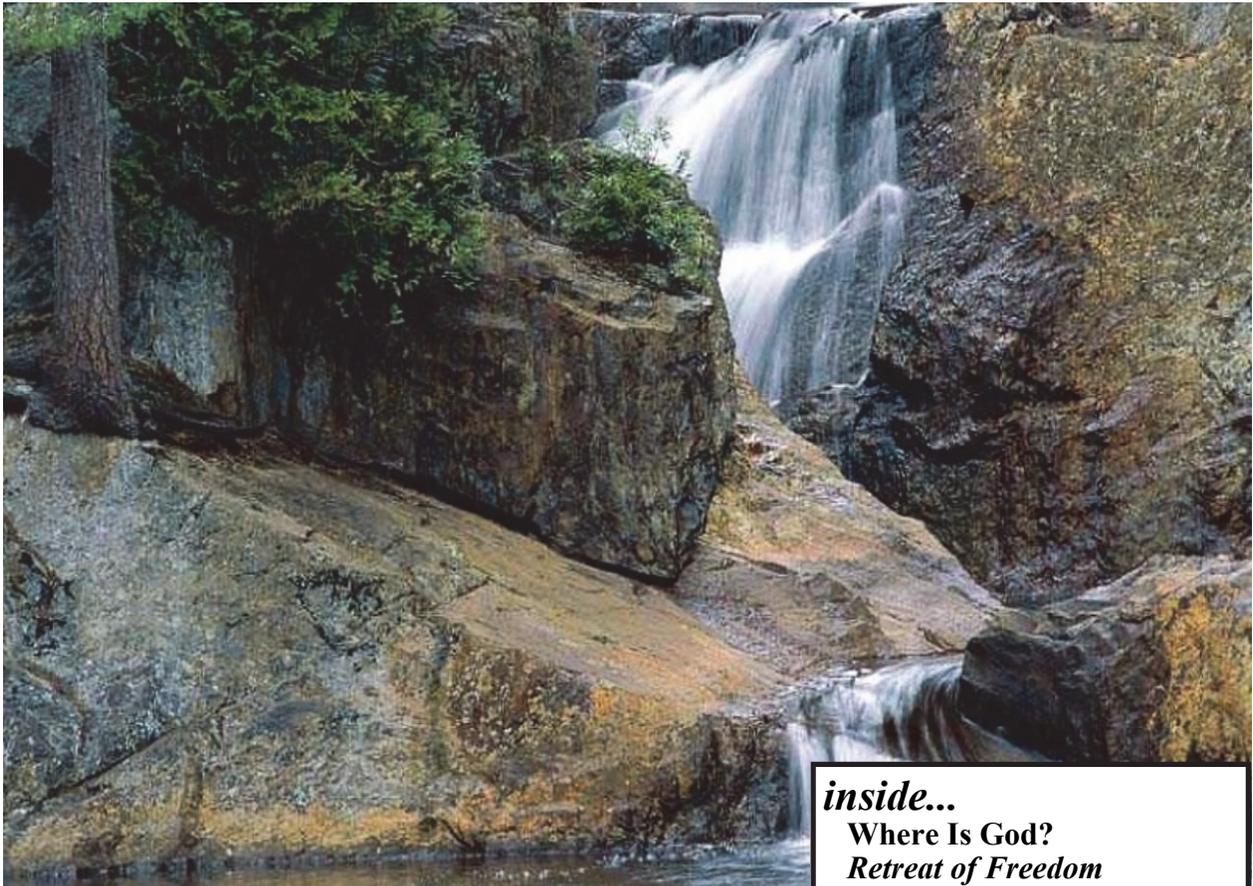


new **Horizons**

Vol 26 No 1

January/February 2022

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



inside...

Where Is God?

Retreat of Freedom

The Easter Story

Weather—why?

Pandemic Perspective

Be Ready!

Where Is the Church?

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

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

If you would like a copy of our *Statement of Beliefs* 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
mobile: 07949942180

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

or from:

Tulsa, OK 2022

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 151

January/February 2022

How does the concept of 'god' affect day-to-day life?

Polls tend to show that religion and belief in a god of some kind is almost universal—even non-believers formulate a 'god' of some kind. (The latter are estimated to be about one in seven (86%) of world population—about a billion). But what impact does belief in god have on lives?

As the apostle Paul acknowledges '*...though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, as there be gods many, and lords many*' (I Corinthians 8:5). That has changed little over the centuries since. And each god imposes his (or her) way of life on its devotees.

In Islam, for example, there's a rigid daily routine and various weekly and annual festivals. The Hindu faith has myriad unique elaborate gatherings. The Christian faith, of course, also has its own varied observances. The various faiths have unique outcomes to life and have their individual philosophies.

One God

Paul continues: '*But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him*' (v.6). Not, observe, a plurality of often-competing gods, but one supreme Creator. One Father of mankind. One Saviour, Jesus of Nazareth, the first-born Son of the Father.

The Christian scriptures—the only coherent religious text delineating origins—is the unsullied record of the Creator's purpose and what He requires of us, requires of *all* mankind.

The Invisible God

No human has ever seen the Father He is indeed invisible to our eye (John 1:18, I Timothy 1:17). But He remains the all-powerful God actively involved through His Son in all history *and* today in the life of nations and of men.

In Christian realms there was in the recent past an awareness, however vague, of a divine oversight of world affairs. We expected God's intervention when the nation cried out, as in the war years. National days of prayer (eg 1918, 1940) were called, and there was widespread acknowledgement of God's direct intervention in our history: the Armada, World War I, the Battle of Britain, Dunkirk *etc.* As spoke Prime Minister Winston Churchill (1942) '*I have a feeling sometimes that a Guiding Hand has interfered, I have a feeling that we have a Guardian*'.

That national consciousness of a divine oversight has faded. Decades of godless Marxist philosophy has festered in our universities and infected all realms of society down to toddlers in the nursery. Foreign cultures add variety but have distorted our traditional values and our innate culture. God is excluded from education, from business ethics, from the media and even from our

churches. The teachings of Jesus Christ, largely, no longer guide personal behaviour—nor our governments.

So, Where Is God?

Consider that bedrock of national stability, *the family*. Governments flout the foundation principles for a cohesive society—principles built by our Creator into the human psyche but largely ignored.

We were designed as a unit—a male and a female, a man and a woman—able to procreate offspring fit for God's own spirit family. *Marriage is sacred* (Malachi 2:15), and every distortion of it is contrary to the divine will with inevitable adverse consequences for individuals and for society and for the human race.

Yet governments with popular support legalize promiscuity, legislate easy divorce, encourage the destruction of the family, legalize same-sex 'marriages'. So—*where is God?*

If all mankind were motivated by the consciousness of the twenty-four hour living presence of the one true God there would be little need for police, for lawyers, for courts, for prisons—for we would then act with the conscious knowledge that we must answer to Him.

If all mankind were motivated by the consciousness of the twenty-four hour living presence of the one true God would parliamentarians dare to line their own nests, or impose law opposed to the divine decrees, or would they lie?

If all mankind were motivated by the consciousness of the twenty-four hour presence of the one true God would there be corrupt business practices, defrauding of customers, shoddy workmanship, secret bank accounts and corporate greed?

The encroaching deployment of authoritarian measures in society strips away personal responsibility for obedience to the one true Authority. It is an open door to compliance with the world and its standards. Warned Jesus: *'...because lawlessness shall have been multiplied, the love of the many will grow cold'*.

No! Few regulate their life by the revealed will of God. Millennia of neglect for God's great *law of love*—that is, willing compliance with His perfect will—has adversely affected body and mind. God is not a constant presence (*cf* Psalm 10:4), nor is a balanced care for those around us, our neighbour'.

As wrote the prophet Isaiah: *'...Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!'* (*ch* 5:20).

Such a universal mindset influences the man-in-the-street. Having abandoned our moral compass (the Christian scriptures) society degenerates and all manner of sinful behaviour is tolerated, even embraced.

He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God ?' Ω

Retreat of Freedom

The parable of the slowly-warming frog is a familiar analogy, and one to which we must urgently take heed. For despite our supposed Christian principles we are an 'endangered species' being slowly engulfed by a rising tide of illiberal pressures from governments in thrall to hidden authoritarian global forces.

It's a well-publicized fact that government employs consultant psychologists to advise it on how to manipulate the populace to accept its plans. We are 'nudged' slowly, step-by-step to embrace concepts alien to us—a panoply of restrictive edicts such as face coverings, or social isolation or climate change 'solutions'.

It has been said—a matter of common observation!—that 'every great cause begins as a movement, becomes a business and eventually degenerates into a racket'. It applies in every sphere of life—in business, in government, in entertainment and even in churches. And to promote the 'common good' movement we are guided towards 'global solutions for global problems'.

No matter how high in the hierarchy of control there is always someone 'pulling the strings'. Top-down (*eg* global) organization encourages dependency, and a dependant population is at the whim of the organizers and we can come to lose the readiness to think independently. However benign the motive and however 'soft' the presentation (wolf dressed as lamb) basic freedoms are being eroded and we are increasingly at the mercy of forces alien to our settled way of life.

We may not like a particular government 'nudge', but—hey! - it's only a small step, we may say, so we take it on board, however reluctantly. The time comes, however, when enough is enough, for we begin to compromise with essentials, with the Word of God.

Wearing a face covering despite its health and psychological hazards

may perhaps be a small price to pay for harmonious relations with fearful fellow man. So we wear them and take steps to minimize the aggravation and limit self-harm.

We still have choices, but our freedoms are slowly being stripped away (mandatory vaccine, cashless society, digital currency *etc*) as the state becomes increasingly authoritarian. But what if, like the three Jewish lads in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar, you are faced with a life or death choice affecting your allegiance to God, to Jesus? When such authority touches faith?

A Precedent

The three faithful Jews (*see* Daniel 3:3-21) faced with enforced idolatry responded *'... If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up'*.

Recall the admonition Jesus gave the apostles: *'...whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven'*. Loyalty is all. Loyalty to the one true God the Creator of all. Loyalty to His covenant with us. Loyalty to His revealed will, to His unchanging way of life as made plain in the Word of life, the Scriptures.

As we edge towards the dawn of a new age, darkness dressed as light will envelop us. As Paul warned the Ephesian brethren: *'...Have nothing to do with the barren unprofitable deeds of darkness, but, instead of that, set your faces against them'* (Ephesians 5:11).

As brethren it is imperative we together face these forces, support and encourage one another, *'...knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed'*. Ω

THE EASTER STORY

Even in our secular age many churches bulge at Easter. Will you be celebrating?

Easter is perhaps the most pivotal of all the Christian festivals. Fail to observe it and you would not be considered Christian. Wasn't Jesus crucified at that time of year in early Spring? Didn't he hang on the cross for many agonizing hours? Was he not placed in a rock tomb at Easter? And on Easter morning did he not rise triumphantly from the dead?

That in a nutshell is the "Easter story". On Easter Sunday many Christians still don their best attire ("put on their Easter bonnet") and go to places of worship - to mighty cathedrals, to lowly chapels, to churches made of mud, to open spaces. Millions rise before dawn for a Sunday sunrise service in honour of the Saviour of mankind. Surely Easter is a festival central to the faith of all Christians.

Yet many Christians do not observe it. *Why?*

These same Christians are as convinced as the others that Jesus died and rose again. That by these acts they have been freely redeemed and given eternal life. That through Jesus, by the grace of God, they are placed as sons and daughters of the Almighty. *But they do not observe Easter.*

First Observation

You may be surprised to learn that neither did the apostles. Nor any of the first Christians!

In fact it was not for over a century after the resurrection of Jesus that its observance began to enter

the Christian Church. Indeed the very word "Easter" is found nowhere in Scripture except in one gross mistranslation in the *King James Bible* (Acts 12:4) - corrected in later versions.

Anyway, what on earth do you mean - "Easter"?

Says the *Oxford Companion to the Bible*: "Easter: From *Eostre*, a Saxon goddess, celebrated at the spring equinox". The goddess was also known as *Astarte* and *Ishtar* - the name used in ancient Babylon. Her son was *Tammuz* (called Nimrod in the Scriptures) who died violently. Her "weeping" was deemed to bring about his resurrection in the spring.

This same idolatrous practice crept into the worship of ancient Israel: *'...he brought me to the door of the gate of the LORD'S house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz'* (Ezekiel 8:14). It later gave rise to the practice of "Lent" - the forty days of partial fasting prior to Easter - by mainstream Christianity.

Strange Customs

As the Christian Church abandoned God's revealed precepts it thus began to wear the religious garb of the idolatrous religions that surrounded it.

Ishtar was also worshipped idolatrously as *Venus* and *Isis*, and one of her symbols was the egg. Hence the ancient - and

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

modern - custom of coloured eggs at Easter. The egg symbolized her fertility. This strange notion also accounts for the "Easter bunny" - rabbits and hares, too, being seen as fertility symbols in ancient idolatry.

Strange, isn't it, how "modern" man can lapse into silly and idolatrous worship, ascribing it to the one and only pure and righteous God, Creator of all things!

Ancient Festival

How then did the first Christians mark this pivotal historical event of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? The truth is they continued to observe one of the most ancient of religious festivals the origins of which go back to just after man's creation. From it derives all the sacrificial rituals used by mankind in whatever religious guise.

When our first parents sinned God showed them that they must sacrifice an innocent victim to cover that sin. In ancient Israel it was known as "*Passover and Unleavened Bread*". You can read about it in Leviticus 23. This spring festival marks the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God - and his resurrection as the firstfruits of mankind into the Family of God. That same mistranslation in Acts 12 served to hide this observance. It should read *pascha* - Passover.

That the first Christians continued this form of worship is verified by both the Scripture record and by secular history. The *Oxford Companion*, for example, goes on to admit the late arrival of Easter as a festival on the Christian calendar - mid second century. After the death of the apostles the Church caved in to the pressures of the surrounding pagan society. *cont'd over*

To avoid persecution and to achieve political clout - and more converts - the religious practices of the day were grafted on to Christianity.

Does It Matter?

God reveals Himself as “Jealous”. So jealous for how He wishes to be worshipped that the “people of God” - the nation of Israel - were evicted by God from the land of promise for embracing strange worship. Read, for example, the fierce condemnation of Israel for “Easter sun-rise services”! The account is in Ezekiel 8:16, where the prophet in vision saw a group of men, ‘...with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east’

A further example is Israel’s failure to worship God on the *Sabbath*—the seventh day of the week (Ezekiel 20). Another is the abandonment of God’s annual *Festival of Tabernacles* - the notorious and oft-mentioned sin of King Jeroboam (I Kings 12:32-33). Read, too, the account in Jeremiah 10:1-5 of God’s condemnation of what looks suspiciously similar to a Christmas tree—a kind of totem pole! Here God warns Israel: “*Learn not the way of the heathen [ie idolatrous worship]...for the customs of the people are vain*”. Israel “...forsook the Lord and served Baal and Ashtaroth [ie the goddess Easter]” (Judges 2:11-13).

Nowhere in the writings of the Old or the New Testament Scriptures did Jesus Christ authorize a change to the worship he prescribed for mankind. Clearly, the religious worship surrounding Easter is in direct conflict with that prescribed by God.

For God, it *does* matter how we

worship. He remains “jealous”. In no way does this compromise His deep and enduring love for His creation. But to add practices from the depraved religions concocted by the perverted imaginations of devil-inspired humans is an affront to the Creator. Such practices cloud God’s beautiful plan for mankind revealed in His holy days.

Too many Christians ask: “How did the heathen worship their gods? Even so will I do likewise”. And what is God’s response? “*You shall not do so to the Lord your God...What things soever I command you, observe to do it: you shall not add thereto, nor diminish from it*” (Deuteronomy 12:29-32).

Judgment

What will you do when, facing Jesus Christ, you plead for admission to the Kingdom? You may say, Didn’t I religiously attend worship every Easter - and Christmas and Sunday - from childhood? Didn’t I dress up and roll eggs and for years diligently worship you at our annual Easter sunrise service? Didn’t I give up smoking for Lent? And didn’t I teach my

children that the Saviour was honoured through the Easter bunny and by rolling eggs?

His reply may well be: “...*In vain [uselessly] did you worship me, teaching for doctrines the traditions of men*” (Matthew 15:9). Simply because you call Jesus “Lord” is not enough. You must “...*do the will of my Father which is in heaven*”. Otherwise Jesus Christ may say to you in that day: “...*I never knew you; depart from me you that work iniquity [ie you do not in your Christian walk express the law of God]*” (Matthew 7:21-27).

To go through life thinking you were diligently serving God and then to at last find out He hadn’t noticed you is an awesome thought.

The words of Joshua offer sage advice: ‘...*if it seems wrong in your eyes to serve Jehovah, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve, whether the gods whom your fathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. But as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah.*’ (Joshua 24:15). **Ω**

SO...WHAT DO WE DO?

One of Jesus’s brothers, Jude, wrote to the churches expressing concerns about the drift from the foundation principles of the faith: ‘...*I had need to write to you to exhort you to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*’ (v.3). That body of belief was delivered by the apostles of Jesus.

Paul especially, by word and by example, explains Jesus’ true teaching— notably in regard to this Spring festival (I Corinthians 11:23) as he guided us in the observance of the death and resurrection of the Saviour by means of the *Lord’s Supper* and the following seven

days of *Unleavened Bread*.

The solemn memorial is held annually on ‘...*the night in which he was betrayed*’ using the simple everyday elements of bread and wine.

Jesus died next day at the time of the annual *Passover* sacrifice in the Temple, the ‘...*lamb of God that takes away the sin if the world*’. Israelites slew the lamb in the Temple, then roasted and eaten after sundown as the first day of the ensuing festival began.

Years after Christ’s resurrection the apostle records that the Corinthians were observing *Unleavened Bread* (ch 5:7). *Easter* was a late-comer in church observances. **Ω**

Weather—why?

Our climate is the headline-consuming hot topic

‘A bit chilly today’. ‘I hate this weather’. ‘Wow! Isn’t it hot—never saw anything like it’. Weather—it is (certainly in England) top of our small talk. From the seventeenth century ‘little ice age’ to today’s headline devouring ‘global warming’ we have been through every extreme.

Since we first put a spade into the ground our local weather has determined our activity and we have been at its mercy. It has throughout history caused prosperity and it has, as today, driven mass migration.

Meteorologists understand (partially) the complexity of the natural forces that shape today’s weather pattern near you.—from ocean currents to cosmic rays to the jet stream. And, of course, the various gaseous elements in the atmosphere: carbon dioxide, nitrogen, etc. All elements that are essential for life on earth to thrive. Indeed the data indicate that CO₂ in the atmosphere has contributed to enhanced green growth, and may even be in deficit.

The apostle Paul observes: *‘... [God] left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness’* (Acts 14:16, James 1:17). And after the catastrophic climatic change of the great flood He promised: *‘... While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night won’t cease.’* (Genesis 8:22). So—what happened? *Why is our climate disrupted?*

In Control

The ability to control our weather isn’t a skill claimed by science! Yet it isn’t just random, for it is firmly under the control of the Creator. God designed our world, He engineered the natural forces that underpin all life. Through trial and error science discovers these fundamental interacting laws. And they learn to respect them, as do we all! Take the law of

gravity—for we all quickly learn not to ‘break’ it! We avoid known poisons. On the global scale, however, the effect of transgressing the natural laws can be devastating. Like climate change or pollution.

The Manual

There’s a tendency to treat statements in the Scriptures as mere suggestion—‘take it or leave it’—and of no consequence. But our weather, our climate, depends on taking such seriously, for when God speaks (whether or not you believe He exists!) He means it and He has much to say about the climate: *‘...The LORD will make the sky overhead seem like a bronze roof that keeps out the rain, and the ground under your feet will become as hard as iron. Your crops will be scorched by the hot east wind or ruined by mildew’* (Deuteronomy 28:21-23 CEV) That’s climate change. *But why?*

Archaeologist David Wright notes: *‘...Humans don’t exist in ecological vacuums. We are a keystone species and, as such, we make massive impacts on the entire ecological complexion of the Earth. Some of these can be good for us, but some have really threatened the long-term sustainability of the Earth’.* For example, it is now thought that the once verdant Sahara became desert as a result of human activity—overgrazing, deforestation etc.

If...

Your lap-top is designed, made with purpose, and

equipped with appropriate software—and an instruction manual, which guides you in its use. But misuse it and you are in trouble. Planet earth with all its intricate interconnected pre-programmed systems is like that.

If you follow the ‘manual’ (ie the Scriptures) it works, but *‘...it shall be, if you will not heed the*

voice of your God, to take heed to do all His commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today, even all these curses shall come on you and overtake you’ (Deuteronomy 28:15). And there follows a list of the inevitable negative consequences.

Earth is mankind’s inheritance and it is our responsibility—long neglected—to preserve it. The Creator instructed our first parents *‘...dress and keep it’* (Genesis 2:15). We now reap what we sowed—pollution, poor health, real poverty (people die), over population, drought, famine.

Missing Dimension

Neglect of these basic principles, however, is just one strand in how we experience the climate. For there is an unbreakable link between a harmonious climate and morality—as instanced by the great flood of Noah’s day: *‘...GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth’* (Genesis 6:6-7). He warned: *‘...yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights’* (ch 7:4).

Mankind in general has failed to learn the lesson of that mass destruction some four millennia ago. Nor from more recent mass climate change episodes such as in the

sixth century, which sealed the demise of the corrupt Roman Empire or the 14th century Black Death which carried off 50% of the population of Europe.

Our failure to care for the planet coupled with our neglect of divine moral requirements directly affects our environment. A stable climate is a partnership between man and the Creator. **Ω**

Festivals 2022

Lord’s Supper	Thurs evg April 14
Unleavened Bread	April 16-22
Pentecost	June 5
Trumpets	September 26
Atonement	October 5
Tabernacles	October 10-16
Last Great Day	October 17

Pandemic Perspective

The ‘world’ increasingly encroaches on our liberty in Christ. We must commit firmly to the way God has revealed

Our Adversary, the devil, has several core unpleasant characteristics. He is a *liar*, he manipulates *natural events*, he induces *fear*, he *deceives* and he *divides*. And from the beginning he has employed all of these devices in repeated attempts to overturn the divine plan—interacting with individuals, with groups and with the world at large.

As Christians, however, we know with absolute certainty that God is firmly in control and that His will is unconquerable.

A Destructive Spirit

It will be worthwhile to consider the on-going destructive pandemic in the light of Satan’s designs, for he has deployed the weapons of fear, deception, division on the bulk of mankind. He has manipulated natural events—with divine consent and the blind connivance of world leadership—in order to undermine God’s plans.

Face-to-face communication—normal human interaction—is inhibited by the imposition of (ineffective) face coverings—a historical mark of subservience. It’s a sign that many are fearful—a characteristic alien to pure religion. Fear is a trigger factor in that it lowers resistance to illness. As Job at one point found (but resisted): ‘...*the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me*’ (Job 3:25)

Sadly, Christians have not been exempt from this fearfulness, yet

we are told ‘...*perfect love casts out fear*’ (I John 4:18), and ‘...*God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind*’ (II Timothy 1:7). It is our privilege in Christ to be ever in his care, remembering that ‘...*you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear*’ (Romans 8:15).

Some faithful brethren have been cut down by the effect of this virus, so it’s important to remember that ‘...*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints*’ (Psalm 116:15). Isaiah adds: ‘...*the righteous perishes, and no man lays it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come*’ (ch 57:1). And that we pray and offer support for those afflicted, and for their families.

Faith in Action

That widespread fear is magnified by the devilish lies disseminated via toxic social media and the manipulation and repetitive airing of frightening statistics fuelled by often inaccurate tests, by social distancing and by lock-downs.

Recall the awful plight of the patriarch Job, struck down by a horrendous plague, and who experienced, at the behest of Satan, the loss of children, property and a vast business empire. Job’s reaction?: ‘...*Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly*’ (Job 1:21-22). Even his wife, lacking faith, succumbed to fear, berating him: ‘...*Do you still retain your integrity? curse God, and die*’ (ch 2: 9). But to his friends he later adds, ‘...*Though he slay me, yet*

will I trust in him’ (ch 13:15; see Psalm 116:15).

Divided We Fall

The devil, the adversary of all that is godly, is also ‘...*the accuser of the brethren*’ (Revelation 12:10). When we abandon trust in our Father we align ourselves with Satan’s attitudes, He sows the seeds of division—in the world and even among God’s people—by setting vaxxers against anti-vaxxers, by setting the wearers of face coverings against those who don’t (or can’t) wear them, by diverse views regarding climate change. Families have been ripped apart over such, friendships ruined.

The word ‘hate’ (Gk. *miseo*) in scripture is best considered as ‘loves less, rejects, despises’. The apostle John advises ‘...*He who loves his brother man continues in the light, and his life puts no stumbling-block in the way of others. But he who hates his brother man is in darkness and is walking in darkness; and he does not know where he is going--because the darkness has blinded his eyes*’ (I John 2:10-11).

The Antidote

We already know the antidote—to fear, to hatred, to lies—for it is the foundation of our faith. Jesus reminds us: ‘...*this is my commandment, That you love one another, as I have loved you*’ (John 15:12). It’s a message repeated by Paul, by John, by Peter. Not just sentiment but a practical acceptance of others and respect for their right to their opinions. It is practical concern for the temporal and spiritual well-being of others. Wrote Peter: ‘...*seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently*’ *cont’d p.8*

Be Ready!

The world, it is generally agreed, is presently in a bad place. No surprise, then, that in many faiths there is widespread expectation of imminent change

Many expect the overthrow of the present regime and the restoration of a past 'golden age'. In Christianity and Judaism it is the Messiah, in Islam it's the Mahdi who is already here and is to appear soon. In Hinduism the Kalki, the tenth avatar of Vishnu, is expected at the end.

Expectations! But when? Is his coming imminent? For Christians—however much they may desire the return of the Saviour—there's a clear answer: *we don't know*. There's no doubt Jesus will come again: '*...I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, that where I am you may be also*' (John 14:3, Acts 1:11). His disciples knew this: but it isn't for us to know when: '*...It is not yours to know times or seasons which the Father placed in His own authority*' (Acts 1:7, Matthew 24:36).

And what of his coming? The Islamic Mahdi is considered to be waiting, now, with his assistants in the Saudi deserts. Kalki isn't expected for thousands of years. Jesus, by contrast comes when the Father gives the say so, and his coming is spectacular, for '*...every eye shall see him*' Revelation 1:7). Jesus warned us of such deception '*...he is in the wilderness; do not go out. Behold, He is in the inner rooms; do not believe. For as the lightning comes forth from the east and shines as far as the west, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man*' (Matthew 24:26-27).

It's no surprise that we are all on edge, for are we not experiencing increased seismic activity and erupting volcanoes. Isn't here a shift in climatic conditions with floods and drought and famine in various places. Is there not widespread civil unrest and disregard for the law, with hot wars in many nations and persecution of Christians. And don't we have recurring killer disease epidemics. *All happening now*.

Jesus did indeed say we can expect

such events (Matthew 24:5ff), but he added a cautionary note: '*...it's not the end yet*'. Throughout the ages mankind has experienced such self-inflicted calamities, so '*...don't be terrified*'; but there is more to come (v.6). '*...for there will be great affliction, such as has not happened from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever will be*' (v.21). Given mankind's violent history that's not hard to imagine!

The Key Sign

Such events are to a degree subjective: *just what is 'worst ever'*. But Jesus, citing the prophet Daniel (*ch 9:27*), does give us a sign which can't be missed. It refers to both the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in the sixth century BC and in AD70. Jesus then references his (second) coming: '*... And then all the tribes of the land will wail. And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and much glory*' (Matthew 24:22-30). We await that precious moment.

Luke adds the detail: '*...when you see Jerusalem being encircled by armies, then recognize that its destruction has come near*' (*ch21:20*), and pin-pointing the timing: '*...the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the heavens. And then all the tribes of the land will wail. And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and much glory*' (v.27).

Since Adam was ejected from Paradise lasting peace has eluded mankind. Seismic and cosmic events have from time to time over earth's long history devastated many areas; nations and empires have come and gone; pandemics have decimated populations; conflict has impoverished nations. But, as predicted, all of that *will* pass away, for a *new* world is on the horizon.

A False Peace

Every Christian who remains faithful will, in a glorified body, accompany Jesus at his coming, having been with him at the 'wedding feast'. They will, for their allegiance to Christ, have experienced extreme privation

(and some martyred) under the world-ruling despotic leadership. The rest of mankind will have yielded to its rule and simply carried on with life and, as said Jesus: '*...as they were in the days before the flood: eating, and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah went into the ark. And they did not know until the flood came and took all away. So also will be the coming of the Son of Man*' (Matthew 24:38-39).

Coerced into submission (in effect to the worship of Satan) the bulk of mankind will be prepared to actively resist the King of kings as he returns to judge and rule (*Gk*=shepherd) the nations in his millennial kingdom (Revelation 19:11ff).

How to Prepare

So when will Jesus return?: '*... Always be ready!*' he said, '*You don't know when the Son of Man will come*' (Matthew 24:44). Decisions made now determine our core character, determine our future reaction when we experience severe pressure (*Gk thlipsis*, tribulation). Let's daily build a firm trust in our heavenly Father as we '*...search the scriptures daily*' to discover his will for us. Or 'faith muscles' mature slowly through the little trials that afflict us—and they are all witnessed by our Father, while in us is the holy Spirit comforter, our guide, our helper.

Jesus, *as must we*, referred his every day-to-day choice to Him, acting in accord with His will.. He was in constant contact with his Father in heaven. As said Paul '*...be instant in prayer...pray always*'.

While world leaders plot a godless future dominated by despots we must, as we eagerly await Jesus's return, become ever closer to him, and ever aware of the devilish attempts to undermine our loyalty to him.

And, finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might (Ephesians 6:10). **Ω**

Perspective...from p.6

(I Peter 1:22). Paul concludes his letter to the squabbling and hostile Corinthian church with a universal solution: ‘... *be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you*’ (II Corinthians 13:11). It’s a maxim for all of us to take on board in increasingly difficult times.

‘...finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil; For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places’. Ω

STUDY THE WORD

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

unsigned articles are by the Editor

CALLING ALL INTERNET USERS!

The Outreach Ministries website lists over a hundred Bible-based articles which address issues frequently on the minds of Christians. You may download any, or request print copies. There is, too, a section of on-line audio sermons, links to associated groups, back issues of *New Horizons* and an on-line magazine for our younger readers.

Be sure to take a look at www.cgom.org

Foundations**THE LIFE BEYOND
Birth. Life. Death. Then
what?**

We are in a sense bound by the almost universal fear of death. For most folk death isn’t a welcome visitor, and we postpone its entangling tentacles by every conceivable means as we search for our ‘lost youth’. In the UK more than forty percent of the national budget is expended on the blood, sweat and tears of the health services as we seek to stave off the inevitable.

Science also experiments with ways and means to extend life beyond our ‘three score years and ten’, while some seek immortality by means of cryogenics. Anciently it was by mumification.

The latest pandemic with its potential to kill has induced craven fear, and driven much of the populace to cower behind face coverings, to work from home, to shun contact even with family and friends, and indeed has driven long-time friends apart and many to suicide.

Religion, it is said, was invented to deal with the pangs of death. Many fear for their loved ones who have died, concerned as to their condition beyond the grave and for an unknown eternity.

The apostle Paul addresses death so: ‘...*The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death*’ (I Corinthians 15:26). It has ever been so for death is, in general, the enemy as witnessed by a multiplicity of often bizarre funeral rites. But why *fear* death? Isn’t it just ‘natural’? After all, no animal, no plant is immortal. So are we different?

In the Beginning

Mankind is unique and was created with the potential to live endlessly—if we had followed the guidance of our Creator. *We didn’t*. Adam opted for the route that seemed right to him, to his own reasoning and to the exclusion of God. But that choice leads to death—death for him and death for

all his progeny. We are all now subject to the universal law of entropy: *change and decay, always*. There is no escape from the cords of death.

Judgment

For some, death is a welcome relief—from pain, from anguish, from overwhelming circumstances. But we in general fear it. For *all* of us, however, will be held to account for our life: ‘...*It is appointed unto man once to die but after this the judgment*’ (Hebrews 9:27).

We decay. We die. It is a certainty, O man, that you will by divine power *return* from the grave to face our Maker. Indeed that concept is in-built in the human psyche and accounts for our fear of death—however buried that thought may at times be in our consciousness. Notes Solomon: ‘...*the living know that they shall die*’ (Ecclesiastes 9:3). And Jesus: ‘...*Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation*’ (John 5:28-29).

Deliverance

For those ‘in Christ’, however, that fear fades: ‘...*Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself [Jesus] likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*’ (Hebrews 2:12-14). Fear of death no longer binds us, for we know that our resurrection will be to glorious life. And Isaiah: ‘...*the righteous is taken away from the evil to come*’ (ch 57:1).

This is the significance of the good news, the Gospel, brought by Jesus. This is why men and women have dedicated their lives to Christ, have often risked their life to spread this message.

In him alone is there deliverance from that fear of death. Ω

MiniStudy**Where Is the Church?**

'...Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn'

'...he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other'

Christianity claims one third of earth's population as adherents scattered among thousands of 'denominations' large and small. Among them is there a 'true church'? If so can we identify it? Many Christian groups lay claim to having a monopoly of 'the truth', that they alone are the 'gateway to heaven', to salvation. We need to know.

- God's 'church' while open to all (Matthew 10:32) is by invitation only. Jesus set out the parameters: '*...No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him*' (John 6:44). He refers to the church, his assembly (Gk *ecclesia*), as '*...the elect*' [Gk *eklektos*; selected, chosen]. And he is the sole avenue to a relationship with the Father: '*...I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by me.*' (John 14:6). After Jesus's resurrection the apostle Peter said: '*...Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*' (Acts 4:12)
- It is commonly held that the church was 'born' on the *Day of Pentecost* (Acts *ch* 2). However, that day represents a new phase of God's true church which has its roots at mankind's beginning. God has never left Himself without witness '*...he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began*' (Luke 1:70). Throughout time there has been a core faithful few (eg Abel, Enoch, Noah, Elijah, Abraham). Indeed God comforted Elijah by telling him there were thousands of contemporary believers (I Kings 19:18). And Stephen speaks of '*...the church in the wilderness*' (Acts 7:38), while Paul writes about '*...the Israel of God*' (Galatians 6:16), faithful believers implanted in the nation of Israel—the 'true church'
- Under the guise of the term '*kingdom of heaven*' Jesus explains the foundation principles of the church he is building—the continuation of the Israel of God. Thus it would grow slowly (Matthew 13:33), would be like a vineyard (Matthew *ch* 13), would be for the humble and the persecuted (Matthew 5:3, v.10, 11:12), would be law-abiding (v.19), and is for those who obey the Father (7:21), the converted (18:3). It is inclusive of all mankind ((13:47). The Israel of God, the kingdom of heaven (the true church) represents on earth the Kingdom of God that has existed eternally (Luke 11:2)
- In a related parable Jesus likens Israel to a vineyard (*cf* Isaiah 5:7) rented to various farmers. (Mark 12:1ff). They failed to bear fruit for the owner and mistreated his emissaries—eventually killing the rightful heir. They were 'destroyed' (v.9) and leased the land to others. The true Israel was embedded in the visible church. Jesus summed up this analogy: '*...therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*'. (Matthew 21:43). The Romans destroyed the nation, and the Israel of God reoccupied the vineyard
- In another parable Jesus sees the kingdom of heaven as a wheat field sown with good seed (the Word of God). During the growing season, however, an enemy (the devil) secretly sowed corrupt seed which produced a crop of weeds ('tares', false doctrine, corrupt practices and tradition). As with ancient Israel the church was infiltrated by the uncommitted, by those born merely into a Christian family, by the curious
- In the parable the farmer's workmen urge him to uproot the weeds but are wisely told to leave them until harvest. As said Jesus: '*...he [the son of man] shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other*' (Matthew 24:31). He adds (v.41f): '*and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire*'. The 'Israel of God' are then born into the Kingdom
- Wherever Christ is embraced there is God's vineyard planted with the true vines. The Gospel message is almost universally distorted, the tares choking the good seed, false teaching abounding. Jesus says 'leave them' (Mark 13: 41). Jesus cares for and oversees every individual plant in whatever denomination they may be planted, and '*...I will raise him up in the last day*' (John 6:40)

Ω

Are you unable to attend Sabbath services in your area?

The following CGOM Associate Churches offer live streaming of their regular Sabbath services!

*Tulsa Church of God, Tulsa, OK — 1:00 p.m. CST
www.tulsachurchofgod.net — www.tulsachurchofgod.org*

*Church of God, New Mexico, — 1:30 p.m. MST
www.cognm.org*

The above also offer online access to past sermon presentations.

request—no charge

Kingdom... here and now

Bound by Law

Babylon — fountain of error

Bible Basics

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries publish an internet Bible home study course

*If you would like to study with us check it out at
www.cgom.org*

The introductory lesson gives some hints about how to study the Bible

We are pleased to reply to any questions arising from any of our publications.

Don't miss out on a single issue of the *New Horizons* magazine!
When you move don't forget to send us your new mailing address.

Please send your change of address to:
Churches of God Outreach Ministries
P.O. Box 54621
Tulsa, OK 74155-0621

or e-mail your change to:
subscriptions@cgom.org
in Europe:
coguk@aol.com

you are invited to look at our website for numerous articles free to read or download

www.cgom.org

all are also available from any of the addresses listed inside