTREACH, NEW HORIZONS** magazine, the **BIBLE BASICS** on-line home study course, and a 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* or a *Publications List* please request it from any of the addresses listed or go to our website: **www.cgom.org**

Publisher:
Churches of God Outreach Ministries
P O Box 54621
Tulsa, OK 74155-0621
USA

e-mail: information@cgom.org
phone: 1-800-611-8080

Editor: James McBride
e-mail: coguk@aol.com
mobile: 07949942180

Copy Editor: Richard Gawith

Graphics: Richard Gawith

England:
The Churches of God, UK
Unit 14356, PO Box 4336
Manchester M61 0BW
England
e-mail: coguk@aol.com

Canada:
Canadian Church of God
PO Box 476
Don Mills Station
Don Mills Ontario M3C 2T4
Canada
www.canadianchurchofgod.com

or from:

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new Horizons

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Civilization was in the beginning built on a sure foundation, principles that if overturned would lead to chaos. Go compare!

Mankind struggles to build a better society. We have a utopian dream—but never seem able to achieve it, despite our best efforts. Our boundless humanitarian effort, our individual generosity, our science and technology, our religions, our service to fellow-man can't eradicate poverty or squalor. Like a house built on sand our best-laid plans crumble to dust. Even the natural world conspires to undermine us—earthquakes, hurricanes, climate change, disease.

Then there's man himself: in our drive to acquire—individually or collectively—we rob, we fight, we murder, we invade, we go to war— even to the brink of self-destruction. *Why?* Why can't we 'get a grip'? Why can't we build on rock, on sure foundations, on sound principles?

Sound Principles

Those principles are not 'unknowns'. When man first set foot on the planet he had them clearly explained—by his Creator. And that's where we start: *God*, a concept shared in some form by the vast majority of mankind.

But, of course, we have virtually abandoned Him. The faint remnants of His guidance that once graced our law-books are being quashed by arrogant law-

makers who think they know better than their Creator. Ancient Israel also experienced this: '*...You are confused by leaders who guide you down the wrong path*' (Isaiah 3:12).

God Is

The key-stone of the foundation, then, must be... *God is*. As Creator He is sovereign. He designed the millions of interacting physical and chemical processes that make the human body. He wove the intricate mesh of billions of interconnected neurones that is our brain. He who has life inherent

FOUNDATIONS

breathed into it *life*. He prepared a universe, an earth, perfectly designed to sustain that body. He created mankind uniquely capable of interfacing with Himself, and with the spiritual qualities that enable us to admire beauty, to be creative, to love, to choose, to worship. God knows us. He knows what 'makes us tick'. All we are operates in accord with in-built physical and spiritual law.

A Complete Creation

Having created the universe, and having created man as a 'clay' image (made from earth's elements) of Himself, God acknowledged his work as 'very good'. He then ceased from His creative activities.

The man He had created was immediately introduced to an institution essential for his well

-being—one that commemorates the awesome power and majesty of God by weekly worship on the ensuing seventh day of the creation week, and focuses our minds on the one true God. The seventh-day Sabbath identifies Him.

This 'sabbath' was set aside by God as 'holy'—a day given for all mankind to be refreshed physically and spiritually. It is a day jealously guarded by God., the observance of which underpins our relationship with Him. Our observance of the seventh-day Sabbath is a 'sign' by which we recognize the one and only creator God. [Other religions worship a different 'god' on a different day.]

Divine Plan

The creation of humanity was not a whim, not a divine afterthought. Planned in the timeless spiritual realm, man was created with purpose, for God in a sense was, in mankind, reproducing Himself. This is the next layer of the foundation.

God created the 'clay model', made from earth's elements—'dust', and with all faculties perfectly equipped for rational, independent existence, with communication skills and capable of an endless life. And, crucially and essentially, with the ability to reproduce, to provide godly offspring, to be fruitful, providing potential children for His Family, His Kingdom. Every life would be precious to Him.

Unity by Design

'...It's not good for man to be

alone, said God. He created a companion for him from his own flesh—but necessarily different in function. With complementary anatomy and physiology the couple, necessarily male and female, were to become one—as ‘father’ and ‘mother’—but each with a clearly assigned role. A role supported by their physical and emotional make-up.

As man was designed to be a social being, God created a partner, one that would complement his personality—but yet be of equal status before Him. (‘man’, ‘mankind’ is inclusive of male and female.) The female was perfectly designed to bear children (Genesis 3:20).

Each unique couple was created to become a unity, each harmoniously fulfilling their assigned role. As stated by the apostle Paul, the male (Adam) was created first, with the divine mandate to head the family—and to be responsible for its guidance in accord with the covenant between him and the Creator. Of necessity the family is patriarchal.

Deadly Choice

This divine scenario was shattered by sin, by the wilful breaking of that covenant. God warned that if the covenant were abused man would come to dominate rather than serve his wife, that child-bearing would be fraught with challenges, that their relationship with God would dramatically change as we lost direct contact with Him.

By no means was this a divinely-imposed punishment. Such effects were a consequence of broken law, principles that underpin our behaviour, our attitudes, our spir-

Godly
God Is involved
Sabbath
Purpose
Lifetime union
Godly offspring
Each has a role
Patriarchy

Ungodly
God is irrelevant
Sunday universal
Adrift
Family is irrelevant
Children aborted
Sexes interchange
Confusion

it. They are as inevitable as transgressing the laws of physics or chemistry.

Eve, the ‘*mother of all living*’, came to recognize she had been deceived (Genesis 3:13), her ‘repentance’. She represents those of her descendants who similarly repent and who oppose and resist Satan and his ‘children’ - those who embrace an ungodly life-style: ‘...*You [Satan] and this woman will hate each other; your descendants and hers will always be enemies. One of hers will strike you on the head, and you will strike him on the heel*’ (v.15). One of her ‘children’—Jesus—struck a deadly blow on Satan.

World Today

Today our world has lost sight of that first principle—that we are individuals *created in the image of God*. Since earliest history we have manufactured from our debased minds a multitude of ‘gods’ and ignored the rightful demands of the one true God—demands that are solely for our own well-being and which restore the balance in our life.

That ‘deadly blow’ assures us that sin is conquered, that through the sinless life of Jesus Christ, God become flesh—and through him alone—we gain access to the very Family of God. Ω

Extraordinary... from p.5

have learned is transient. Science is temporary, with new discoveries forever throwing out old concepts once held as sacrosanct. What we “knew” as children is probably no longer true. And what we learned about God in Sunday School or at mother’s knee is just as likely not to be true! Didn’t Jesus warn us about “*tradition*” (Mark 7:6-9)?

Man the Pinnacle

When God created mankind - yes, He did! - He noted that everything He had created was “*very good*”. Indeed, mankind was the very pinnacle of that creation. He said: “*Let us make man in our image after our likeness*” (Genesis 1:26). (The speaker, by the way, is the one who became Jesus Christ - Colossians 1:15-17.) Even though we are “*of dust from the ground*” yet we have the potential - through repentance and the subsequent indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God - to become a part of the divine Family. We can become truly “children of God” (Romans 8: 12-17).

God alone has immortality - not man (I Timothy 6:16). We don’t have dwelling within us some kind of immortal soul freshly dished out at our birth. We are not, as human beings, god-like. But we can - through Jesus Christ - become in God’s image just as He originally planned!

You - who were made to become in the image of the divine - have an abundant array of undiscovered and unused talent. Use it in the service of God, of your local fellowship, of humanity - and of yourself. Ω

NEW HORIZONS

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If you don’t wish to retain your copy after reading we would appreciate your passing it to others.

Preparations are afoot to build a Temple in Jerusalem, modelled on the one described by the prophet Ezekiel

The Scriptures indicate that just before the promised return of Jesus Christ there will indeed be a Temple constructed. Many evangelical Christians are working alongside the Temple Mount Institute to make this a reality. However, the concept of a literal 'third temple' is derided by some Bible students.

Many of the implements and artefacts used in the Temple service have already been constructed using the finest of materials and employing the best craftsmen. There is a 6ft tall golden Minorah (on public view), replicas of the Temple garments and a replica Ark of the Covenant have been constructed. Reportedly Prime Minister Netanyahu has expressed support, as have powerful members of the Government and the religious community. As of writing, a mock (or possibly a real) Passover service is planned in April if permission is granted.

There are many obstacles, though—not least the fierce opposition of some Islamic authorities. Also, some researchers believe the site occupied by the present Islamic Dome of the Rock is where the original Temple stood—which would cause friction—riots—should it be demolished.

That's disputed by some researchers who believe the true site is on the lower 'City of David', to the south of what is at present designated as the 'Temple Mount'. Other studies point out that the original Temple site (five hundred cubits square) wouldn't fit on this narrow City of David ridge, while numerous artefacts from the second Temple have been unearthed on the 'Temple Mount' (Mount Moriah).

Yet this may not be an obstacle to building a third Temple. For talks

have been held between Jewish, Islamic and Christian authorities that may result in sharing of the site.

Another Temple

The Scriptures point us to a different 'Temple', also now in course of building. The apostle Paul explains: '*...Do you not know that you are God's temple and the Spirit of God dwells in you?* (I Corinthians 3:16).

Christians are in-dwelt by the Spirit of God, and are here likened to the inner chambers of the Temple (Gk *naos*: the sanctuary, the holy places) where the LORD the Spirit dwelt (II Corinthians 3:18).

Individually we are each a 'temple'. But in another sense we are individually a 'stone' to be added to the spiritual Temple: '*... you also as living stones are being built a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*' (I Peter 2:5). The 'building blocks' of *this* temple will endure for eternity.

There is no other foundation for the temple we are building than Jesus Christ who is the '*chief corner-stone*', for he is the focus of the entire Scriptures. We are warned to ensure we use, as in the original tabernacle and temple, only the finest of divinely-approved materials as we build that spiritual temple: '*...if anyone builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, straw, the work of each one will become evident. For the day will reveal it*' (vv.12-13).

Those selected to become 'living stones' are, with the help of the indwelling of God's Spirit, producing the spiritual fruit of Christ-like character.

God's Temple

Be Prepared

Many think a Temple must be built before his return, though others doubt that necessity. No date for the return of Christ is provided in the Scriptures. But given are a few clear indicators.

While recognizing that mankind has always experienced difficult times, Jesus yet outlined (Matthew 24 *etc*) a sequence of events coincident at the time of 'the end', during the closing of man's day.

Specifically he referred to the '*...abomination of desolation... stand in the holy place [Gk. *hagios topos*]' (Matthew 24:15). This doesn't necessarily mean a temple but applies to any holy area. The term *hagios topos* anciently was often applied to the synagogue, and it's reported that this adequately fulfills the requirements for sacrifice.*

However, Judaism incorporates many unscriptural practices (the 'tradition of the elders') and the attempt to build a Temple is not necessarily a Scriptural injunction. Wrote the Psalmist: '*...Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it*' (Psalm 127)

Either way, each of us must be personally spiritually prepared as living stones for our place in His eternal spirit Temple. **Ω**

Festivals 2019

Lord's Supper	April 18 Thurs evg
Unleavened Bread	April 20-26
Pentecost	June 9
Trumpets	Septemb 30
Atonement	October 9
Tabernacles	Octob 14-20
Eighth Day	October 21

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

Rules v. Relationship

Christianity is not a binding catalogue of rules

The breakdown of law and order is a symptom of a nation in decline. Worse, however, would be any attempt to govern without clearly-defined laws. It applies to nations. It applies to any business. It applies to your local youth group—in fact to any club or school or organization in the land.

It would be surprising if your church didn't have a set of rules: appointment to a church office, for example. But what about 'the church'—the body of believers; do the members have to obey a set of rules if they are to be 'saved'?

The 'Church of God' movement of which *CGOM* is a part believe we ought to observe the weekly Sabbath on the *seventh* day, Saturday. Is that a *rule*, a requirement for 'membership'? Nor do we celebrate the 'Christian' festivals—*eg* Christmas or Easter or various Saints days. Another required rule? In their stead we celebrate the festivals appointed in the Scriptures—a rule?

Because we observe these we are frequently condemned as believing we are saved through our 'works'. (Of course, as these practices were appointed by the LORD we would claim they are 'good works'!)

Personally I have followed such practices for some six decades—but it has never crossed my mind that my salvation comes by other means than by God's grace and mercy through Christ

Jesus. Does that mean, then, that we have no obligations?

Covenant Relationship

It's a myth, common in some Christian circles, that to become a Christian we simply have to 'only believe'. However, such a momentous decision means we are entering into a *solemn covenant* [a 'new covenant'] with the God Family. The apostle Paul calls it 'adoption': '*...you received a Spirit of adoption by which we cry, Abba! Father!*' (Romans 8:15). And to the Galatian Christians: '*...when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son...that He might redeem the ones under Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons*' (*ch* 4:5). We become His 'children', are placed as His sons [Gk *uiothesia*].

It is a covenant we annually renew at the *Lord's Supper*, instituted by Jesus the evening before he was crucified:

'...the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and giving thanks, He broke and said, Take, eat; this is My body which is broken on behalf of you; this do in remembrance of Me. In the same way the cup also, after supping, saying, This cup is the New Covenant in My blood; as often as you drink, do this in remembrance of Me. For as often as you may eat this bread, and drink this cup, you solemnly proclaim the death of the Lord, until He shall come'

(I Corinthians 11:23-26)

Any covenant, contract, treaty has obligations from both participants ('I pay, you supply'). By his death—which we commemorate—we are 'adopted', becoming joint-heirs with him of the universe. (Romans 8:17). In return we commit to his way of

life as revealed through the Scriptures.

Our Father

As the all-powerful Creator God who exists eternally outside His creation we bow in awe before Him and His royal majesty. We respect all He is. We are His creation, owing our life, our every breath to Him.

When we align ourselves with Him and His way of life, when we live by His *torah*—His law, His perfect guidance and way of righteous living—we harmonize our being with the will of the Creator.

Our Destiny

Yet He willingly enters into a relationship with us! He is not an ogre from a distant galaxy but a loving Father intent on enlarging His 'Family' and sharing His creation. And as our Father He has an intense interest in each of the children He has spiritually begotten.

In the book of Hebrews we are told: '*...whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chastens not?*' (*ch* 12:6-7).

It's this *relationship* that counts. When we covenant with Christ we become part of God's Family. He views us through the prism of Christ's righteousness applied to each of us. We are, right now, truly '*...sons of God*' (I John 3:2).

How we each in our own life apply His revealed guidance through His Word is the fundamental measure of our Christian maturity. Ω

**In Christ, our human potential
is boundless**

Everybody knows about fingerprints. Of all earth's billions, no two people have the same pattern. Each of us is unique. But did you know that no two hearts are alike? Or stomachs, eyes, livers, nerves, blood vessels? Or brains?

You are, in fact, *extraordinary!*

On physical examination it is quite apparent that each of us in a very special way is a unique person. Even the shape of the liver differs from one person to another. So, too, its colour, and how it reacts inside its special environment. And its size. . . The same is true in principle for every organ. This, in part, explains why medicine or surgery is a hit or miss affair - an art form!

Our brains, too, differ. The functions of this crowning and vital organ can be mapped out in rough on the cortex. Yet no neurosurgeon can have an accurate knowledge of a particular brain without careful and detailed pre-investigation using all manner of scans and psychological tests.

As one research neurologist, K.S. Lashley points out, "...individuals start life with brains differing enormously in structure." And, "its diversities within the species are of the same general character as are the differences between related species." As that successful and very human psalmist, King David of ancient Israel, exclaimed, "You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body, and knit them together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex. It is amazing to think about. Your workmanship is marvellous..." (Psalms 139:13,14).

But does such uniqueness have any practical significance?

Indeed, it does. Did you ever wonder why your partner feels pain or cold or heat more acutely (or less so) than you do? It's because of the striking variation in the sensitivity of our pain or other receptors. Some have little

or no pain sensation - a fact which might influence your choice of occupation!

Of ninety-seven prize fighters tested in New York, all but ten had a low pain sensitivity! And don't we wrapped-up office types marvel at those bare-chested hirsutes working happily in sub-zero cold?

Then there's colour vision. "That curtain is green," you say. But your wife's perception is "blue." Who's right? Well - both, for we each see colours in a special way. Knowing about such differences might lead to more toleration within the family and on the job or golf course!

You are, indeed, extraordinary. But - so what?

Power-up Your Brain

The bottom line is that each of us has a very distinctive mind. We're each a unique "bundle of nerves" - in the Bible it is described as the "spirit in man" - that's capable of immense development, and whatever our age. The brain consists of billions of inter-connecting neurons mostly present from birth - the "most complicated machine in the entire universe". But the numbers decrease with age, for millions of cells die daily.

"No hope for me, then" you say? Not so, for your brain can grow whether you are seven or seventy. Whether we're young or old, neurologists now tell us that any learning activity actually increases the size and weight of the brain. And not from eating fish

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free 32-lesson Study
Course. It's a key to what
is for many a
'Book of Mystery'

unsigned articles are by the Editor

You Are Extraordinary!

but from mental effort. Said wise King Solomon, "An intelligent man is always open to new ideas. In fact, he looks for them" (Proverbs 18:15). The successful human being is one who forever questions his views and looks constantly to improve himself or herself. Such are not stuck in a rut. Nor need you be!

All of these factors imply that none of us need feel "a write-off". Simply because during our schooldays we were branded with a particular IQ we needn't feel inferior - not even to our boss. For you are talented in ways that are not inferior to his and are probably complementary. This applies, too, within family relationships!

That old - but ever new - book, the Bible, is a rich vein of practical business wisdom. So, grasp firmly what Paul said in his letter to the Roman Christians: "God has given us the ability to do certain things well" (Romans 12:6). Each of us - and that includes you - has an incredible potential for personal development. The mathematical genius Albert Einstein once reckoned that we use only .02% of our capacity! We each have a storehouse of unused talent in a combination that is unique to us. We each have, in business terms, our "unique selling points".

So, accept yourself for what you are - a special blend of strengths and weaknesses. Like the employee who hid his talent (Matthew 25:25), the only failures are those who die without taking advantage of their inborn capabilities, and those who don't recognize and offset their weaknesses. Said Helen Keller, "I thank God for my handicaps, for through them I have found myself, my work, and my God."

On the other hand don't accept yourself as you are! Our present attainments are but a step along the way. Much of what we *cont'd p.2*

Christianity 101

what do Christians believe?

God Is

Clearly, it's fundamental to the Christian to believe in 'God'—a concept shared by over 90% of the world's population. Indeed, as wrote the writer of the book of Hebrews: '*...he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*' (ch 11:6).

Those who profess Christianity number some two billion, or roughly a third of mankind. Then there are a billion Hindu and 1.5 billion Islamic believers—all 'believers in god' along with African, Chinese believers in a deity of some kind.

'God' is the default life position of most of our kind, with the basic teachings of the myriad faiths accepted by their believers. He is present from rising time to bed-time, and is—as in Islam—their minute-by-minute guide.

A Jealous God

What God is like, what he requires of us, what is his purpose is as varied as there are specific faiths. It has been said that it is as if He dwells atop a mountain with many and varied paths to reach him: '*...all roads lead to God*'.

However, the Christian Scriptures—the Bible—claim there is but *one* way, a way closely protected by the Father, a way unchanged since creation. He is a '*...jealous God*', protective of His rights as Creator. He has created mankind with a well-defined purpose, and created us to be dependent on specific in-built physical and spiritual principles. (Principles that are sadly neglected with all the adverse consequences.)

The character of the Christian God is summed up by the psalmist: '*... You, O Lord, are God, full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and rich in mercy and*

truth' (86:15)—divine character traits echoed throughout the Bible in both Old and New Testaments.

He is referred to by a variety of descriptive titles—Shepherd, Healer, Protector, Ever-present *etc.* He is mankind's *Saviour* and there is none other, as detailed by the apostle Peter: '*...Neither is there salvation in any other [ie Jesus]: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*' (Acts 4:12).

Choice

Israel's prophet Elijah was in his day one of a small remnant of true believers in the God of the Hebrew Bible, JHVH. He had an encounter with the hierarchy of the pervading Baal religion at which he set before the people a choice: '*...How long do you halt between two opinions? if the LORD [JHVH] be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him*' (I Kings 18:21).

Following a miraculous intervention by God the gathered throng made their choice '*...The LORD, [JHVH] he is the God; the LORD, he is the God*' (v.39). Their choice may not have been permanent (they later reverted to Baal worship) but they then rejected the false worship of the surrounding Ishmael/Moabite (Arabic) tribes.

That same Baal-belief system of belief was in the seventh century of our era mixed with imagery and personalities from the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures and comes to us as the Islamic faith—at heart the ancient Baal (Hubal) worship. The Bible recognizes the existence of myriad 'gods'. The first of the ten commandments I '*...you shall have no other gods before me*'. But, as notes the apostle Paul: '*... though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but*

one God, the Father, of whom are all things' (I Corinthians 8:6). The apostle adds: '*...the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God*' (ch 10:20).

Identity Crisis

All faiths share common behavioural traits, promoting, for example, care for one another ('love your neighbour'). But we recognize different faiths by what they do publicly.

In Judaism and Biblical Christianity, for example, the *seventh* day of the week, Saturday, is set aside for corporate worship, while in mainstream Christianity it is Sunday—the *first* day of the week. Friday, the *sixth* day, is the Islamic day of dedicated worship. Hindu belief assigns a day of the week to each of their numerous gods: Sunday, for example, is dedicated to Lord Surya (the Sun God), Friday to the Mother Goddess.

Each faith also observes identifying festivals; thus *Islam* has Ramadan, *Christianity* has Christmas and Easter, *Hinduism* has Divali, *Judaism* and Bible Christianity the festivals of Leviticus 23.

The God of Scripture is particularly 'jealous' for how He is worshipped. Time and again He uprooted His protective hedge surrounding Israel because of neglect of His festivals and for their sinful behaviour, allowing calamity to overwhelm the nation until they changed. He remains jealous for His revealed way.

Our Choice

Each of us must face that choice—sooner or later. There can be but one supreme God, and He demands our allegiance. Will *yours* be Allah, or Shiva—or the JHVH of the Scriptures? Ω

The *Outreach Ministries* was formed (in 1996/7) on the foundation of *co-operation* and *interdependence*—individual local assemblies working together under Jesus Christ to take his message around the world.

We embarked on our voyage with a widely accepted doctrinal foundation rooted in our former ‘mother’ church. Doctrine, however important, is but the springboard for our mission—which is to use all our individual local resources and co-operatively, whatever minor differences we may have, carry out the commission Jesus gave to his church.

Without the burden of servicing a ‘church empire’ with all the time and financial wastage and bureaucracy that may entail we are free to deploy all our energies to that mission.

As in the first flush of the first-century faith we believe Christ still walks in the midst of the various churches, overseeing them and correcting when necessary.

Advantage

The fact that our structure as a ministry is one of locality and is not a corporate structure reflects the New Testament pattern. It provides us with the confidence that we are following a proper course.

Leadership, for example, is firmly local, with elders being ‘home-grown’ and deeply rooted in the local culture—not flown in from an alien culture and with no local knowledge or connections with the brethren in that area.

Despite our geographic separation, our connectivity gives access to mature and wise counsel from other assemblies nearby and around the world. Servant leader-

ship ensures the local leaders are not too self-sufficient and proud to seek such counsel.

Local assemblies are a barrier to ambitious leadership bids. Such happened in the first century church in Rome as local leaders became ‘bishops’ and then ‘archbishops’ and then ‘popes’—and the sentiment is often seen since, not least in our own day.

As is evident from the Scriptures, serious issues are all too common, and in corporate churches (*cp* Catholicism) are readily imposed universally. In the New Testament pattern issues tend to be localized. (Hence the value of independent counsel and oversight—especially of new local assemblies—*via* other assemblies.)

Help at Hand

As seen in the early church, fraternal co-operation between local assemblies—not faceless bureaucracy—supported an assembly in need. The brethren in Antioch, where ‘...*the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea*’; one local assembly to another. It was sent to the presiding elders to distribute among the various assemblies. The Philippians, too, ‘...*sent once and again*’ in support of Paul’s outreach ministry.

Challenges

But the course of independence has a few pitfalls. Scattered worldwide as we are, for example, a major obstacle is *communication* which—despite the internet!—can be subject to neglect. Each assembly could become inward-looking, concerned about local

Working Together

issues and perhaps experiencing isolation—especially when far from the ‘hub’. In our connected world this is without excuse!

Hence the need for each assembly to ensure open channels to share local outreach enterprise, local challenges and needs, to be aware of potential needs in other assemblies *etc*. Without open communication how could this be rectified!

As mentioned above, early church experience also reveals an isolated church can harbour seeds of error. The apostles found it necessary to weed out such growing destructive teachings—as is shown by the various letters to individual assemblies, each with its unique challenges. Interaction with other assemblies is a counter-balance.

With a hierarchical structure—who will intervene, who will listen? Communication is controlled from the top. As Jesus, through John, tells us of an erring assembly: ‘... *I am coming to you quickly, and will remove your lampstand [your assembly] from its place, unless you repent*’ (Revelation 2:5). Good counsel!

Mission Incomplete

But our focus must still be ‘the big picture’. Who knows when the Father will ‘pull up the drawbridge’, decide His ‘army’ is for the present complete, that the time has come to send His Son. For now there remains, we believe, a spiritual harvest to be both sown and reaped.

A Pattern for Today

The New Testament pattern of

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evangelism was two-fold. Support travelling preachers to evangelize and establish assemblies. And for those assemblies to reach out in their geographical area as in the guidance by Jesus himself: ‘... you will be witnesses of Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ (Acts 1:8). First, the immediate environment, then outwards. When a local assembly flourishes and matures spiritually it will reach out to ‘regions beyond’ to plant new assemblies.

The Mission Defined

The heralding of the good news of salvation is as urgent—and as unchanged—as it was in the days of the apostles. Indeed Jesus himself ‘... came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent you, and believe the gospel’ (Mark 1:14-15, Luke 8:1).

The Twelve proclaimed the same message, commissioned by Jesus (Luke 9:2), as they continued to do after Jesus returned to the

Father. Paul exemplifies: ‘...Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him’ (Acts 28:31).

The first century world sorely needed that message. It had almost reached the point of self-destruction through its depravity. The time was ripe to proclaim the Kingdom message—that God was preparing a people for Himself, a people who would, empowered by His Spirit, embrace His way, walk in the path trod by His Son,

reflect his character and be a light to sinful mankind. This is the ‘gospel of the Kingdom’.

That Kingdom—the spirit Family of God—is everlasting, without beginning, without end. Those who now are covenanted with the Father through Christ and his sacrifice, whose sin is forgiven, are invited to become an integral part of that Kingdom. For them, this life is ‘boot camp’, the training ground to reign with Jesus over the remnant of mankind who will survive the coming time of global chaos and destruction.

Psalm seventy-two is a cameo of the establishment of the Kingdom of God’s rule on earth. It will at least initially be a turbulent time as the survivors adjust to the perfect code of governance; ‘...for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem’ (Isaiah 2:3).

The result? ‘...In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endures. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth’ (Psalm 72: 7-8).

This is our mission. Through his church Jesus sows the seed of God’s Word providing opportunity for all who hear and respond to ‘...follow the Lamb wherever he goes’ (Revelation 14:4).

Let ‘working together’ be our watchword! **Ω**

read...

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Britain —exit or stay?

As of writing, the United Kingdom is experiencing a cloud of confusion. It’s an unprecedented national crisis that our leaders, while breaking all parliamentary precedent, have failed to solve. MPs promote their personal agendas and the country, both ‘stay in the EU’ and ‘leave’ elements, seethes with disbelief and even anger. Our Parliament is adrift on an ocean of division and indecision, designed to thwart the 2016 referendum result that favoured restoring sovereignty.

Whatever the outcome of Parliament’s rambling decision-making, the ‘backstop’ remains—as said the prophet Daniel: ‘...[God] changes the times and the seasons; He causes kings to pass away, and sets up kings’. He is in charge, and the end result will be what conforms with His plans.

Our leadership utterly fails to grasp—and to address—the root cause of our nation’s problems—*sin*: the abandonment of divine law by society at large. Ancient Israel experienced the fearsome consequences of this neglect, suffering national disintegration and invasion by a foreign power—becoming refugees in foreign lands.

‘the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the prudence of their prudent men shall be hid’ (Isaiah 29:14)

MiniStudy**The Way to Life**

‘...what must I do to be saved?’ (Acts 16:30)

‘...the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved’ (Acts 2:47)

It’s perhaps the most momentous decision we humans can make in our lifetime—more than marriage, job and even family. For its implications reach beyond our life span, beyond death—and on into eternity. It’s a choice placed before all who come within sound of the message sent from heaven through Jesus—the long-awaited Messiah.

- Despite our ardent desire to ‘be good’, man’s default position is that our victories are transient. Annually we collectively pour billions into a rich variety of ‘good deeds’. Yet millions remain in abject poverty—no clean water, minimal food supply, lack of sanitation, imperfect health provision. Billions more are globally squandered in universally vain attempts to curb the seemingly endless range of criminal behaviour. Clearly, something is wrong with our basic nature, challenges that defy the best efforts of our philosophers, scientists, religious leaders. Surely, the desire for a solution haunts all of us from time to time
- Nor is the challenge confined to society at large, for we all eventually come to recognize our personal imperfections—no matter how much we may attempt to suppress our darker nature. God calls it *sin*—a ‘missing of the mark’. And have we not all fallen short—even of our own softer standards?: ‘...all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God’ (Romans 3:23). Not one is free from it. *Nor are you*
- Nothing we do is without consequence, no matter how trivial we deem it to be—our physical actions, even our thoughts. Life events cause changes to DNA (‘epigenetic change’) and are passed to future generations. The father of humanity deliberately chose to dissolve his relationship with our Creator—an action labelled in the Scriptures as ‘sin’—thus embracing *death* rather than unending *life*: ‘...in the day you eat of it [the forbidden tree] you will surely die’ (Genesis 2:17). All his descendants inherit that same consequence: ‘...the wages of sin is death’ (Romans 6:23)
- To address all this the time came when our Creator stepped in with His remedial programme: ‘...when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons’ (Galatians 4:4-5). Mankind was created to function in accord with a set of principles (Heb. *torah*, ‘law’) the breaking of which—we are all guilty!—is described as being ‘under the law’. God’s remedy is to take the consequences of our sin upon Himself in the person of His Son, Jesus thus making possible our son-ship
- Jesus (the Messiah, the Anointed, Christ), in his prayer the evening before his death, set out his unique credentials: ‘...Father, glorify you me with your own self with the glory which I had with you before the world was (John 17:5). He was the instrument of creation, eternal with the Father and alone fit to bear the penalty—death—for the sin of all mankind: ‘...by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist’ (Colossians 1:16—17). Yet he took on human flesh: ‘...the Word became flesh and dwelled with us’. Paul adds:
- Having lived the perfect sinless life Jesus was falsely accused and suffered crucifixion at the hands of the Jewish religious authorities and the Roman conqueror. As the perfect Son of God his sacrificial death encompassed all the sin of humanity, both Jew and Gentile: ‘...God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh’ (Romans 8:3). His death, for all who embrace his offering for our sin, opened the gate to eternal life as true children of God, as joint-heirs with him in the Father’s eternal Kingdom: ‘...if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together’ (v.17). That’s the meaning of ‘salvation’. That’s the incomprehensible future for those who submit to the terms of his ‘new covenant’
- The apostle Peter addressed the chastened crowds on that first *Day of Pentecost* following the resurrection of Jesus. The assembled crowd were ‘pricked to the heart’, now convinced that Jesus was the Messiah and that their sin was the reason for his death; they sought from the apostle the answer to their question: ‘...what must I do to be saved?’ His inspired response: ‘...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:38).
- That question and Peter’s response remain unchanged. All of us have sinned. All are ‘under the law’. All who have encountered this message of salvation face that same momentous choice—life, or death. Choose life and we will live eternally as a joint-heir with Jesus Christ. Otherwise—*judgment*

Ω

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