

NEW *Horizons*

Vol 24 No 6

November/December 2020

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



inside...

The Adam Principle

The Son of God

Israel and the Church

Pointless?

A Devilish Plot

The New Horizon

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

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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 Newsletter **OUTREACH, NEW HORIZONS** magazine, the **BIBLE BASICS** on-line home study course, and a 32-lesson **STUDY COURSE**.

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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

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.

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Tulsa, OK 2020

New Horizons is distributed without charge, and is financed by the gifts of associates and friends of the *Churches of God Outreach Ministries*. Readers are invited to obtain a free subscription by writing to any of the addresses listed. You are under no obligations, and no-one will call uninvited.

new Horizons

Issue No 144

November/December 2020

The world has radically changed over the past century, as we have replaced former foundation principles. Have our lives improved?

We need, only briefly, to delineate some of those changes. ‘Gender fluidity’ has replaced the concept of male and female. Marriage is a free for all. Concepts of ‘right and wrong’ are now a personal choice. ‘Sin’ is an outdated concept—sexual promiscuity, pornography, adultery—soft justice that encourages criminal behaviour, rampant consumerism.

And not least the abandonment of the Christian faith however diluted and distorted that has become. For the roots of Christianity and the roots of all civilized society can be traced to the guidance given by mankind’s Creator to our first parent, Adam.

The Adam Principle

It should be clear that morals are driven by an initial set of guiding principles. Otherwise it is a free-for-all do-as-you-please society in which we all do what individually suits us—with the chaos we see around us today. (Why, indeed, should I ‘love my neighbour’?)

Every State has to be regulated, has to have it’s legal basis. That’s because of the unpredictability of our human nature. As the founder of the Christian faith, Jesus the Messiah, noted: ‘...out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man’ (Matthew 15: 19-20). That’s a snapshot of shared human nature—a nature inherited from father Adam!

Adam, however, was created with none of those defects; he was ‘perfect’, endowed with divine characteristics, in God’s image and instructed by the Creator in the parameters governing his freedom of choice. It didn’t last. As Paul tells us: ‘...*Adam was not deceived, [and] the woman being deceived was in the transgression*’ (I Timothy 2:14). He chose the blind alley of self-assertion and rejected his Creator’s guidance.

THE ADAM PRINCIPLE

That deliberate choice, manipulated by an alien spirit, corrupted his spirit and set mankind increasingly on a path of enmity to our Creator ‘...*the carnal mind [as Adam’s became] is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*’ (Romans 8:7). All mankind has inherited that same mind-set.

The Foundation

Encapsulated in the account of Adam’s creation are the principles on which a successful society is built. Today, they are all but lost. Indeed modern society is increasingly built on contrary principles, principles that drive us to the cliff-edge of destruction.

Not many decades ago civilisation was fuelled by *Christian* principles. Children attended ‘Sunday School’ and school as-

sembly began with prayer. Adults went to church and were exposed to the teachings of Jesus. The ‘Ten Commandments’, the Lord’s Prayer, the Parables *etc* were written in our minds and influenced our behaviour. Yet these are written in Adam’s story.

At the foundation is *God*, our Creator, the Creator of all ‘matter’, all law, all life. He is the foundation for all that follows. Without Him nothing exists, for something cannot evolve from nothingness.

Atheists and humanists would love to see every vestige, every reminder of God banned and they seek to eliminate Him from schools: no prayers, no religious instruction. *And* from churches! Karl Marx reputedly wrote that ‘*religion is the opiate of the masses*’; it keeps us out of mischief and tends to make us obedient to our rulers. Eliminate God and you can concoct your own mish-mash of ethics, it goes.

Male and Female

It was God who made us *male* and *female*. Meddle with that formula and we’re left with today’s chaos of multiple ‘choice’ of sexuality. Licence is taken for every form of sexual deviation including bestiality, pornography. Accompanied by all the adverse consequences for health and welfare.

God instructed Adam that marriage is a union of a man and a woman and that it was constrained by boundaries. Sexual relationships were confined within the parameter of marriage. The

two would become one, equal and mutually dependant (Genesis 2:22-23). It was designed as a life-long commitment.

Implicit in God's guidance to Adam is that life is precious, that man is designed to produce offspring with equal opportunity to share in God's plan for us: '*... Didn't God create you to become like one person with your wife? And why did he do this? It was so you would have children, and then lead them to become God's people. Don't ever be unfaithful to your wife*' (Malachi 2:15 CEV).

Family Disarray

We have today abandoned such instruction and are left with divided and broken families, millions annually aborted and deprived of the chance to contribute to human well-being—and life eternally in God's service.

Parents are now unwilling to train their children: '*...you fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*' (Ephesians 6:4). Or, as God taught the Israelites: '*... these words, which I command you this day, shall be in thine heart; And you shall teach them diligently to your children*' (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). God's Word is *life!*

Environment

What a mess we have made of our environment! We have raped earth's resources in a mad scam-

ble for riches, and left an earth scarred by our crude effort.

What of Adam? Having created the human race God placed him in a perfect environment: '*...the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed*' (Genesis 2:8). He then instructed him in its care: '*... the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it*' (v.15).

That implies that we 'guard' the earth over which we have been given jurisdiction, that we preserve its integrity, that we don't exploit it beyond our reasonable needs. So how do we measure up? As with all the guidance given to our first parent we are reaping the consequences of ignoring it.

The Bible's account of creation is not a bed-time story for children. It includes the foundation principles for all civilisation—and it is ignored at our peril.

Judgment

Unlike the animal creation Adam was created with the ability to absorb and adapt language. He could reason. He was responsible for his actions and thus experienced the consequences of his choices—good or bad. He was endowed with conscience—initially informed by the word of God {'truth') as He walked and talked with them in Eden.

It wasn't a free lunch for Adam. He entered a covenant with his Creator under which he, as did God, had obligations to fulfil. Follow His guidance—guidance perfectly adapted to his core being—and he had the capability to live endlessly, to attain to full spiritual maturity. [Compare the life of Jesus, 'the second Adam':

'...being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him' (Hebrews 5:9).] Our forefather, Adam, *rejected* eternal salvation. (He may later have repented—but paid the consequent 'wage', death.)

'...The earth wilts away; its mighty leaders melt to nothing. The earth is polluted because its people disobeyed the laws of God, breaking their agreement that was to last forever [KJV everlasting covenant]. The earth is under a curse; its people are dying out because of their sins. mournful sounds are heard instead of joyful shouts... Towns are crushed and in chaos; houses are locked tight. Happy times have disappeared from the earth'. (Isaiah 25:4ff)

A Matter of Faith

'Religion', too, stems from the Adamic era. But not as we know it. The original faith was in fact simply the way of life implicit in the instruction the LORD gave Adam. It is the way that if followed would lead to the fulfilment of our life's purpose—to 'salvation'. God later codified it as the 'Ten Words (Heb *dabar*) [Commandments]' and incorporated it at the heart of Israel's Constitution (Exodus 20). In the beginning Adam willingly followed this from the heart, as did the faithful ever after (*cf* Romans 4:15). It is the 'law of love'.

The LORD also instructed him in human nature ('*...you will lose your life if you sin*'; he wasn't immortal, as is God). That we live on after death is the premise, the lie, on which all subsequent false religions are built. From it stem the doctrines of heaven, hell, purgatory *etc.*

Abandon the real-life account of our first parents in the Christian Scriptures and the foundation of all civilisation crumbles. **Ω**

The Son of God

The relationship between the Father, the Word and ourselves underlies the divine purpose

Jesus—the ‘Word’ (Gk. *logos*)—has always co-existed in perfect harmony with the Father, sharing the same holy Spirit. In due time he offered himself to pay the legal penalty for mankind’s sin.

In process of time God through that same Spirit begat a Son: ‘...*the birth of Jesus the Messiah was thus. While his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they had cohabited, she was found to be with child by the holy Spirit*’ (Matthew 1:18).

The Word divested himself of divine glory and qualities and was transformed as human flesh: ‘...*the Word was made flesh [Spirit to flesh] and dwelt among us...the only begotten [Gk.monogenes] of the Father*’ (John 1:14). The apostle Paul adds: ‘...*being in the form of God, [he] thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men*’ (Philippians 2:6-7).

The Family of God

‘God’ is a *family*—without beginning, without end, an ‘everlasting Kingdom’. That, of course, is a mystery to us, for our minds cannot grasp—but must live with—that concept. (‘Where did God come from?’ *cp* Deuteronomy 29:29). *He is*—but is perceived through individual faith: ‘...*without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that comes to God must believe that he is [that He exists]*’ (Hebrews 11:6).

As a family, the eternal God [Heb *Elohim*] was ever two separate entities, both in perfect harmony. (If one, why not two? *Elohim* is plural.) In their relationship with mankind they were known as JHVH. Each had a role in creation—the ‘Logos’ as the ‘Chief Executive Officer’ who creat-

ed the material universe: ‘...*through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear*’ (Hebrews 11:3). And Paul to the Colossian church: ‘...*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*’ (ch 1:16).

Jesus’s Human Spirit

Becoming human, Jesus shared our ‘spirit in man’ as illustrated by various texts: ‘...*Jesus perceived in his spirit*’ (Mark 2:8, 8:12, Luke 1:80 *etc*). He was like us but because of his divine origin exempt from all the baggage we inherit since Adam: ‘...*The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High [ie the holy Spirit] will overshadow you, and for this reason that holy One being born of you will be called Son of God*’ (Luke 1:35, Matthew 1:18).

Jesus had our human nature and shared the same struggles we have with sin—but always defeating temptation victoriously:

‘...*[he] in the days of his flesh offered up both prayers and supplications, with loud crying and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard as a result of his reverence*’ (Hebrews 5:7). An example for us, surely, who struggle in similar manner!

The ‘spirit in man’ is the energizing force that activates the body’s cognitive processes. It is the seat of our will, and regulates expression of our overt behaviour, our emotional responses, through our living flesh, in which in our present corrupted state ‘...*there is no good thing*’ (Romans 7:18).

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

The Father perfectly understands that we struggle with our corrupted human spirit (inherited from Adam), but gives us that same indwelling holy Spirit as had Jesus to aid us as we seek to emulate him.

He lived a flawless sinless life in perfect harmony with the Father with whom he was in constant communication, a life culminating in his death just before which he stated: ‘...*I have glorified You on the earth. I finished the work that You gave Me to do*’ (John 17:4). And on the cross saying ‘...*it is finished*’ (ch 18:30).

Speaking before the Twelve at their last meal together he said: ‘...*Father! Give me glory in your presence now, the same glory I had with you before the world was made*’ (John 17:5). [Being sinless, There was no impediment to Jesus exercising any gift of the Spirit.]

When He Died

When Jesus released his human spirit he died (Matthew 27:50) and his body was entombed in ‘*the heart of the earth*’ for three days and three nights (ch 12:40). He is described as being for that period in *hades*—the grave [*KJV*-‘hell’] (Acts 2:31), and his spirit, - as *per* King Solomon—‘*returned to God who gave it*’. But, being sinless, ‘...*God raised him from the dead*’ (Acts 13:30).

Paul details what followed: ‘...*[God] raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavenly places, above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name named*’ (Ephesians 1:20-22). That same holy Spirit communicates with us through our human spirit: ‘...*The Spirit itself bears witness [witnesses together, interacts] with our spirit, that we are the children of God*’ (Romans 8:16).

A New Role

Following his resurrection, Jesus, having experienced life as a human [*...the man, Christ Jesus*] (Romans 5:15)], assumed a new relationship with the Father—but as a *Son*, and the inheritor of the universe, the ‘...*the firstborn from the dead*’

(Revelation 1:5).

As such he retains all his divine glory, power, majesty and authority. As the apostle Paul tells us, Jesus willingly divested himself of his divinity for our sake—an awesome sacrifice.

The Godhead is repeatedly referred to as having separate roles—in both the Old Testament and the New. In the Old it was the Logos who not only ‘...created all things (Colossians 1:16) but interacted, sometimes face-to-face, directly with mankind executing the plans of the Godhead. In the New ‘...all judgment’ was committed to the Son (John 5:22).

The Father and Jesus are frequently described separately. For example: ‘... God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ’ (I Timothy 1:1), ‘...God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour’ (Titus 1:4). To the church in Corinth Paul wrote: ‘...there is for us only one God, the Father, who is the Creator of all things and for whom we live; and there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were created and through whom we live (I Corinthians 8:5). [see also the introductions to many of Paul’s letters.]

The Firstborn

In sum, Jesus for our sake became human flesh, died, was resurrected in a body transformed as spirit, and ascended to the Father clothed with the glory he had shared with Him before his birth as the only-begotten [Gk.*monogenes*] (at his conception) Son of the Father. The Father had never before generated a human offspring.

Jesus now is ‘... the image of the invisible God, the firstborn [Gk.*prototokon*] of every creature’ (Colossians 1:15). He is ‘...the firstborn from the dead’ (v.18). Jesus is the first of the children of God to be born as, to become, spirit and in a new relationship with the Father. In him the image of God is restored, to be shared with those who are with him, the ‘firstborn’. Wrote James: ‘...Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we

should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures’ (ch 1:18).

Those who in this life are through Christ in a relationship with the Father will in the resurrection become ‘...the church of the firstborn’ Hebrews 12:23.

Our Relationship

On repentance and baptism believers receive God’s Spirit and become the children of God: ‘...and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). As says the apostle John, ‘...now are we the sons of God...we will be like him’ (I John 3:2). All those in whom resides the holy Spirit are viewed by the Father as ‘...sons and daughters of the almighty’ (II Corinthians 6:18), sharing with Jesus Christ as co-heirs.

God’s Spirit, working in believers during our lifetime since our baptism, transforming our human spirit to prepare us at Christ’s return for our resurrection responsibilities, when we will be clothed with our spirit body and become joint-heirs of the Kingdom. As explains the apostle Paul: ‘... It is sown a natural [Gk.*psuchikos*] body; it is raised a spiritual [Gk.*pneumatikos*] body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body’ (I Corinthians 15:44).

How awesome that, providing we remain faithful to the end, we will share that same relationship with the Father as does our Saviour, the Son of God. What an incentive to remain faithful in our relationship with the everlasting Kingdom of God—whatever life throws at us! **Ω**

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The Reality of Hope

None of us is in possession of a crystal ball. What’s round the corner stays there until we turn the corner—whatever our premonitions, or our fears. We may encounter the proverbial bus. Or it may be a brush with COVID or ‘flu. Or, we may encounter a ‘lucky’ break—often the result of good decisions.

As night follows day, so difficult times (Gk *thlipsis*: ‘tribulation’) almost certainly follows the bright sunshine in life. As darkness falls we tend to react with ‘I hope it will be all right’. In a way that’s negative—for it usually implies a less than positive outcome that blights daily life with a downward cycle of depression, issues of mental health and, too often, suicide (six thousand annually in the UK, forty thousand in the USA). It’s a complex battle that all but overwhelms health professionals.

Medical care has its tool-box of techniques to ameliorate distress, but too often these situations are simply intractable and ‘solved’ by medication without a positive outcome.

The Christian scripture reflects the varied suffering which mankind experiences. It, too, has its tool-box, though applying the tools can be painful! They are based on a fundamental change of direction in our lives to conform with the will of God—a direction perfectly tailored for each individual’s best welfare and with positive effect.

As wrote Paul: ‘...God has not given us the spirit of fear [timidity]; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind [self-control]’ (II Timothy 1:7).. That spirit is God’s Spirit, and we acquire it when we implement in our lives that change of direction (‘repentance’) (Acts 2:38).

With God’s indwelling Spirit we have that Christian hope—not a ‘maybe’ but sure and certain. The end result, the ‘harvest’ of our life in Christ’ is that at the return of Christ we have the hope of a sure resurrection to a perfect life: ‘...

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul [our life], both sure and steadfast’ (Hebrews 6:19). **Ω**

Pointless...from p.7

what that means: ‘...if children, then heirs too—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ; if indeed we are sharers in Christ’s sufferings, in order that we may also be sharers in His glory’ (Romans 8:17).

Indeed *all* of God’s creation—now in a state of decay and degraded—will then begin to be restored: ‘...For the earnest expectation of the creature is waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God’ (v,19).

The Way

We assume that the adherents of each faith system sincerely believe its tenets—even to the point, as in Islam, of replacing all others. Pope Francis, however, endorses the view that all faiths lead to the one God, and he is actively working to bring all under the one religious roof to bring harmony.

The Bible alone of all ‘faith manuals’ is, from Genesis to Revelation, a coherent narrative detailing the way to salvation. No other ‘sacred scriptures’ offers unmerited forgiveness, offers such salvation. It is Christianity’s source book and claims there is but one way: ‘...there is salvation in no other One [ie Jesus], for neither is there any other name under Heaven having been given among men by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12).

Clay Mould

So—is life ‘pointless’? Created from earth’s elements we are a ‘clay mould’ which, if we are willing, can be shaped by the hands of the Master Potter. Engage with Him, restore our relationship with Him, and He will prepare us for our part in that unending future of growth—an eternity with the power given us to shape the broken universe into

Israel...cont’d from p.6

Became normalised in Christendom, and those who remained faithful to the apostolic doctrine (Jude 3) faced persecution. And martyrdom. By the mid-sixth century the church in Rome had usurped universal religious and temporal authority and gradually imposed its pernicious rule over Europe.

It today spreads its insidious influence and unbiblical tenets globally, while Kings, Princes and Presidents do obeisance. In recent years there has been a rush of prominent Protestant leaders seeking reconciliation (‘one faith’) with Rome, accepting its authority and itself deviating from the Biblical faith

By substituting Sunday worship Rome—and Protestantism—in effect rejected the God of creation whose ‘mark, sign’ is the *seventh-day Sabbath*: ‘...hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign [Heb. oth] between me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God’ (Exodus 31:16-17, Ezekiel 20:12, 20). It is God’s ‘signet ring’, *His mark of authority*.

Christendom has embraced this false ideology—both Protestant and Catholic.

Prophecy

Failure to recognize this dichotomy within Christendom can lead to a distortion of how we see prophetic events. Paul, drawing on the prophets (Daniel, notably), notes that prior to the return of Christ a blasphemous leader (‘*the man of sin*’)

God’s vision and image.

That is salvation. That is why we were created. All life’s experiences, good and bad, are a tapestry viewed from the reverse—but they form a finished work of beauty, to be revealed at the return of Christ.

Therefore - ‘...seek the LORD while he may be found. Call on him while he is near’.

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with worldwide influence would arise during the ‘last days’ (ie the long church age). He will be ‘seated’ (Gk *kathidzo*) in ‘...the temple of God’—ie prominent in the church, in Christendom (II Thessalonians 2:4-12).

Clearly he is someone in the *apostate* church (dubbed ‘Babylon’ in Scripture) and *not* part of the *Israel of God*. The *man of sin* claims to be above God evidenced by his readiness to change His laws, persecute the true believers, propagate false teachings and exercise satanic powers to deceive through lying wonders. He will, by his actions, blaspheme God.

In outlining the end-times Jesus warned his disciples (Matthew 24:4-5): ‘...Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, ‘I am Christ’ and shall deceive many’. It is vital that all who are of the true Israel of God maintain a love for the truth and remain faithful and vigilant.

That deception already has the world in its grasp.

Israel and the Church

There's a clear parallel between the story of Israel and the story of Christianity

Both, though related, worship the same God of the Christian Scriptures, the Creator. Both are rooted in the divine law, the divine way of life. Both exist in a world antagonistic to the true God. Both were established as a 'light', a witness, to the world. And both were soon corrupted from their founding principles.

Barely delivered from slavery in deeply idolatrous Egypt, the people of Israel swiftly turned to idols and to the foul practices associated with them, despite having covenanted with the LORD to follow His way in return for His care and protection. Having repeatedly abrogated their responsibility under the covenant Israel experienced the temporary loss of divine protection—hence the 'curses' fell (*see* Leviticus 26), until they changed their ways.

The Church

Jesus propagated his message, the 'Gospel', first through the twelve apostles and then by those taught by them. Thus was formed his church, his *ecclesia*—a selected coterie of those committed to him and called out from the world to enter covenant with him through a change of heart and baptism. Through Jesus their broken relationship with the Father was restored, the divine law 'written in the heart' through submission to the promptings of God's Word.

Those who remain faithful are destined to be resurrected to serve with Christ eternally. And, as with ancient Israel, '*...the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him*' (Hebrews 10:38, Habakkuk 2:3-4).

The Israel of God

Israel didn't remain consistently faithful—and indeed experienced frequent loss of sovereignty and even exile under duress in foreign lands. Ultimately, despite the clear indica-

tion in the prophets as to when he would come, they rejected their Deliverer, the Messiah, Jesus. Many in Christendom don't understand him.

However, all was not lost. The LORD told the prophet Elijah: '*...I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal*' (Romans 11:4). Elsewhere (Galatians 6:16) Paul calls this remnant '*the Israel of God*'. Embedded in apostate Israel and Judah were some who remained faithful: '*...Even so then at this present time also [early first century AD] there is a remnant [the 'election' v.7] according to the election of grace*' (Romans 11:5).

The Olive Tree

Throughout the Scriptures, the olive tree symbolizes God's faithful nation: '*...The LORD called your name, A green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit: with the noise of a great tumult he hath kindled fire upon it, and the branches of it are broken. For the LORD of hosts, that planted you, has pronounced evil against you, for the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have done against themselves to provoke me to anger in offering incense unto Baal*' (Jeremiah 11:16-17).

Their idolatry led the husbandman to 'prune' the decaying 'branches' from the 'natural' holy roots—though with the option of their being grafted in again upon repentance (Romans 11:23).

Embedded within Christendom is the Israel of God

As the divine plan unfolded, in due time (Romans 5:6) the Deliverer, Jesus the Messiah, heralded the process by which *all* of mankind could have the opportunity to repent and be grafted into the olive tree, the Israel of God.

Mirror Image

Israel's apostasy is mirrored in Christianity. Over two billion live under the 'Christian' banner, many faithfully attending to the 'offices' of

the church. Jesus, however, gave a powerful warning: '*... narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it*' (Matthew 7:14). It is this 'few' *within* Christianity who are the 'Israel of God'. Most professing Christians have simply and without question embraced the form of the faith into which they were born—for the most part a deadly mix of idolatrous superstitions. Most of Christendom has embraced ancient sun-worship [Baal] practices (*eg* Christmas and Easter, sun-rise services *etc*), along with a form of ancestor worship in venerating so-called 'saints' and seeking their assistance for personal problems.

Just as in ancient Israel, for they, too, believed they were serving the one true God while embracing 'doctrines of devils' (Deuteronomy 32:17, I Timothy 4:1). An Israelite historian records of those who embraced the religion of Israel: '*...They feared the LORD, and served their own gods*' (II Kings 17:33).

A Faith Abandoned

The infant church was born into a hostile world in which the true godly way was suppressed and gross distortions underpinned beliefs and practices. Worship of manufactured 'gods' was universal (*cf* Romans *ch* 1). The seeds of apostasy were sown in the early church.

Such gradually infiltrated Christianity and was noted even in the apostolic era. Hear the apostle Paul: '*...I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them*' (Acts 20:29-30).

By the fourth century idolatrous and authoritarian practices **cont'd p.5**

'the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keeps the sabbath from polluting it, and takes hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people' (Isaiah 56:6-7)

Pointless?

Is this all there is? Retired, your career behind you—*what next?* Was there a point to those three-score years and ten?

As our end looms we can look back on a string of failures and successes. Goals abandoned and achieved. And then all we have worked for sinks in a sea of oblivion, and soon forgotten.

But what if life were far from pointless? What if every thing we did during this lifetime, even every decision and thought, contributed to a productive life lasting beyond earth and into eternity? But it's a fact that most of us don't see beyond our near horizon, a high fence blocking all that lies beyond our material needs and aspirations.

The daily trek for miles to fetch clean water. Prayer to the gods for rain. All too frequent cause to mourn the departed victims of malaria or bilharzia or cholera. Rebuilding a flooded home. No time to fix the shingles. And no time to think much of the beyond. This is what preoccupies us.

'Salvation'

But for those who want to reach out and grasp it *there is hope, certainty*. The chaotic state of the world is our own doing and won't be unravelled until there is direct hands-on intervention from the Creator. Make the right decisions and you will be a key player in that process.

When our first parents opened their eyes on a world of beauty and harmony they entered into a plan to enable us to participate in an eternity of enabling God's vision for His universe. It is called 'salvation'.

Those who take their religion seriously aspire to this—but most fail to understand the process. For many it's the nagging doubt: *will it be heaven or purgatory or hell?* Others are concerned as to their reward for achievement and 'good works': *be restored as a higher caste, or with a lower status?* Maybe attain *Nirvana*. And, of course, a billion 'Protestants' in Christendom look for a blissful reward in *heaven*.

Paradise Lost

Having evaluated an alternative plan to that set out by the Creator, man chose to believe a packet of lies purveyed by an alien force—a powerful deceptive force that continues to adversely influence mankind to this day. It's an influence that permeates and drives every aspect of life—in education, in health, in the environment, in commerce, in entertainment. *And in religion*.

The direct consequence was a downward spiral in man's fortunes with the results we encounter today: war, planetary destruction, economic chaos, religious confusion, perversion of our in-born life-force, unleashing of our darkest thoughts as blood touches blood on our streets and nation battles nation.

Our 'great and good' don't have an answer to conflict, or to disease, or economic stability, or the control of mankind's destructive nature barely suppressed by a thin veil of civilisation. *Even after six millennia of civilisation!*

Planned Recovery

Our first parents—contrary to modern pseudo-science—were created perfect but with freedom of choice. Their perverse decision had been anticipated by the Creator and the pre-determined recovery plan was immediately imple-

mented: '*...In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began*' (Titus 1:2).

Made to reflect the divine nature in human flesh they experienced the presence of their Creator as He walked and talked with them in Eden, imparting guidance and practical wisdom.

Adam by choice accepted the lies peddled by satan, laying the groundwork for the future perversions of the divine way—notably the false concepts of what lies beyond the grave, and the pursuit of human reason distorted by demonic influence contrary to God's revealed way (*cp Romans ch 1*).

God's Grand Design

Mankind continues to suffer the consequences of Adam's rebellion. The bond between man and God snapped and paradise was lost. The plan, however, restores that bond and we can become the '*offspring [children] of God*' (*ie, be saved*). Wrote Paul: '*...what we now suffer I count as nothing in comparison with the glory which is soon to be manifested in us*' (Romans 8:18).

What that glory may be is veiled but we are given glimpses: '*... Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him. But God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit*' (I Corinthians 2:9-10).

Freed from the restraints of our temporary existence we will rise from the grave in a spirit body (Gk *pneumatikos*) (v.44), incorruptible and powerful (v.42-43).

And when we truly become children of God see *cont'd p.5*

A Devilish Plot

Why is our world in such chaos! We can't work out a way to permanent peace. Despite the bounty of earth's God-given resources we can't feed everyone nor supply everyone with clean water. Disease, despite medical advances, remains an ever-present challenge.

'Saviours'—Presidents, Prime Ministers, educationalists, economists, business gurus—arise with their flawed solutions. And still there are wars, criminality, economic boom and bust, illiteracy, poverty.

Causes

First, at the core there is human nature. (though there is but one solution for that). Mankind is himself deeply flawed and by nature chooses the way that, to us, 'seems right'. But it usually has unintended consequences.

Next, and a result of the first, is the universal antipathy to and rejection of the path of life placed before us by the Creator. Deviate from that way and adverse results follow – both personally, nationally and on a global scale.

Satan's Input

Then there's the devastating effect of alien influences—spirit influences. Satan, man's inveterate adversary, is determined to oust God—and Christianity—off stage. We see his work in efforts to erase every trace of religion from education. We see it as God's guidance is trashed in our legislatures. We see it in the debauching of entertainment. We see it in the vast array of 'faiths' and the perversion of the message brought by Jesus, the Son of God. And we see it in the wide public acquiescence to such changes.

Our adversary assumes territorial rights over Earth: '*...the devil takes him [Jesus] up into an exceeding high mountain, and shews him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And says to him, All these things will I give you, if you wilt fall down and worship*

me' (Matthew 4:8'9).

Having succeeded—perhaps over a period of years—in seducing our first parents to ignore God's guidance, Satan has increasingly influenced every aspect of human existence, manipulating it to his own ends. He is branded in the Scriptures as '*...the god of this world*' who has '*...blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them*' (II Corinthians 4:4).

Gk. *diabolos*

Applies only to Satan

Gk. *daimonion*

Applies to unclean spirits in general

Despite—or because of (*cf* Ezekiel 28;17)—his exalted position as a created spirit being, Satan's ardent desire was to be '*...like God*' - Isaiah 14:14. But when another perfect being, man, was given dominion of a beautiful planet, Earth and, being privy to the counsel of God (v. 14), he successfully undermined Adam's God-given authority and effectively 'stole' his kingship role.

Satan had fuelled his seditious rebellion by seducing many of the 'angels of heaven' to his cause – called devils, unclean spirits (Gk *daimonion*) in the Scriptures.

Spirit Hierarchy

It would be folly to downplay Satan's role in our world. Unseen by mankind, he rules his own spirit kingdom, as acknowledged by Jesus: '*...Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falls. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand?*' (Luke 11:17-18). He has since the beginning sought to undermine God's intention to restore mankind as His rightful heir, and to establish his own kingdom. He clearly has the 'fallen angels' in his thrall—and they are organized.

The prophet Daniel provides insight into this spirit hierarchy. He had been diligently praying over exiled Israel's plight in captivity, at that time in Medo-Persia, when an angel came from God to provide answers (*ch* 10). The angel describes how he had been held up by a powerful demonic spirit who had jurisdiction over Persia: '*... the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with [to influence] the kings of Persia*' (v.13).

Satan infiltrates the kingdoms of this world to further his aims and he uses his army of obedient 'devils'. We learn from the Scriptures that they can invade the minds of willing recipients, though not all are physically harmful (Luke 11:26). They urgently need a suitable human mind to enable them to function (v.24).

By entering an individual (possession) they can convey, through the person's thought processes, the will of their master. Satan himself. He can also tempt without possessing—as with Jesus before he started his ministry (Matthew 4), or with our first parents (Genesis 3).

An unclean spirit can (but with God's permission) influence many - *eg* to lie, or give a false prophecy (II Chron 18:20).

Having failed to cause Jesus to sin (Matthew 4) and ultimately by Jesus's death on the cross and by his resurrection Satan ceded to Jesus his sovereignty of our planet. But through his influence the Devil still retains the 'power of death' over mankind, for we all die. By covenanting with Christ we negate that power and fear of death (*cf* Hebrews 2:14, James 4:7), and will be resurrected to live eternally.

Until Jesus brings his Kingdom to reign over mankind the Devil remains the 'god' of this world (II Corinthians 4:4) and disseminates his malign influence worldwide. His plot to conquer will fail and he will be restrained (Revelation 20:1-3). **Ω**

MiniStudy**The New Horizon**

'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him. But God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit' (I Corinthians 2:10)

'I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us' (Romans 8:18)

In a crisis we need to keep our eyes firmly fixed on the divine purpose. It's a plan that stretches infinitely beyond the limited horizon that now restricts our short physical lifespan. For those committed to Jesus Christ life beyond the cold grave far exceeds our wildest imagination.

- Paul's message to the Corinthian brethren is that God has, through His in-dwelling Spirit, released glimpses of what He has prepared for us (v.11). As he later says, in this life we see mere reflections from a misted mirror—but the reality is beyond our present understanding (I Corinthians 13: 12)
- God's grand design pre-dated the physical presence of man on Earth: '*...In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began*' (Titus 1:2). The unfathomable complexity of the human body reflected the '*...image and likeness of God*' (Genesis 1:27), and as long as our first parents remained in harmonious relationship with the Creator they would live endlessly
- They were, however, created from the elements of earth—mere clay models of what they could become, and with freedom of choice: '*...the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground (cf Job 33:6), and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul [Heb. nephesh]*' (Genesis 2:7). By direct intervention God animated the created material body of Adam—both his physical and spirit life. By this '*spirit in man*' (Heb.*ruach* Job 32:8) we are able to communicate with our Creator—and to fulfil His plan that we become an integral part of His Family
- Their—and our—relationship with God hinged on adhering to the spiritual laws of life - that is, the laws which sustained their immortality, encapsulated in the fruit of the Tree of Life. Choosing to make contrary decisions would have consequences: '*...in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die*' (ch 2:17). They made that wrong choice and the process of death was initiated, for them and for us. They thus cut themselves off from direct interaction with the Creator (ch 3:8ff)
- Their choice was foreseen by God and a plan was in place to restore His created image. Adam and Eve had fractured the universal law of love that binds together the *kosmos*. Their sin could be forgiven only by someone who was perfect and worth more than all: '*...the Lamb [Jesus Christ] slain from the foundation of the world*' (Revelation 13:8). Peter explains: '*...with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you [us]*' (I Peter 1:19-20)
- When we through Jesus harmonize our will with the Father's will we become His '*...sons and daughters*' (II Corinthians 6:18). Paul provides further insight as to the significance of that relationship: '*... 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. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*' (Romans 8:17-18)
- Recall that the Father has put all that glorious inheritance in subjection to Jesus: '*...you set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him*' (Hebrews 2:7-8)
- Such a great salvation is open to all through Jesus—and through him alone: '*...Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*', spoke Peter (Acts 4:12).
- The apostle gives a clarion call to his hearers—and to us today: '*...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*' (ch 2:38) Ω

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