

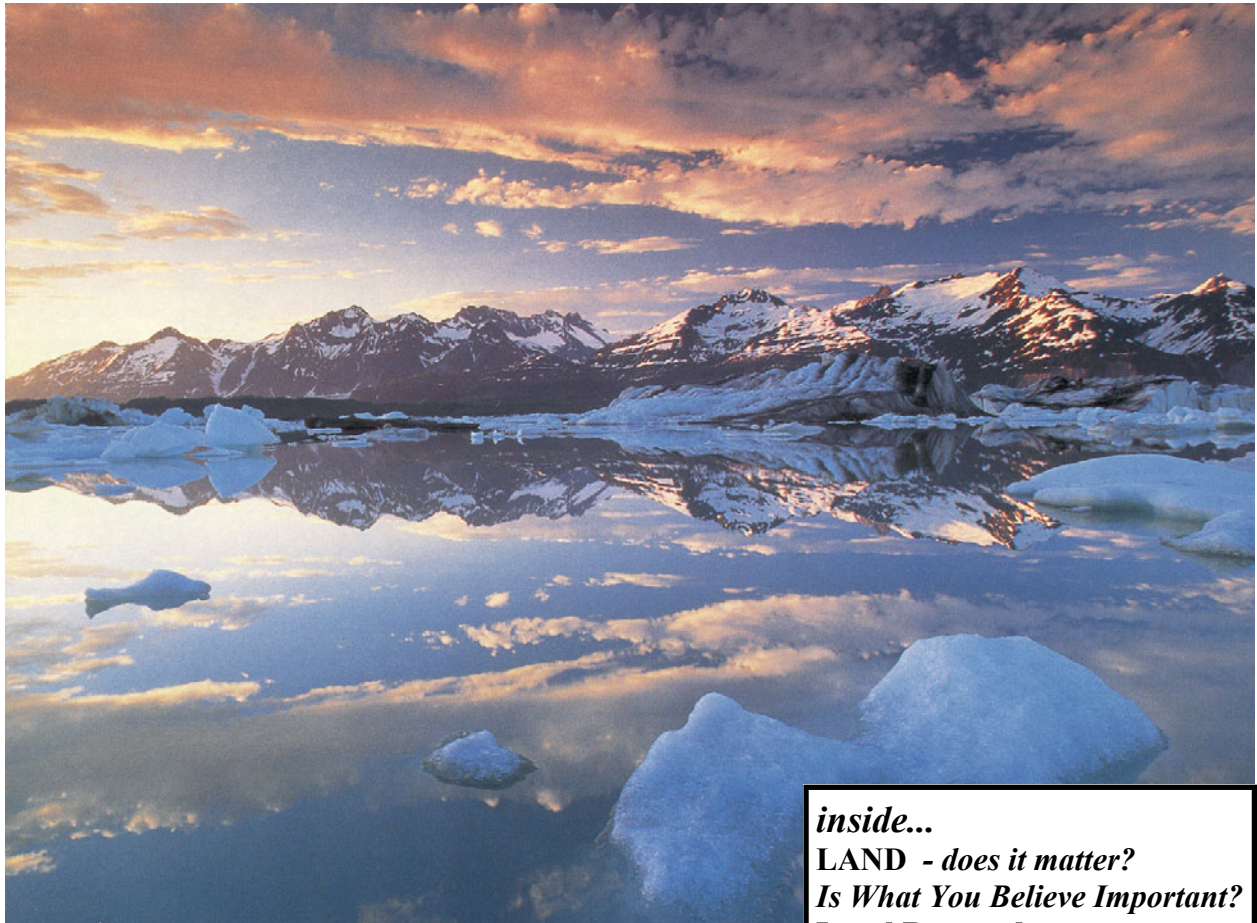
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Horizons

Vol 7 No 4

July/August 2003

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



inside...

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CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

**With around two thousand
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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.**

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by Jesus and by his apostles
in the clearest of terms - and
recorded for us in the Scrip-
tures. Over the centuries
that truth has been buried,
dug up, buried again. Our
desire is to restore the sim-
ple apostolic message. We
hope you will be excited
by what the Scriptures re-
veal about life, and the
horizons beyond**

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new **Horizons**

Issue No 40

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National boundaries are ferociously defended, often at great cost. Does the nation state matter?

Virtually everyone lives within prescribed national borders. They are often vigorously defended - usually by customs posts, but often by an armed military.

The boundaries were set by various means. Invasion, certainly. Conquest. Occupation of an empty land. Civil war. The passing of time clouds the origins, and boundaries become permanent. Government and sovereignty is established. The people come to see it as 'our land' - and they are ready to fight to the death to protect it.

As Coalition forces found to their cost in Iraq - a nation less than a century old - the removal of an oppressive tyrant unleashed a fierce nationalism. The people reject foreign interference and many Iraqis are ready to give their lives in defence.

Divine Sovereignty

Whatever the outcome, however, all land rights are subject to divine sovereignty. [That is, the one and only unique God who created the Universe and reveals Himself in the Hebrew-Christian Bible.] His will is ignored at our peril!

Now, the notion of divine sovereignty is despised today by national and global authorities. International bodies such as the European Union and the United Nations are bodies which reject any view that God has anything to say on government or land distribution.

The UN is a mix of conflicting faiths, so it's not surprising that God doesn't carry much weight there. Thirty percent (fifty-seven) of its 191 participating nations are Islamic. Powerful voices - representing a quarter of world population - are communist, while over a billion Hindu have a UN voice. All have views differing radically from those of the sovereign God of the Christian Bible.

God declares: *"The earth is the LORD's and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it"* (Psalm

LAND... does it matter?

24:1). As our Creator He oversees all human activity - to the extent of overthrowing and establishing kings when He sees fit (Daniel 2:21).

As the planet's 'land-owner' God distributes territory as He sees fit. For example, to Abraham - encamped in what we call 'Palestine' - God said: *"...all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants for ever"* (Genesis 13:14-17). He even over-ruled Abraham's generosity in agreeing to give his nephew Lot his choice of land. Note that Israel's tenancy of Palestine, 'the Land of Canaan', would be *'for ever'*.

Indeed the land was deeded to Abraham and his descendants (through his son Isaac) by a solemn covenant (Genesis 15). *"On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram saying, To your descendants I have given this land - from the river of*

Egypt [the Nile] to the great river, the River Euphrates" (v.18).

Eviction

On several occasions God exercised His right to evict entire nations from their territory. The Canaanites, for instance. Their abominable life-style fouled the land - the same land given to Abraham - and God moved Israel back in to the land He had deeded to Israel. Even here He exercised His sovereignty by apportioning specific tracts of the Land to each Israelite clan. Centuries later Israel suffered the same fate as did the Canaanites - evicted from 'the land of promise' for idolatry and appalling behaviour.

Worldwide Authority

But Israel isn't God's sole interest. He decides who goes where on His Earth.

Central to God's division of land among the nations is His nation of Israel. To Moses, God said: *"When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam [ie mankind], He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel. For the LORD'S portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance"* (Deuteronomy 32:7-9).

Any nation or individual that usurps the sovereignty of Israel or hands over control of the levers of power to foreign powers is seriously meddling: *"...he that touches you touches the apple of His eye"* (Zechariah 2:8).

Take the modern Israeli nation, the descendants of ancient Judah, as an

example. The prophet continues with God's message: "*And the LORD will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the holy land*" (v.12). It's a message for our day - and certain to be accomplished - referring to the time immediately following the return of Jesus as King of kings!

And for those with ears to hear, God's care and oversight applies not only to the land of Palestine but equally to those nations and their territories which are the modern descendants of the ancient House of Israel - including Great Britain and the United States.

Nations may be invaded, the people killed or enslaved - but those national leaders who violate or give away the sovereignty of God's nations, God's lands, will together with their people face serious consequences - the judgment of Almighty God.

National Israel

The land of Palestine is today a land divided. Out of a population of 6.7 million, five million are Jewish (two-thirds born in Israel), one million are Muslim, and a quarter million are Christian or Druse. The land itself is carved in contentious pieces - West Bank, Gaza, the settlements, Jerusalem *etc.*

The Islamic inhabitants are largely descendants of Abraham's son by his wife's handmaid, Hagar - named Ishmael, the forebear of the Arabs. He, too, was prophesied to father twelve nations. Out of Ishmael came, over two millennia later, the religion of Islam. It has become a world religion with over a billion adherents, and has spread to many non-Arab nations. While sharing the Old Testament patriarchs (but not the same God), Islam is radically different from Judaism and from Christianity with potential for conflict.

'The Peace Process' - begun in Oslo, and seen by many as a root cause of

the hostilities - continually dissolves in blood, and a new 'Road Map to Peace' will lead nowhere but to more dissent, more suicide bombings, more destruction. Yet intense pressure is placed, by the United States, on the Israeli government to accept the terms of the latest plan.

In the light of God's promises to Abraham through Isaac of a permanent inheritance in the Land the 'Road Map' would seem to be more meddling. Its avowed aim is a 'Palestinian State'. - slap in the middle of Israel's divinely appointed inheritance.

Lesson from History

On the face of it, this conflicts with God's plan for the region. History, however, should give pause for thought. We have been here before.

The Israeli's unchallenged occupation of this small strip of real estate is dependent on *how the nation behaves*. The Land is God's

(Joel 1:6). In His longsuffering He tolerates wrong-doing. But only for a time. A day for judgment is inevitable.

It was God who urged ancient Israel to conquer the 'promised land' of Canaan - by force of arms. He instructed them to destroy or evict the inhabitants, who had themselves defiled the Land.

In the early eighth century before Christ the northern Ten Tribes were evicted from their por-

tion of 'the holy land' for their idolatry. A century and a half later the House of Judah, too, was sent into captivity - at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.

But just because the Jews have title to the Land doesn't make their occupancy permanent! To secure permanence, the Jews will have to demonstrate righteous behaviour.

Whose Land?

Biblically, the Jews represent only a part of ancient Israel - the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi - the latter with no land inheritance. The territory of this House of Judah was the area around Jerusalem from the Jordan to the Mediterranean. (Joshua 15 is the detailed 'title deed'.) Not the whole land, and certainly not the area east of the Jordan. That was deeded to other Israelite tribes, and described in Joshua chapters 13-22.

Technically, the present occupation of the Land by the House of Judah is to a degree illegal. The Israelis have no authentic claim to territory north or south of the Dead Sea. The current occupation breaches these boundaries.

The Palestinians, too, are subject to God's tenancy bye-laws. According to these any stranger is welcome to dwell within Israel's territory (*See, for example, Leviticus 19:33-34*) - *as long as they comply with the Laws of Israel*. This is, today, clearly not the

in past times Israel has been evicted from God's Land

case. And given the Palestinian attitude to the Jews their presence is very temporary. Eviction will come.

ALLAH

The Islamic god, named *Allah*, is in fact a moon god - part of the 'host of heaven' condemned in Scripture. It was well-known among Arabic people before Mohammed's time. Allah was worshipped in Mecca along-side many other gods. Mohammed when he grew militarily strong expunged all gods but Allah.

Israel is in a cleft stick. A true 'peace process' requires that by whatever means Palestinian opposition must be stopped. Yet on the other hand extreme pressures from the world powers prohibits such action. Apart, then, from brief respites in the 'Oslo War' no peace in the 'holy land' will be permanent.

The Peaceful Future

However, after a time of great distress peace *will* come to this troubled Land.

The Scriptures predict destructive invasion by foreign powers, the division of Jerusalem, exile of the inhabitants. The Land will, too, be the launch pad for a mighty international force opposing the returning Jesus Christ - the so-called Armageddon.

The Scriptures assert: *'And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem [standing for the nation] a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it... It shall be in that day that I [God] will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem'*.

As a result of the intervention of the King of kings, peace will at last come. Jesus will take the reins of government - not only in the troubled

Whose Land?

- there has *never* been a *land* known as 'Palestine'. It is simply a geographical region, like 'the Peak District' of England
- there has never, until recently, been a *people* calling themselves 'Palestinians'
- there has never been a *nation* known as 'Palestine'
- the region was governed successively, until 1948, by the Romans, Crusaders, Turks, Britain, the Arab Kingdom of Jordan
- Jerusalem has never been a capital city of any nation but that of ancient and modern Israel
- the Arabs never claimed Jerusalem until the land was mandated to the Israelis
- today's 'Palestinians' are in every respect Arabs, with three million compatriots living in Jordan
- **says the Creator God: "This is My Land"!**

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lands of the Middle East but worldwide.

The outcome is addressed by many of God's prophets. Isaiah, for example: "...*He [the LORD, the returned Messiah] will arbitrate between the nations and shall decide (disputes) for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning shears. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war anymore"* (ch 21-4).

The prophet Jeremiah also addresses the issue: *"At that time Jerusalem shall be called the Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it"* (ch 3:17). It's the time, v.18, when all the tribes of Israel - the House of Judah and the House of Israel - will return together in peace from exile to their God-appointed Land after a fearsome captivity. □

Does it matter what you believe?

Thousands of Christians, Muslims, Hindu daily pore over sacred texts and texts about sacred texts. The majority in all religions, however, simply are not interested. Whatever the cleric says is fine - but let me get on with my life.

Now that's good, if what is taught is benign. Love your neighbour. Be good to your adversaries. Be honest in all your dealings. They are qualities that are at the heart of all the major faiths.

But then there are the fanatics. *Burn, Burn, Burn* screamed the Crusaders. *Kill the infidels* yelled the followers of Mohammed. If the 'holy land' is occupied by unbelievers then they must be ousted. If opponents of Allah don't submit then put them to the sword.

What we believe is a powerful driving force for what we do. Whole nations have been subverted by a handful of zealots to destroy neighbours. Usually they are 'different' - a different tribe, a different

religion, a different colour. Even wearing the same religious name-tag doesn't stop the mayhem: Protestant v Catholic, Sunni Muslim v Shi'ite, for example.

Most readers of *New Horizons* share the 'Christian' label. But unless you are perhaps too laid back to be concerned, as a Protestant you are likely to object to Roman Christian beliefs. And *vice versa*.

And when you venture to compare your beliefs - Protestant *or* Catholic - with the teachings of Scripture there's an even wider gulf! In fact most Christians, whatever their label, share more than they differ. And on the fundamentals they differ little from, say, Hindu belief.

Increasingly it's accepted that 'all roads lead to the same God'. A nice thought - but simply a lie. The One God has

revealed Himself in the Scriptures. Who He is. What He expects of us. How He wants us to worship Him. Why He has created us. And He says He is 'a jealous God'. You can tell that from how He dealt with idolaters! He has changed only in the sense He is exercising patience pending the inevitable day of Judgment.

Most of us grow comfortable with our beliefs. Perhaps complacent. If you are concerned to be a part of the divine Family this is an issue you can't dodge.

We are each at a different state of preparedness to receive 'the seed of the Word'. Only the 'fertile' will nourish it to salvation, as Jesus taught in his 'parable of the sower' (Matthew 13, Mark 4). If you seriously want to know His will and not blindly accept the traditional teachings of your church then you must search out the truth from the Scriptures. To blindly accept what you hear from the pulpit is like chucking seed on concrete.

Some sincerely want to understand and for a time rejoice in *[cont'd p.9]*

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Babylon - Fountain of Error

Israel Restored

The Jews have long rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Are they now without hope?

John Morton

God's promise to restore Israel was well known among the Jews in Christ's time. Many expected Christ to free Israel from Roman occupation and rule as king. They asked - "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel" and no doubt they were disappointed when he said, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in his own authority" (Acts 1:6-7).

House of Israel

Israel had once been a strong and wealthy kingdom under divine protection. A chosen people, redeemed from slavery and set up as model to other nations. They had an agreement with God, a covenant that required them to worship Him alone. It was a marriage contract and any form of idolatry was considered to be spiritual adultery. Yet despite initial warnings *via* Moses, which were repeated through many prophets, these chosen people were unfaithful to God and suffered the consequences of their actions (Deuteronomy 4:23, 26-27 and 28:62-68).

Originally the name *Israel* was given to Abraham's grandson Jacob and it applies to his descendants who, in the Bible, are called both the *House of Jacob* and the *House of Israel*. After King Solomon's reign the House of Jacob split - Israel to the north and Judah to the south. Under King Jeroboam, Israel quickly turned to idolatry (I Kings 14:7-10, 15-16) and God warned them that He would not continue to extend His protection if they rejected Him. Because they would not listen, God said they would cease to be a nation and would no longer be His people (Hosea 1:9, 9:15-17).

Consequently, they were defeated by the Assyrians and the survivors taken captive.

Judah

When Israel turned to idolatry, many who remained faithful to God from the various tribes of Israel resettled in Judah (II Chronicles 10:17, 11:3, 15:9 and 31:1-6). But later, Judah also failed to heed the warnings and suffered a similar tragic fate: "Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the prostitute also" (Jeremiah 3:8). Judah was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon.

For a while the capital, Jerusalem, was allowed to continue with a certain amount of autonomy under the Babylonian occupation. But eventually they rebelled against their captors and came under attack. After a long and bitter siege Jerusalem, the last bastion of that once glorious Kingdom of Israel, was also destroyed. Only a pitiful remnant survived, and they were scattered among the nations exactly as Moses and the prophets had predicted (Leviticus 26:33, Ezekiel 20:23-24, Jeremiah 9:16). Their defeat and captivity truly was a time of trouble for the House of Jacob (Jeremiah 30:7).

Restoration

During their long captivity Jacob's descendents were able to reflect on their mistakes and no doubt deeply regretted the tragic outcome of their actions. On a more positive note they also recalled God's promise in regard to the restoration of Israel in the future (Hosea 1:10-11 and 3:5, Jeremiah 33:4-10, Micah 4:1-2).

Interestingly there are a number of places in the *King James* version of the Bible that say God will "bring again the captivity" of Israel. In Bullinger's *Companion Bible* this phrase

is described as an idiom which actually means that God will *restore* Israel rather than bring them into captivity again as many have interpreted this to mean.

Confirmation of this can be seen in many other translations. For example, the *New King James Version* says, "I will bring back from captivity my people." Some of the places this occurs are Jeremiah 30:3, 18, 31:23, Amos 9:14, Joel 3:1-2, Ezekiel 16:53, 39:25, Psalms 53:6 and also Deuteronomy 30:3. These passages imply that Israelites will be released from the captivity when it is time to restore Israel.

Some might think that Israel was restored during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah when many exiles returned to Judah to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the Temple, but Judah was still under control of its captors. Even in Christ's time, their country was occupied by the Romans.

Israel today is only a small nation surrounded by enemies and under constant threat of war. They experience neither the peace, nor the abundance promised by God (Amos 9:11-16, Joel 2:21-27). Their people are not innumerable (Hosea 1:10-11, Jeremiah 33:22, Isaiah 27:6). The Messiah is not their king (Zechariah 14:9-11), nor do they provide spiritual guidance to the rest of the world (Micah 4:1-7). The restoration promised by God has not yet taken place.

True Kingdom

When asked if he were king of the Jews, Jesus said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). The writer of Hebrews said that those who had, "died in faith" sought - "a better, that is, a heavenly country" (Hebrews 11:13-16). Peter said that all the things God's prophets predicted would be fulfilled when Christ returned (Acts 3:21).

At the return of Christ, those who have God's Holy Spirit will be

changed to spirit and those who have previously died having received His spirit will also be resurrected to spirit (I Corinthians 15:51-53). They are the first fruits and will rule over this earth with Christ for one thousand years, a period commonly known as the Millennium (Revelation 20:4).

After this there will be a time of judgement for all who have lived but have never received God's Spirit. They will be resurrected back to a *physical* existence and given the opportunity to repent, after which they will receive His Spirit and eventually be changed to spirit so they too can enter God's kingdom (Revelation 20:5-10, 21:24-27).

True Israel

Jesus Christ was a direct descendant of Abraham (Matthew 1:1) and at baptism that same Spirit that is in Christ is also imparted to the individual: God's Spirit unites with the spirit of man producing sons or daughters of God.

Said the apostle Paul:

"Therefore know that only those who are of faith, are the sons of Abraham" - "For ye are all the sons of God though faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:7, 26-29)

In this manner Jew and Gentile alike, become spiritual descendents of Abraham through Christ. In other words those who have Christ's Spirit are now the true Israelites, they are of the household of God – God's very own sons and daughters (I Corinthians 2:11-12, II Corinthians 6:18, Ephesians 2:12-13 and 18-22).

God's Spirit Promised

During Old Testament times the Holy Spirit was not freely available except to a few people called by God

for specific purposes. The general population of Israel did not have God's Spirit within them. They therefore cannot be resurrected to spirit among the first fruits.

God said they would not be His people until such a time when He is able to say to them, "*You are the sons of the living God*" (Hosea 1:9-10). He will only be able to say that when they have accepted Christ as their saviour, repented and received His Spirit (Ezekiel 36:25-28, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 8:6,10-11, Romans 11:25-27).

Since they are now dead, to do that they will need to be resurrected to physical life during a judgment period along with everyone else who has never received God's Spirit. Then and only then can they become true sons and daughters of the Living God (Romans 9:24-26).

Ezekiel described their physical resurrection (*ch 37:1-14*) - after the 'millennium'. Hosea confirmed that it will occur during a time of judgement – "for great shall be that day of Jezreel" (Hosea 1:11). Jezreel is symbolic of judgement and that day of judgement is the one described by the Apostle John in Revelation 20:11-12.

New Covenant and New Jerusalem

In a vision on the Isle of Patmos, John saw a representative group of one hundred and forty four thousand who were the first fruits of God's Kingdom. He said, "*I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him one hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written on their foreheads*" and "*the hundred and forty*

and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth" also "*These were redeemed from among men, being first-fruits to God and to the Lamb*" (Revelation 14:1-4).

Those who are the first fruits, having become spiritual Israel through Christ will be subject to a new covenant of which he is mediator (Hebrews 12:22-24). Like the old covenant, the new one will also be a marriage agreement:

And it shall be, in that day, saith the LORD, 'That thou shalt call me "my husband"' and "I will betroth you to me for ever" (Hosea 2:16, 19-20).

This is exactly what John saw in his vision:

the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband". He said, "they shall be his (God's) people, and God himself will be with them, and be their God". "The bride, the Lamb's wife" comprises "those who are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:1-3,9 and 27)

Whereas old Jerusalem represented the last bastion of the physical kingdom of Israel, new Jerusalem will represent the new spiritual Kingdom of Israel – God's Kingdom. John's description in Revelation 7:4-8, indicates a familiar structure because the spiritual Kingdom will be the reality the ancient kingdom represented.

Innumerable Multitude

John said that after the first fruits an innumerable multitude is added to the Kingdom (Revelation 7:9-17). These people who stand before God's throne in white robes, washed by the blood of Christ, have been resurrected to spirit. They represent all those who become spirit after the first-fruits - having come out of great tribulation.

After six thousand years of Satan's rule culminating in the end-time events graphically portrayed in the Book of Revelation, the affliction (tribulation) of sorrow **[cont'd p.9**

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The article describes the wonderful life for all who survive the coming time of distress (the 'Great Tribulation') and return, converted, to God's Land led by Jesus Christ

REAP A DESTINY

Where is your life going? The path you are *now* treading will determine it

From our first rising until bedtime much of our day is bound by routines. They make life easier. Each morning we don't have to struggle with figuring how to wash and groom, or how to dress, or how to make breakfast.. Such activities simply become 'habit'.

Habits are '*a settled tendency or practice*', and we can't comfortably get through the day without them. In general they are positive and helpful. They are occasionally acquired slowly, undercover, un-noticed. Other desirable habitual behaviour is acquired painfully, with much persistent effort. For Christians it may be the habit of daily prayer or study of the Word or regular fellowship.

But there's a dark side to habitual behaviour - as would be agreed by the alcoholic, or the chronic worrier, or the TV addict. Wrote Dr Samuel Johnson: '*The chains of habit are too weak to be felt until they are too strong to be broken*'. Those chains can bind us for life - and for eternity: '*Sow an act and reap a habit. Sow a habit and reap a character. Sow a character and reap a destiny*'.

However, for the Christian the chains can - with effort and with divine empowerment - be snapped.

It's unlikely *you* are not bound by some practice that you would prefer to finish with! And undesirable habits can be forsaken, put behind you. As with helpful habits, so too with the negative - effort must be applied. Wrote the apostle Paul: "*...who on earth can set me free from the clutches of my own sinful nature?*" (Romans 7:24). The good

news is that the Scriptures provide the tools needed to break those chains.

Examine Yourself

A first step in conquering a wrong habit is an awareness that you are in its grip. Habits become 'second nature' - so much a part of us that we don't recognize their presence. The Psalmist knew this and prayed: "*Search me, O God, and know my heart...and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*" (Psalm 139:23-24). Self-examination, Word of God in hand, can uncover buried unsavoury character traits that are hidden from us because now habitual. You could, too, ask someone you trust - though your spouse has probably already told you, and often!

God's Word is the mirror that reflects our wrong habits. It 'hits us between the eyes' with right practices and thus condemns our sin (for that is what it is). Study it. Allow the Bible to shine a light into those dark corners of life.

What Are the Consequences?

What hidden habits lurk in your life? Anger, perhaps? Do you often 'fly off the handle' - and not realize it has become a habitual reaction to your circumstances? Anger may have its beginnings in the example your parents set you. Or, it may be that you 'got away with' responding in anger to life's challenges. It became habit.

Wrote King Solomon: "*He that is soon angry deals foolishly*" (Proverbs 14: 17). And Job understood the consequences: "*Wrath kills the foolish man*" (Job 5:2). It's general knowledge that anger and wrath and resentment can cause illness - and even may literally kill!

And that's a further step in getting rid of a habit: *understand the consequences*. Look at the alcoholic retching in the gutter and note the effect it has on family and work and life. And on your church brethren - for Christians are far from being immune. See the iron grip that imprisons the paedophile - the consequence of habitual pornographic input. Or, watch the perspiring grossly overweight man or woman as they gasp for breath on an incline. *Consequences!* Such habits don't just happen. They result from a chosen life-style - whatever the cause of that choice.

There are, too, *long-term* consequences to ingrained habit. The apostle Paul: "*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the Kingdom of God*" (I Corinthians 6: 9-10). They are '*works of the flesh*' Paul told the Galatians (*ch* 5:19-21). Allow any of these practices to become habitual - part of your total life-style - *then you are barred from God's eternal Kingdom*. If that concerns you then it should be incentive enough to deal - *now* - with your habit!

Some of the Corinthian brethren had been ensnared by these practices. Paul adds, however (v.11): "*Such were some of you*". They had come to grips - and beaten - their poisonous life-styles, their destructive habits.

Nip in the Bud

So you are now aware of your problem. But that doesn't stop it spilling out! A sudden burst of anger. Simmering resentment. More gossip. Another back-stabbing slash. Another drink, another cream cake, another furtive paging of a top-shelf magazine. Bang goes your resolution!

You must move on. Writing to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul says: "...you must no longer behave like the Gentiles [ie the unconverted], whose lives are spent in the uselessness of their ways of thinking" (ch 4:17). He is pointing out that our behaviour results from our thought patterns. Or, as Solomon wrote: "As a man thinks in his heart so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). To conquer a habit, then, we must work on our habitual mode of thinking, be 'transformed by a complete renewal of mind' wrote Paul (Romans 12:2).

Divine Help

How? By first looking in the mirror of God's Word to identify what's right and what's wrong, to focus the spotlight of truth on your personal sinful habit. Many men and women have successfully identified and beaten undesirable habits through sheer unaided gritty will-power.

Christians, who have God's Spirit - His mind - indwelling them, must in like manner exercise the same power of their mind. It's the Spirit of a sound mind implanting in us the seed of spiritual fruit - including *patience* and *self-control* (Galatians 5:22-23). Soul-destroying habits don't happen in isolation. They affect - and are affected by - the whole of life. A man who is habitually resentful or angry - or has other life-dominating problems - harms his family, friends, social activity, finances, work, church, his relationship with God. He is deficient in the all-encompassing *divine love* that is another vital 'fruit of the Spirit'. As we nourish the growth of the Holy Spirit's influence - through 'the means of grace' - we can win battles beyond our normal strength. The Christian way of life is more than just 'pie in the sky when you die!' The man or woman converted to Jesus Christ links to the power-house of the universe.

In working with the alcohol-dependent, AA appoint a 'buddy' to

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 quarterly *Newsletter*, *Fountain of Life*, a bi-monthly outreach magazine *New Horizons*, the *Bible Basics* home study course). The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of independent fellowships and scattered brethren.

We cordially invite all independent fellowships of whatever size - or individuals - to associate with us in this worldwide ministry. Our *Statement of Beliefs* and a *Publications Catalogue* is available from any of our addresses. We are pleased to offer you, without charge, any of

CGOM in Perspective

What are the goals of the *Outreach Ministries*? How do we operate?

This article explains our unusual approach, and tells you how you can become involved

help - someone to contact when the going gets tough. Christians have also the support and encouragement of their church fellowship. God's Spirit guides us, but the Spirit works, too, through human instruments - those brethren in whom He dwells. Such support is an important key to successfully overcoming any habit. Wrote James: "*Is any of you suffering trouble?... Confess your sins [ie offences, problems] to each other, and pray for one another that you may be cured. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great effect*" (ch 5:13-16). We can call on the brethren - as well, often, as family and friends - for support when faced with destructive habits.

Avoidance

Another key to conquering habitual life-style patterns is to identify those 'triggers' that initiate a bout of anger or gambling or alcohol abuse *etc* - and avoid them. The apostle Paul gives us the principle: "*Flee fornication*" (I Corinthians 6:18), and "*Steer clear of the activities of darkness*" (Ephesians 5:11).

Is 'demon drink' a problem? Don't linger around bars - take another way home! Where appropriate avoid the bakery or the betting shop or the race track or the TV or top-shelf magazines. And don't carry cigarettes around with you.

Tough - but decisions you must make in the light of your eternal destiny.

Use and Disuse

Now link with this a further principle. You could call it 'put off-put on'. Writes Paul, again: "*You are to rid yourself of the old nature with your previous habits, ruined as it is by deceitful lusts [rotted through and through with lust's illusions]; that you be renewed in your mental attitude and that you put on the new nature which is created in God's likeness in genuine righteousness and holiness*" (Ephesians 4:20-24) [*cont'd p.9*]

The Heart of Religion

Why does religion stir up so much conflict?

Are you 'religious'? Among Anglo-saxon folk increasing numbers shy clear of the thought. Elsewhere among the peoples of the world, however, religion is precious both to individuals and to States. In South America, Philippines *etc* most of the populace are devout Roman Catholics. The Arab nations, West Africa, Indonesia, Pakistan - a billion plus around the world - are fiercely loyal to Mohammed and Islam. One and a half billion Chinese follow their ancestral religions. And a billion Indians jealously guard their adherence to Hinduism. They match the dictionary definition: *one of the prevalent systems of faith and worship.*

Another definition of religion is *human recognition of a superhuman controlling power and especially of a personal God entitled to obedience; effect of such recognition on conduct and mental attitude.* Your God, in other words, determines your behaviour. What your God says through sacred writings, visions, revelations of all sorts - will colour your personal life and indeed the laws of your nation, as with *Sharia law* in some Muslim countries.

Looking at the world's faiths, then - are there any, even one, that patterns in its practice all mankind desires?

Perhaps above all we want to live our lives in peace. Certainly we don't want our property taken away - by thieves or by government. We would like to see policemen *off* the streets - because there is no crime. And everyone keen to be helpful to neighbour.

Religious Practice

But what do we see. Oppression. Hatred. Greed. Anger and resentment. Violence. And that's everywhere, every nation - every religion. That's Hinduism, Islam, Christianity. Take away restraints and whatever veneer there may be of civilised behaviour collapses.

A contemporary example is Iraq - but it could be, given the right circumstances, India or Pakistan or Indonesia or Zim-

babwe. Or, today with the very Word of God - recorded in the Christian Bible - at our fingertips, the true faith is almost universally obscured by spiritual blindness. Wrote the apostle Paul: *"But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded"* (II Corinthians 4:3-4).

Whatever may be claimed about the peaceful intentions of Islam, as soon as 'government' collapsed in Iraq in came anarchy, chaos, looting, theft, burning, violence, lawlessness, assassination. Uncontrolled mobs thronged the streets. Clearly, the all-prevailing Islamic religion did nothing to constrain their conduct. The heart of true religion is missing. It's a pattern repeated in every Islamic nation when threatened.

Christianity, too

The history of Christianity gives us nothing to crow about. In the centuries during which Christianity held unrestrained sway there was war after bloody war. There was fearsome torture. There was 'burning at the stake'. Dissidents feared for their lives. Even those who brought us the Bible in our own language were pursued and killed by the 'Christian' authorities. Non-Christian nations feared invasion and individual Jews feared for their lives.

It may well be that only the rise of humanism - largely a reaction to Christian excesses - restrained Christian government, ended its tyranny and undermined its power. Even today ugly sectarianism causes death and mayhem in 'Christian' nations - Northern Ireland, Zimbabwe.

Religion - of whatever form - has done little to bring in a world at peace with itself. Why?

Origins

In the beginning religion was life. The sovereign Creator God walked and talked with man, guided him in his daily walk, taught him how He desired worship. It was perfect, unrestricted blessing.

Mankind, however, chose his 'freedom'. But freedom from those divine constraints which were designed to ensure abundant life, spiritually and materially. He spurned the divine presence - and over time established his own false substitute worship, a concoction of human reasoning and satanic influence.

From this rejection of God's revelation stems all modern religious faiths. Even

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At the heart of all the major faiths are golden nuggets of truth. They in varied degree reflect the timeless principles of the Ten Commandments. But there's a missing dimension.

The most basic human desire, common to all mankind, is to sustain life. And when government fails to provide the basic necessities, anarchy prevails - hence the strong-arm control tactics that mar so many third world nations. Yet religion doesn't help, despite being deployed to be, as Marx wrote, *'the opium of the people'*. Rather, religion is too often a rallying banner for conflict - as with the Islamic concept of *Jihad* or the medieval Christian crusade.

Heart of Religion

The distillation of true religion is from Jesus Christ. His teaching is the standard by which all else must be judged. What Jesus taught is the perfect reflection of the will of his Father - the one and only God. Jesus spoke only what the Father told him. Yet despite centuries of exposure to His teachings, numerous 'free' churches, open access to the Scriptures - despite this exposure there isn't a single 'Christian' nation that predominantly practices the teachings of Jesus. What is that 'missing ingredient'?

Only in the teachings of Jesus do we find the power to make religion effective. Only there can we find the offer of divine power to live as God intended from the beginning. He has made it possible for each of us to receive His mind, His Spirit. Without that Spirit no-one can become a part of the divine Family.

That empowerment doesn't come without a price. To become a true disciple we enter into a 'new covenant' - a new agreement, contract - with God. *Covenantants have mutual commitments.* This is at the very heart of religion. True Christianity alone offers us sinners forgiveness and the power to live, as did Jesus, in the way our heavenly Father desires. □

the truth. But they are not prepared to plough well - to break up the 'stony ground', to let go of cherished error. So when they face opposition to their beliefs they simply crumple and give up.

Others have a 'conversion experience' but fail to cultivate and nourish the precious seed. Too often a tangle of weeds spring up and choke it. They allow daily cares or material pursuits *etc* to choke the seed. Or, failure to adjust to Christ's moral demands shuts the door to spiritual growth.

The words God gave Jeremiah for the elders of Israel exiled in Babylon are apt: *"I know the thoughts that I think towards you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go to pray to me and I will listen. And you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart"* (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

God - and His *one and only* way to salvation - can be found by those who desire Him strongly. You must echo the mind-set of the disciples in Berea: *"These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so"* (Acts 17:11).

Doctrinal Know-all?

Jesus makes it quite clear that the road to eternal life is unpaved, rough, boulder-strewn and precarious. Few, he said, find it. Fewer go all the way. You can expect persecution, rejection, the hatred of family and friends - even of church folk. So he urges us to first 'count the cost' of following him.

It's not a matter of just saying 'I believe', though a child-like simplicity is essential. What Jesus requires is total commitment. Decide to become a Muslim and you embrace total change: worship on Friday, face Mecca five times a day for prayers, different festivals - a whole new life-style. No less so if you commit to following the true teachings of Jesus.

Doctrine is important. But you don't need to be a doctrinal know-all to enter the Kingdom of God. On the other hand what the Bible teaches differs root and branch from what you will hear from most pulpits - a mix of devilish

Israel restored...cont'd

and suffering that began when sin entered the world, will finally come to an end

Ever since going into captivity the people of Israel have looked forward to a time of restoration - but they did not know when it would take place. Each generation thought it would be in their time. Christ's disciples asked - *"Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"* (Acts 1:6).

Neither Christ's disciples, nor their fellow Israelites understood the spiritual nature of the Kingdom to which they would eventually be restored. It was not until after Christ had died and his disciples had received the Spirit he had promised to them, that they understood who the true Israelites are and to what Kingdom they will be restored.

True converted Israelites - sons and daughters of the Living God, Jew and Gentile alike - have God's Kingdom to look forward to. □

superstition and humanly devised tradition.

Idolatry

God, for example, has always had but one pattern of worship. It identifies Him in the same way that the Islamic form of worship identifies Allah. The same with Hindu or Buddhist or Shinto. The worship of the God of the Bible is the standard against which all others are measured. *Anything else is idolatry.*

Indeed, God's nations of Israel were ejected by Him from 'the land of promise' for their idolatry. The northern House of Israel has never as a body returned there, while the House of Judah was exiled in Babylon for seventy years. The Jews learned their lesson and on their release forever after were careful, perhaps over-zealous, in observing the divine pattern for His worship - which was established at creation. The same pattern was observed by the first Christians.

Conversion, then, is a change of heart.

Request the articles:
**What Do You Mean - 'Repent'?
Coming To Baptism**

DESTINY...cont'd

So - become aware of your wrong habits. Consider their consequences - for this life - and for the next. Discipline your mind - that is, use sustained daily effort aided and strengthened by God's indwelling Spirit - to develop a new healthy and positive thought process encompassing every aspect of life.

The chains of habit can be broken. The prize of becoming a member of the spirit-Family of God is worth every drop of sweat we expend. □

In sum. To beat your unhelpful or destructive habits:

- Be aware of your habits
- Consider the consequences - for here and now
- Consider the eternal consequences
- Change your thought patterns
- Enlist divine help
- Enlist human help
- Put away the flesh, put on the Spirit
- Identify triggers and avoid them

It's a readiness to submit to God's way of doing things. It's what the Bible calls *repentance*. Once we truly believe God - evidenced by what we do - He imparts His Holy Spirit. It is the key to entering God's Kingdom. We may not - will not - then have every nuance of doctrine in place. That comes with diligent study, and the better we understand it the more we can rejoice. 'The truth', said Jesus, 'will make you free'.

It *is* important, then, what you believe! We are saved into the Family of God solely by God's mercy extended through the death and resurrection of our Saviour. But our part in that covenant relationship is to do what He requires of us.

CGOM has prepared an outline of basic Bible teachings, a *Statement of Beliefs*. You are invited to request a copy. Your salvation depends on your putting down the right foundation. □

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